



# Further Investigating Supports and Opportunities: Implications for Age-appropriate Camp Programming



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## INTRODUCTION

While there is ample evidence that camp is a powerful context for youth development, few studies address the varied experiences of different age groups at camp. We know the Supports and Opportunities identified by Gambone, et.al—relationships, safety, youth engagement and skill building—are important elements of youth development programs. How does age influence campers' experiences of these elements? Furthermore, if teens are assigned staff roles, how does this impact their experience of supports and opportunities at camp?

## METHODS

We selected six California 4-H camps and administered a written survey from Youth Development Strategies, Inc.(YDSI) to 514 campers and 72 teen staff. The survey measured youth's perceptions of their relationships, safety, engagement and skill building at camp. Respondents were placed in one of three categories for each construct (optimal, insufficient, mixed) based on their responses. Using logistic regression we compared data across age groups and camper vs. youth staff roles. Site observations and focus group interviews with campers, teen staff, and adult staff/chaperones informed survey results.

## ABSTRACT

Young people experience different levels of supports and opportunities based on age and the role they assume at camp. This study examined how campers of different ages experienced relationships, safety, involvement and skill building at six 4-H resident camps. It also examined how teen staff experience the above mentioned supports and opportunities central to positive youth development.

## FINDINGS

### Supportive Relationships

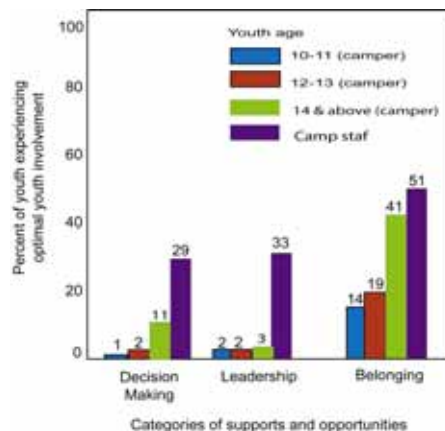
- Relationship building is a strength in 4-H camps.
- Older campers were more likely than younger campers to report optimal scores in guidance and emotional support.
- Teen staff experienced highest optimal scores through strong relationships with both campers and adults.

### Safety

- Youth generally felt safe at camp. 83% reported feeling safe all or most of the time.
- 10-11 year-old campers experienced significantly less optimal emotion safety than older campers.
- Boys tended to feel less physically safe than girls.

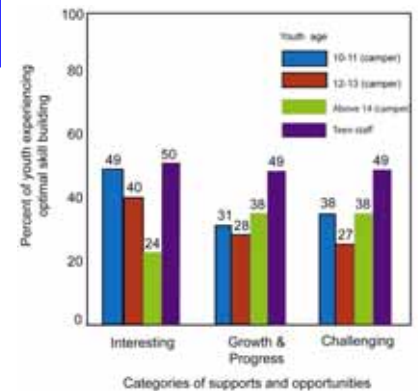
### Youth Involvement

- Camper age influenced youth involvement overall. Older campers perceived more opportunities for decision making than younger ones.
- As youth get older, their sense of belonging increases.
- Teen staff experience more optimal opportunities for youth involvement through the youth-adult partnership strategy of the 4-H camp planning process.



### Skill Building

- Youngest youth and teen staff find camp the most engaging.
- As campers get older, they perceive camp activities as less interesting, often stating they are repetitive.



## HOW THIS RESEARCH CAN HELP ME

- Find ways to help youngest campers feel connected.
- Create trusting environments where *all* youth feel known, secure and cared for.
- Find ways to allow campers to be more engaged in planning and leading so that they, too, feel they have been part of building the camp experience.
- Progression is important in program. Build progression into activities to create newness, learning, and a sense of accomplishment for campers, especially those returning or are older.
- Engage teens in camp planning.

