



Helping You Help Youth



INVOLVE CARING ADULTS IN 4-H

Parents*: What They Can Add to 4-H!

Parents are an important resource in a successful 4-H club. They are a vital, but often overlooked and under-used asset. Parents are key to assuring a lasting and meaningful 4-H experience for the member. A parent is the most important person in a child's growth and development. When parents are involved in the 4-H club/group, they provide: encouragement, assistance, guidance, knowledge, resources, leadership, and ideas.

4-H is a three-way partnership. The club leader provides members opportunities for growth and leadership; the members use those opportunities to learn and grow; and the parent supports the member as he/she gains life skills from 4-H participation.

Why Parents Get Involved

Most parents want what is best for their child. Whether at school, at home, or in the community, parents are more likely to cooperate if they are informed and understand what is expected of them and their child.

Parents of 4-H members need to know:

- what 4-H is and the opportunities it offers
- what is expected of their son or daughter, as a member
- who the volunteer leaders are and their responsibilities
- financial cost to the family
- time, place, and topic of 4-H meetings.

Parents are more likely to assist with 4-H activities if they are **ASKED** and know what role they should play.

Parents get involved in 4-H because they:

- want to help their child
- want to help others
- gain personal satisfaction
- can share a skill
- feel it is the right thing to do
- can work with other adults
- will enjoy a new experience
- get to meet new people
- have been asked.

There can be improved parent-child relationships as parents and children work together toward a mutual goal.

Benefits to 4-H Members

When parents are involved in 4-H activities, all group members gain extra support and confidence. The youth gain from having other caring adults, as well as their own parents, involved in their projects and sharing enthusiastic attitudes.

Because of parental involvement, members gain more individual attention and guidance from other adults in their community. They are able to choose to do more projects and activities supported by adult leadership. The members are more likely to have the necessary materials and encouragement from home. The members also gain confidence, assurance, and security that come with parental approval.

Adults and members who work together on projects of common interest create lasting bonds and support that goes beyond the 4-H club.

*Many children today may not live in a traditional two-parent family. The term *parent* is intended to refer to the adult supporting the child's participation in 4-H, school or community activities. This could be a mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandparent, guardian, sibling or another caring adult.

Benefits to Parents

Parents have much to gain from being involved in 4-H. First of all, they will get first-hand experience in helping their children learn and grow as they share 4-H activities. Because of these shared opportunities, their family relationships will improve when they work, communicate, and play together. Participating in 4-H events as a family builds unity and shared memories.

As parents share their skills and talents with others, they will be making a valuable contribution to the youth in their own communities, while getting to know their children's friends. As a plus, the parents will also be making new friends and meeting others from their own community.

Benefits to 4-H

Informed and involved parents benefit the 4-H program in several ways. Involving parents in the 4-H club, increases the opportunity for the members to gain valuable life skills. The community, the leaders, and the club, as well as the members, benefit from involving parents in the 4-H club activities.

The **community** served by the 4-H club gains from additional adults helping with the growth and development of its youth. The youth are offered a better educational experience in 4-H with opportunity for service to the community.

The **4-H club/group** gains the support of the most capable, important people to the club's members – their parents. Additionally parents, who have been enrolled as volunteers, can help expand the club's program. Involved parents also increase the club's leadership and resource base to support its activities in the community.

The **4-H leader** gains a resource base to share the responsibility for a successful club that meets the needs of its members. A 4-H Leader gains support to expand or maintain a viable continued program, as well as community status from leading a successful, meaningful program.

Bringing Parents into 4-H

Parents need to feel involved in the 4-H club/group from the beginning. Many parents are willing to help, but do not know if their assistance is needed or wanted. Special effort needs to be made to ask parents for their assistance with specific requests.

Club leaders need to make a special effort to get acquainted with the club members' parents to explain what 4-H is, what is expected of members and parents, and learn more about the youth and their family.

Keeping parents informed of 4-H activities and events, encouraging them to attend meetings, and making sure they know other adults and youth at the meetings will help them be more willing to accept requests for assistance.

The yearly plan of meetings and activities is one way to get parents included in the club. Parents who serve on the program planning committee are more likely to understand why the club needs parental help and can be a resource to ask other parents to be a part of the club program.

Each family should be provided a written club program. The program should include dates of meetings, assignments for each meeting, activities planned for each meeting, committee responsibilities and other information pertinent to the club.

Parents need to feel welcome to attend and help with 4-H club meetings. Planning at least one family activity during the club year will help parents get acquainted. Other ways to keep parents informed include: home visits, telephone calls, e-mail, letters, newspaper articles, Web sites, or newsletters.

4-H can provide an atmosphere for parents to maintain an interest in their children's activities and meet their goals. Showing love and concern for their own children and other children in their community improves the family's relationship, as well as the community's well-being.

What Can Parents Do

Parents can assume a variety of roles to support the 4-H member and club. They may assist members with individual projects, club activities, service projects, fundraising, or other 4-H events.

Matching the talents and interests of the parents to the task is crucial. Most people are more likely to volunteer if they feel comfortable with the task that needs to be completed.

4-H can provide resources and materials to assist parents to be successful as they work with the club members. These include: Project Helper Guides, training offered at the county, regional and state levels, new family orientation and/or parent orientation.

When asking a parent to assist with the club, be specific. Explain what tasks are involved and needed, not just a general plea for help. (An example would be: Ask the parent to type the club program, rather than work with program committee.)

Have parents complete the *4-H Parent Skills Bank* survey to gain a better understanding of their interests and talents.

Ways that parents can help include:

- Help their children select, finance and manage their 4-H projects
- Show interest and encourage their child
- Share a skill or hobby
- Serve as an activity or project leader
- Provide transportation for meetings, trips, or tours
- Hold meetings in their homes
- Help plan club programs
- Assist with judging
- Attend 4-H meetings and events
- Encourage record keeping
- Talk about 4-H with others

Parents who are involved directly with 4-H youth must also successfully complete the *Illinois Volunteer Screening Process*. Club/group leaders should contact their local University of Illinois Extension office for assistance with this process.

Encourage Parents to:

- Take the time to learn about 4-H, what it stands for, and how it operates.
- Help their child select a project of interest to the child and his/her family. The member's ability to complete the project's goals, and the resources needed to complete the project need to be considered.
- Show an interest and enthusiasm for their child's selected 4-H projects. Plan project work throughout the year, rather than waiting until the last minute.
- Help their child participate in county, regional and state events, such as public presentations, camp, fair, and project workshops.
- Keep the purpose of 4-H in mind. The project is a teaching tool and method to involve the member in a learning experience. It is more important to involve the 4-H member in a learning experience to gain life skills than to prepare a perfect project display for the fair.
- Celebrate the 4-H member's successes, and learn from their mistakes. Whatever the rating or score, help the 4-H member see the progress made, things learned, and goals reached.

Parents Expect Leaders To:

- Find answers to 4-H questions.
- Distribute 4-H materials in a timely fashion.
- Be courteous, helpful, and respectful.
- Provide an organized structure for club meetings and activities.
- Help officers plan creative, fun meetings.
- Assist members to learn leadership skills.
- Encourage all members to set realistic goals and work toward completing them.
- Be a positive role model.
- Create an awareness of resources and opportunities available to 4-H members.
- Reflect and celebrate successes, even small ones.

Parenting Styles

Not all parents are alike. Some will take a more active role in their child's experiences, while others prefer to have their child be more involved on their own. Parenting styles can generally be defined as:

- **Balanced** parents want to share the 4-H experience with their child. They want information to help their child gain the most from their 4-H experience. The balanced parent's goal is for their child to learn and grow through 4-H.
- **Overprotective** parents will want to guard their children from failure. They need to be encouraged to let their child enjoy the total 4-H experience, including failure and overcoming problems.
- **Overly-Strict** parents set high standards for their child and are critical when these standards are not met. These parents will need some guidance to let their child be a child and learn at the child's level.
- **Take-Over** parents will dominate the club meetings, activities and events. They want their child to be the primary focus of the leader. Helping this parent understand the goals of 4-H and focusing on the purpose of 4-H projects and activities may reduce this domination.
- The **Unconcerned** parent gives little support or encouragement to their child or the club. Even though these parents may be difficult to change, they need frequent contact to be informed of what the child and the 4-H club are doing.

Thanking Parents

Recognizing parents for their help is a final step. Parents want to see the value of their assistance. Recognition can be simple, but it needs to be meaningful. Use special parents' meetings or dinners as a way to interest parents and thank them for their support. Other ways to thank parents include:

- Have club officers send thank you notes
- Recognize parents at club achievement program
- Make personal phone calls
- Give a small token of appreciation
- Encourage members to personally thank parents

Involving parents in the 4-H club makes 4-H a true family affair.

Parent's 4-H Pledge

- ☘ I pledge my HEAD to give my child the information I can, to help him/her see things clearly and to make wise decisions.
- ☘ I pledge my HEART to encourage and support my child no matter whether he/she has successes or disappointments.
- ☘ I pledge my HANDS to help my child's club; if I cannot be a leader, I can help in many equally important ways.
- ☘ I pledge my HEALTH to keep my child strong and well for a better world through 4-H, for my child's club, our community, our country, and our world.

Authors

Melinda States, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development, Mt. Vernon Center
Sheri Seibold, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development, State 4-H Office

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