

Conquering Fears of Speaking in Public



Part of the “belonging” concept of the Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development is that youth know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group. This “fellowship” has always been an important part of a 4-H experience. 4-H gives youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group. Research suggests that a sense of belonging may be the single most powerful positive ingredient we can bring into the lives of children and youth.

Working in clubs through 4-H strengthens and reinforces social skills that will allow youth to co-exist and thrive with others in society. Success in life rarely comes to an individual without some type of personal interaction with others. 4-H members learn early on the value of cooperation in their project work and activities.

4-H can greatly help the members to interact with others and to overcome a common fear: the fear of speaking in public. The mere thought of speaking before an audience can be paralyzing to youth and adults alike. Delivering a demonstration or talk from beginning to end in front of a group can be equally daunting and scary. Taking small steps of getting youth up front in a safe environment such as 4-H will begin to help youth overcome the fear of speaking in public.

Objectives

- To help youth identify what makes them scared of speaking in public.
- To help youth learn to plan for and around stage nerves.
- To help youth build their communications skills through simple speaking opportunities.



In this session, we'll focus on these objectives.

Objective #1

To help youth identify what makes them scared of speaking in public.



Group Activity

Does speaking in public scare
you?



To help us overcome our fears, it's a good idea to first identify what it is that is making us afraid.

Instructors: follow notes listed on lesson plan for procedures to lead this activity.

Common Public Speaking Fears

- Boring the audience to sleep
- Burping uncontrollably
- Teeth chattering
- People laughing at them
- Tripping on the way up to the stage
- Others?



Discussion Questions

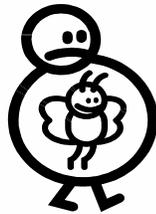
- What other fears can you think of?
- Are you surprised at all the things people fear about public speaking?
- What might you do to prevent some of these fears from coming true?
- What is at least one solution or problem-solving technique for each fear we have listed?
- What nervous symptoms have you had before or while speaking in public?



Instructors: follow notes on lesson plan.

Objective #2

To help kids learn to plan for and
around stage nerves.



Now that we have identified our fears of speaking in public, let's take a look at some ways that we can overcome our stage nerves.

Plan and Prepare

- Proper preparation and rehearsal can help to reduce fear by about 75%.
- Proper breathing techniques can further reduce this fear by 15%.
- Your mental state accounts for the remaining 10%.



To plan for and around stage fears, you must be aware of your anxieties and plan ahead to overcome them.

10 Steps to Reduce Speaking Fears



There are 10 steps you can take to help you reduce your speaking fears.

1. Know the Room

- Arrive early and walk around the room.
- Stand up front by lectern or podium.
- Test out the microphone if using one.
- Walk around where the audience will be seated.
- Walk from where you will be seated to the place where you will be speaking.



Become familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early and walk around the room including the speaking area. Stand at the lectern/podium. Speak into the microphone. Walk around where the audience will be seated. Walk from where you will be seated to the place where you will be speaking.

2. Know the Audience

- Try to greet some of the audience and chat with them.
- Friends are easier to talk to than a group of strangers.



If possible, greet some of the audience as they arrive and chat with them. It is easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers.

3. Know Your Material

- Speak about things you know or that interest you.
- Study your material until you know it.
- Practice your speech.



Only speak about things you know well or that interest you, so you feel confident you have something to offer the audience. If you are not familiar with your material or are uncomfortable with it, your nervousness will increase. Practice your speech or presentation and revise it until you can present it with ease.

4. Learn How to Relax

- Sit comfortably with your back straight.
- Breathe in slowly, hold your breath for 4 to 5 seconds, and then slowly exhale.
- To relax your facial muscles, open your mouth wide and eyes wide, and then close them tightly. Pause and open them again.



You can ease tension by doing exercises. Sit comfortably with your back straight. Breathe in slowly, hold your breath for 4 to 5 seconds, and then slowly exhale. To relax your facial muscles, open your mouth and eyes wide, and then close them tightly. Pause, and open them again.

5. Visualize Yourself Speaking

- Imagine yourself walking confidently to the lectern.
- Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear, and assured.
- When you visualize yourself as successful, you will be successful.



Imagine yourself walking confidently to the lectern as the audience applauds. Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear, and assured. When you visualize yourself as successful, you will be successful.

6. Realize People Want You to Succeed

- Audiences want speakers to be interesting, informative, and entertaining.
- They want you to succeed, not to fail.



All audiences want speakers to be interesting, stimulating, informative, and entertaining. They want you to succeed, not to fail. If you get nervous speaking in front of strangers, try to chat with a few members of the audience before you give your speech. This helps establish contact and makes you feel as though you're on friendly ground.

7. Don't Apologize for Being Nervous

- Most nervousness does not show.
- If you don't say anything, nobody may notice.



Most of the time your nervousness does not show at all. If you don't say anything about it, nobody will notice. If you mention your nervousness or apologize for any problems you think you have with your speech, you'll only be calling attention to it. Had you remained silent, your listeners may not have noticed at all.

8. Concentrate on Your Message

- Your nervous feelings will ease as you focus your attention away from your fears.
- Concentrate on your message and your audience, not yourself.



Your nervous feelings will dissipate if you focus your attention away from your anxieties and concentrate on your message and your audience, not yourself.

9. Turn Nervousness into Positive Energy

- The same nervous energy that causes stage fright can be an asset to you.
- Transform this energy into vitality and enthusiasm in delivering your speech.



The same nervous energy that causes stage fright can be an asset to you. Harness it, and transform it into vitality and enthusiasm. Learn a quick stress-reducing routine for relaxing your neck, shoulder and facial muscles just before giving your talk.

10. Gain Experience

- Experience builds confidence and reduces anxieties.
- Volunteer to speak when possible to build your confidence.



Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. Most beginning speakers find their anxieties decrease after each speech they give.

If the fear of public speaking causes you to prepare more, then the fear of speaking serves as its own best antidote.

Remember, he who fails to prepare is preparing for failure!

Professional speakers say that preparation and practice are the two most critical things to do before delivering a speech. When you feel prepared and have practiced delivering the speech, the butterflies that you feel in your stomach will fly into formation very quickly. After that initial release of the voice at the podium, the butterflies begin to settle and the nerves begin to calm.



Objective #3

To help youth build their communications skills through simple speaking opportunities.



To help give youth opportunities to practice their speaking in public, you can begin in a 4-H Club setting, which can be referred to as a learning laboratory. You, as the leader, should set the stage for a safe learning environment. A safe learning environment in this case means that youth can make mistakes and try new things without being ridiculed or made to feel less than a whole person. You, as the volunteer leader or advisor of the club, set the tone for a fun, positive, and safe learning environment through your actions and handling of mistakes.

There are a number of methods by which we can help youth build their communications skills by providing them with simple speaking opportunities. In this objective, we'll look at some of these options.

Methods for Providing Public Speaking Opportunities



Meeting Roll Call

- As the roll is read, have each member stand and give an audible response to a question.
- Options to consider
 - What is your favorite 4-H project?
 - What is your favorite dessert?
 - What do you like best about 4-H?



When doing roll call in your meetings, have youth stand to give their audible response to a question.

Sample questions might include:

What is your favorite 4-H Project?

What is your favorite dessert?

What do you like best about 4-H?

Officer & Member Reports

- Ask officers and members to stand when addressing the group.
- This accomplishes three things:
 - It gives the speaker presence to the group.
 - The club members or audience can hear and focus on the speaker.
 - It gives the speaker practice with standing up and facing the group in a non-threatening way.



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The club members or audience can hear and focus on the speaker.

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Other Opportunities

Arrange for youth to speak to the club or group. They might share a:

- One-minute demonstration or illustrated talk
- Completed 4-H project from last year in a show-n-tell format
- Full-blown demonstration
- Short speech for contest
- Skit or share-the-fun act or talent



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What other ideas came to your mind as you heard these options?

(Allow time for responses.)

Demonstrations & Illustrated Talks



Demonstrations and illustrated talks can help members

- Gain self-confidence,
- Learn to speak before a group,
- Increase knowledge about a project,
- Develop leadership skills,
- Learn to organize materials in a logical sequence, and
- Develop skill in putting words and actions together.



Suggestions for using demonstrations in your club can be found in publication 4-H 689c-W, Demonstrations and Illustrated Talks.

Instructor note: distribute a copy of 4-H 689c-W publication to each participant.

“Fun Box” Demonstrations

- Contain a variety of everyday items
 - Shoe and shoelace, band-aid and ointment, screwdriver and screw, etc.
- Member is asked or volunteers to select an item
- Member then talks about this item for 30 seconds to one minute



As we have discussed earlier, getting up in front of a group can be a scary experience for a younger member. Talks or demonstrations for beginning members should be short, even as short as 30 seconds at first, and about something familiar to the member. The “fun box” is a simple way to introduce demonstrations to your club.

Here are simple directions to create a fun box:

Create a “fun box” containing a variety of different, familiar, every-day items (suggested items: shoe and shoelace; band-aid and first-aid ointment; hammer, nail, and board; screwdriver and screw; can and can opener; needle and spool of thread; balloon; toothbrush and paste; instant camera and film; tape measure; pencil and pencil sharpener, items from the kitchen, etc. The list is endless.)

Select members to look through the “fun box” and pick some item or items to talk about for 30 seconds to one minute.

“Grab Bag” Demonstrations

- Ask a member to select a bag that contains all items needed for a short demonstration.
- The member prepares what to say about the items during the first part of the meeting.
- Then the member talks about the items for 1-3 minutes.
- An example “grab bag” demonstration would include all of the items needed to show how to properly measure sugar, flour, or baking soda.



“Grab Bag” Demonstrations would be another option to consider. At the beginning of the meeting, a member selects a bag that has a complete kit of items needed to do a short demonstration. During the first part of the meeting, the member prepares what he or she will say about the items. The member then talks about these items or demonstrates how to use or complete the process for maybe 1-3 minutes.

An example of these grab bag kits would include a kitchen measuring kit with measuring spoons or measuring cups along with two bowls, a leveling knife and a supply of sugar, flour, baking soda or another common measuring material to demonstrate to the club on how to measure.

Contests

- At the county, area, and/or state levels, 4-H members can enter contests in:
 - Demonstrations or Illustrated Talk
 - Presentation based on a certain subject matter area
 - Supported by visual aids
 - Public Speaking
 - Speech based on an annual theme
 - Action Demos
 - An exhibit option in some projects
 - Presentation given to the general public multiple times regarding some aspect of the 4-H project



More information about each of these options is available upon request from the Extension Office.

Do you see other ways you can provide the opportunities to build their communications skills within your 4-H program?

Demonstration Practice



To provide practice for the volunteers, have a "Fun Box" prepared and a few "Grab Bags" and select a few people from the audience to carry out a "Fun Box" Demonstration and a "Grab Bag" Demonstration.

Conclusion and Quiz



Sources

- *4-H Communication Activities*. (4-H 689-W, 2007). 4-H Youth Development, West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Extension Service
- *Communication Toolkit: Fun Skill-Building Activities to Do with Kids*. (4-H 1560, n.d.) 4-H Youth Development, Children, Youth and Family Programs, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Extension
- *Overcome the Fear of Speaking to Groups*. (4-H 689b-W, 2007). 4-H Youth Development, West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Extension Service

