

# “Working Effectively with 4-H Parents”



Welcome to the lesson “Working Effectively with 4-H Parents.” This lesson is designed to help us better understand the roles that parents can play in the 4-H program and how to incorporate parent assistance effectively. As a result we will have a more inclusive environment...another of the Eight Essential Elements.

As we begin to talk about parent involvement in 4-H, here are some basic things to keep in mind.

- Parents are important to the success of 4-H. We all know this is true, but sometimes forget just how important they are. We’ll look at some of the ways that parents are important in this lesson.
- We also know that 4-H has its own culture and language. For those of us who have worked with 4-H for several years, we know the culture well. It is important to remember that those with no 4-H background (or at least not a recent 4-H background), will need some assistance to understand the program.
- Parents are going to be involved. What this lesson is designed to do is to help us keep parents involved in a positive way that will lead to positive development of the youth in our program.

**NOTE:** The use of the term “parent” throughout this program includes the child’s natural parent, step-parent, guardian, or other adult who has the primary responsibility for the care of the child.

# Objectives

1. Explain the benefits of positive parent involvement in 4-H activities.
2. Identify methods to gain parent support.
3. Identify roles parents can perform in the 4-H program.
4. List expectations of 4-H parents.
5. Share methods to help parents, 4-H Volunteers, and Extension staff work together.
6. Identify methods to recognize the contributions of parents to the 4-H program.



The objectives that we will accomplish in this lesson are listed on this slide.

## Objective #1:

Explain the benefits of positive parent involvement in 4-H activities.



Questions we will answer in this objective include:

- Why should parents be an active part of the 4-H program?
- What benefits are gained as a result of positive parent involvement in 4-H activities?

Before we proceed, why do you think that parents should be an active part of 4-H?

And, what benefits have you noticed that occur as a result of positive parent involvement?

(Allow time for responses.)

## Benefits to 4-H Members

- Members gain support and confidence from working with interested adults.
- Members are able to participate in a common interest with their parents, helping 4-H to be a family affair.
- Members receive more individual attention and guidance.
- Members mimic their parents' positive, enthusiastic attitudes.



Youth seek the approval of adults. Those who receive positive and constructive feedback from adults will feel better about the work they have accomplished and will be more self-confident.

We talk frequently about 4-H being a family program. Most of us see this as a very positive characteristic of our program. But there are always a few who make it seem like this is a negative. We want to emphasize positive involvement by parents and provide them with suggestions for how to do so effectively.

Just as Extension Educators can't reach all of our 4-H members without the assistance of volunteers, neither can our volunteers provide all of the assistance that members need without the parents. It requires a team effort to help the youth receive the individual attention that they need.

Parents (and staff and volunteers) with a positive attitude will enable the youth to be more positive about their 4-H experiences as well.

## Benefits to Parents

- Parents help their children learn and grow.
- Parents share experiences with their children.
- Parents improve relationships with their children.
- Parents make a contribution to youth in the community.



It is important to realize that parents can benefit from their child's involvement in 4-H. And we need to help parents understand those and other benefits.

Parents can be an important part of their child's nonformal educational experiences. Working together on 4-H projects and activities allows the parent and child to spend quality time together.

## Benefits to Parents

- Parents get to know their children's friends.
- Parents make new friends and acquaintances within the community.
- Parents can show love and concern for their children in 4-H by maintaining an interest in their activities and helping them to meet their goals.



Meeting others in the 4-H community and beyond helps the parents to stay better informed about their child's activities and about opportunities that may be available to him or her.

What other benefits do you see 4-H having for parents? (Allow time for responses.)

It will be important for us to communicate these benefits to the parents!

## Benefits to 4-H Volunteers

- Volunteers can delegate jobs to responsible parents to allow volunteers time to develop additional club events.
- Volunteers can more effectively reach each member with a positive adult influence.
- Volunteers will experience greater satisfaction from watching parent/child relations grow within the 4-H Club setting.



Volunteers who are able to effectively delegate some responsibilities to the parents can offer a more complete, well-rounded program for the members. The volunteers will be able to focus on larger issues of greater importance to the overall operation of the 4-H Club.

Volunteers can help to foster improved relations between parent and child by allowing them to work on 4-H Club activities together.

It is important to emphasize to volunteers that they should not feel threatened by parents who want to have an active role in the 4-H Club. Rather, they should view this interest as a positive means of support.

## Benefits to 4-H Clubs

- The 4-H Club is strengthened, larger, and more active.
- More club activities may be offered and expanded.
- Favorable Attitudes + Parent Interests + Active Parent Cooperation = Successful 4-H Clubs



Parents bring a wide array of experiences, talents, and abilities that can allow the 4-H program to meet the wide variety of interests of its members.

Successful 4-H Clubs will result from this active parent participation.



## Objective #2:

Identify methods to gain parent support.



Now that we know some of the benefits of parent involvement in 4-H, let's look at some of the ways that we can gain parent support.

What suggestions would you give to other volunteers to help them gain the support of parents?

(Allow time for responses.)

# Methods to gain parent support

- Ask!
  - Many parents are willing to help but are unaware that they are needed or wanted.
- Become acquainted with the parents.
- Find out where they would like to help - determine parent interests and abilities by having them complete a short questionnaire.
  - (e.g., 4-H Parent Interest Survey)



Volunteers will want to become acquainted with the parents and learn what interests they have before they ask the parents to become involved.

Parents need to be asked to assist with the 4-H program. And, they need specific information related to the task at hand.

North Carolina Survey of 458 parents:

3/4 were willing to help with 4-H, but only 1/8 to 1/2 of the parents actually did.

The most common response parents gave when asked why they did not help with 4-H was, "nobody asked me."

The key point from this slide is to ASK!!! Let the parents know that their input and assistance is welcomed.

## NOTE:

Information and materials on offering a new 4-H parent orientation meeting are available from the Extension Office upon request.

## Methods to gain parent support

- Be specific about the requests that you make of the parents, including tasks and time involved.
- Invite parents to a special meeting at the beginning of the 4-H year.
  - Inform them of general 4-H procedures.
  - Introduce them to the volunteer leadership and other parents.
  - Request the parents' assistance.



Specific requests are often more effective than are general ones. And, you are better able to communicate your expectations of the parents with a specific request.

## Methods to gain parent support

- Keep parents informed of upcoming activities and events.
  - Send newsletters, information sheets, calls, e-mails, etc.
- Let parents know the expectations of them and their children as 4-H members.
- Encourage parents to attend 4-H Club meetings.
- Recognize members and their parents.



Parents like to be informed, and the sooner the better! Make an extra effort to plan the year's calendar ahead and avoid last minute changes as much as possible.

Be sure that parents know they are invited to attend 4-H Club meetings. Encourage their attendance, but respectfully ask that they hold their comments and questions until the end so that the members can remain the focus of the meeting.

Recognizing parent contributions throughout the year will reinforce the positive participation.

## Methods to gain parent support

- Lead a 4-H Scavenger Hunt with parents and children, using the local 4-H program book as a source for the questions and answers.
- Conduct a family activity with the 4-H Club (e.g., pitch-in dinner, picnic, challenge relay games, etc.).
- Involve parents in meaningful activities so they can see the value in their assistance.



Activities that involve members and their parents or family members further support the notion of keeping 4-H as a family program and reinforce the inclusive nature of our program.

## Roadblocks to parent support

- Lack of communication
- Lack of understanding of 4-H program
  - Parents do not understand educational value of program or program objectives.
  - Parents consider 4-H as recreation or babysitting service.



As with any relationship, communication is a key! We all need to make a concerted effort to help the parents stay informed about 4-H activities.

Inviting parents to an orientation program similar to the one included in these materials can help parents better understand the purpose of the 4-H program.

## Overcome roadblocks with:

- Clear communications
- Avoiding last-minute requests
- Support and assistance
- Encouragement
- Thank you's



Each of these suggestions is fairly common-sense, but important to consider.

Put yourself in the place of the parent. What information would you need to know about 4-H activities and when would you like to have it?

## Objective #3:

Identify roles parents can perform  
in the 4-H program.



We'll consider a number of roles for parents in the 4-H program in this objective.

What roles do you believe a parent can play? (Allow time for responses.)



## Parent Roles in 4-H

- Help, cooperate, and smile often!
- Offer time and services to assist with the operation of the 4-H Club.
- Attend 4-H meetings to provide assistance with crowd control.
- Pick up and/or drop off your own children and other members – on time!



This first bullet point may be the most helpful of all. If we all start with a positive attitude, the whole program will benefit!

Many parents have knowledge, skills, and abilities that are needed in 4-H.

Just as it is important for us to ask parents for their help, it is equally important that parents let us know they are willing to help.

Parents won't always be available to attend meetings with their children. However, it is very important to the volunteers and the children that the members are picked up and dropped off on time. If transportation is to be provided by someone other than the parent, it is recommended that the parent provide a note to the volunteer indicating who has permission to transport the member.

## Parent Roles in 4-H

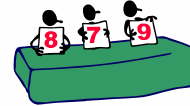
- Serve on committees to help plan and conduct events.
- Share expertise in projects with club members.
- Share ideas for possible future programs.
- Help secure other qualified adults to assist with projects and activities.



Parents have many experiences that will be helpful to the club. They also have many contacts throughout the community and other potential resources that can help in the operation of the club.

## Parent Roles in 4-H

- Serve as a judge for an event.
- Support the 4-H program in the community.
- Promote 4-H among friends and acquaintances.
- Provide refreshments.
- Encourage accurate and complete record-keeping.



Parents can use their areas of expertise by assisting as judges, formally or informally.

Parents who have a positive experience in the 4-H program can be excellent 4-H ambassadors in the community. (Unfortunately, the opposite is also true for those who have had negative experiences...thus, the importance of helping parents to stay positively involved!)

## Parent Roles in 4-H

- Read information about 4-H to keep up-to-date on activities.
- Help members by guiding and supporting them, not by doing it for them.
- Follow expectations of a 4-H parent.
- Consider volunteer service in the 4-H program.



Reading and paying attention to 4-H information sent home is crucial to staying informed about 4-H events.

The second bullet point is probably the one that parents are criticized for the most. It is difficult to walk the fine line between guiding and doing the 4-H project for the member. While we want to encourage parent involvement and make 4-H a family program, we need to help the parents understand the importance of allowing the member to have the full 4-H experience and to develop his or her own life skills. This may include some bumps and bruises along the way, but in the end, the 4-H member will be better off if he knows that the 4-H project was his work!

Parent volunteers are important! (Have we said that before?) Those who wish to assist on a more formal basis are encouraged to complete the volunteer application process through the 4-H Youth Development Extension Educator.

Volunteers should not be responsible for collecting completed volunteer applications.

## Objective #4:

List expectations of 4-H parents.



Expectations of parents in 4-H are many, but not unreasonable.

What do you think are some expectations of parents within the 4-H program? (Allow time for responses.)

## Expectations of 4-H Parents



- Make a sincere effort to have your children at 4-H Club meetings and activities.
- Pick up your children from 4-H Club meetings and activities promptly.
- Advise your children in selecting 4-H projects that are appropriate for them.
- Learn about 4-H with your children.



If we can communicate the importance of meeting attendance to the parents, we can help them place a greater emphasis on ensuring their children attend. We cannot require meeting attendance, but if the parents are on board with the importance we place on attendance, overall attendance will increase.

NOTE: We must offer a high quality program that gives the parents and the members a reason and more incentive to attend! And, we must also have meetings scheduled in advance so parents know the dates – avoid last minute scheduling and rescheduling!

Members often want to take more projects than they can handle successfully. The parents can play a key role in helping the members select those which are of the most interest to them and which they will have time to complete, taking into consideration the other activities in which they are involved.

# Expectations of 4-H Parents



- Keep informed about 4-H through information that is sent to 4-H members.
- Help children learn responsibility by encouraging them to complete their 4-H projects.
- Be a guide, advisor, teacher, and counselor to your children as they work on 4-H projects and activities ... **BUT**, don't do the job for them.



Here's that reading emphasis again!

One of the primary life skills that 4-H teaches its members is responsibility. Parents can help reinforce the importance of completing what the members have started.

Again, parents are asked to walk that fine line!

## Expectations of 4-H Parents

- Be a good example! Help children practice good sportsmanship.
- Encourage children when they succeed and even more when they fail.
- Help members see progress they have made and knowledge they have gained, not focus only on the end result.
- State approval of children's work.



Parents can help us communicate the message to the members that their level of success on a certain project is not the most important part of the 4-H program; rather, it is the learning that has been achieved and the experience that has been gained by the member that should be the primary focus.

Not everyone will achieve the top prize. Parents can help the members to graciously accept the top prize when it's achieved, and also congratulate others who win.

Parent encouragement of their children is crucial to the development of their overall self-esteem and self-confidence.



# Expectations of 4-H Parents



- Help children learn to make choices and decisions.
- Help children understand their capabilities and reach their potential.
- Support the 4-H Club as a positive, active parental influence.



Life is filled with choices. We all have a limited supply of resources (time, money, talents, etc.). Parents can help us to help the members learn these key principles as they participate in 4-H.

## Objective #5:

Share methods to help parents, 4-H  
Volunteers, and Extension staff work  
together.



“Every member needs significant other adults as he grows up.”

This quote emphasizes the importance of multiple adults working together to help the members grow and develop to their fullest potential. We all need to find ways to work together effectively to support the youth in 4-H.

As we begin this objective, we all need to consider again the benefits of parent involvement to the members, parents, volunteers, and overall 4-H Club program (review Objective #1).

Then, we can establish a mind-set that **positive** parent involvement is preferred to **no** or **negative** parent involvement as we work to involve parents more fully in the 4-H program.

What methods have you found to be effective in helping all of these groups work together in support of the youth?

(Allow time for responses.)

We want parents to be involved in a positive way so that our members will have the best experience possible.

## Ask parents:



- For their consent when their child joins 4-H.
- To meet occasionally to discuss the club's program.
- To attend club meetings whenever possible.
- To identify their interests and abilities in helping with 4-H.
- If they are interested in participating in a "Family Buddy System" so each new family has contact with an experienced 4-H family.



Parents have the opportunity to sign the membership form that the child completes to indicate their support of the child's participation.

Consider establishing a buddy or mentoring system, pairing experienced 4-H families with new ones. This can have a positive impact on all of the families in the program.

## Help parents understand:

- The basic 4-H objectives and benefits to youth.
- The essential elements of positive youth development.
- Opportunities available through 4-H.
- Expectations of 4-H members.
- Names of 4-H Volunteers and Extension staff.



Materials are included in the *Volunteer/IN* series that can help parents understand how the 4-H program works and who is involved.

## Help parents understand:

- Materials and resources needed for project completion.
- Financial costs of 4-H participation.
- Time, date, and location of 4-H meetings and activities.
- Methods used to promote 4-H and club activities to parents.



The family financial situation should not prohibit participation in 4-H, but there are costs associated with 4-H such as project materials and club dues.

If finances are an issue, work with the family on an individual basis to select projects that will be more in line with their available resources. And, the county policy-making group may consider some partial scholarship offerings for those who are unable to meet the basic financial obligations of 4-H.

Be sure that the parents know how they can find information about 4-H. Are activities included on the Web site, radio, in the newspaper, mailings to the home, etc.?

## Involve parents:

- Invite them to club events.
- Provide them with opportunities to assume responsibilities within the club.
- Provide those interested in volunteering with a task description that lists all of the things that need to be done.



Again, providing specific details of what you want the parents to do will result in a more successful experience.

## Involve parents:

- Use a rotation system so that no one person or family carries the majority of the workload.
- Express appreciation for their assistance publicly and privately.
- Provide opportunities for parents to offer constructive feedback and suggestions on the 4-H program.



Recognition does not need to wait until a year-end program. Consider a parent of the month recognition. Involve the members in determining how to best recognize the parents.

## Objective #6:

Identify methods to recognize the contributions of parents to the 4-H program.



Why do you believe that parents should be recognized?

What effective ways have you found to recognize parents in the 4-H program?

(Allow time for responses.)



## Make recognition a priority:

- Parent contributions are an important part of the 4-H program success.
- Everyone likes to be recognized, including parents who are a part of the program.
- Recognizing parents takes a little time, but it can produce great rewards!



We all like to know that our contributions are appreciated...parents are no different.

## Find ways to recognize parents:

- Be creative.
- Remember simple things.
- Involve program participants in the recognition.
  - Parents like to know that those who they are serving appreciate their efforts.
  - The participants may have very innovative ideas for how to recognize parents.



The methods listed on these slides are only suggestions. Be creative and involve the members in the recognition.

## Find ways to recognize parents:

- Encourage members to say “thank you” to their parents for their help.
- Hold a “Parent Appreciation Night” with refreshments, entertainment, and recognition.
- Include parents’ names in 4-H newsletters and news stories.



Anything that involves the children in the recognition will be much appreciated by the parents.

At a “Parent Appreciation Night” you can:

Include refreshments or a meal prepared by members.

Include talent by members.

Have members present certificates or small 4-H favors in appreciation of their parents’ help.

## Find ways to recognize parents:

- Recognize parents along with their children for 4-H accomplishments at 4-H Achievement Programs.
- During roll call ask members to complete the following sentence: "I'm proud of my parent because..."
- Hold special family-related club events such as a canoe trip, campout, cook-out, family share-the-fun night, etc.



## Find ways to recognize parents:

- Provide child care services for younger children of 4-H parents while they are helping with the 4-H Club program.
- Arrange for discounts or coupons redeemable to local businesses for parents who help.
- Write thank-you notes, mail cards, or send e-mails to express appreciation for parent support.



## Find ways to recognize parents:

- Personalize recognition.
  - Certificates or plaques with the parent's name (spelled correctly)
  - Recognition gift that is meaningful to the individual parent
- Plan a recognition edition of a club newsletter.
- Place a phone call to a parent who has been particularly instrumental in a program.



## Find ways to recognize parents:

- Offer a “Parents’ Night Out” for those who volunteer with the program (and utilize older 4-H members to help care for young children).
- Invite selected parents to be guests of honor at each 4-H meeting.
- Provide further opportunities for parents to offer their services to the 4-H program.



# Parents' 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.
- **HEART** to encourage and support my child no matter whether he/she has successes or disappointments.
- **HANDS** to help my child's club; if I cannot be a volunteer, I can help in many equally important ways.
- **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.



This pledge may be used as a resource as you work with 4-H parents. Just as our 4-H members say the 4-H pledge before each meeting, here's one for our 4-H parents to recite from time to time.



## Conclusion and Quiz



In this lesson we've covered the following points:

- Benefits of parent involvement in 4-H
- Methods to gain parent support
- Roles parents can perform in 4-H
- Expectations of 4-H parents
- Methods to help parents, volunteers, and Extension staff work together
- Methods to recognize the contributions of volunteers

Here's a short quiz to help us recap this lesson.

Also provided is a "Working Effectively with 4-H Parents" fact sheet which you may use for future reference.

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Thank you for your  
participation and for your  
work with 4-H parents!

Thanks

