



NAVIGATING 4-H CLUBS AS A VOLUNTEER

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH 4-H YOUTH

Belonging

Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group. 4-H gives youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group. As a club leader, it is important that you ensure youth feel like they are part of your club. Some ways to help achieve belonging include:

- Learning all 4-H members' names and how to pronounce them
- Greeting each 4-H member at every meeting
- Taking time to ask 4-H members about things important to them (such as sports, family, other clubs)
- Noticing if a youth is not engaged and reaching out to them
- Encouraging youth to interact with others and get to know them, especially newer members. Play team building games and have icebreakers so the club gets to know each other well.
- Pairing older youth with younger youth as mentors
- Making sure everyone has a chance to participate and is encouraged to step out of their comfort zone
- Show respect to all youth and make sure 4-H members are showing respect to each other.

Mastery

By exploring 4-H projects and activities, youth master skills to make positive life choices. Youth need to have a safe environment to make mistakes and get feedback. Young people need to learn about new topics that then allow them to pursue their own interests. Strategies to achieve mastery include:

- Teach life skills through club programs such as career readiness, leadership, STEM, civic engagement, healthy living, communication, and more. Reach out to local experts for help.
- Allow youth to plan and complete club projects (perhaps a community service project) from start to finish
- Encourage youth to bring completed 4-H projects to meetings for a mock judging and feedback
- Allow youth the opportunity to explore careers through career panels, guest speakers, etc.
- Supplement competition with cooperative activities to develop interpersonal skills
- Incorporate a variety of teaching methods in 4-H club programming
- Model problem solving skills when things don't go as planned

Independence

By exercising independence through 4-H opportunities, youth mature in self-discipline and responsibility, learn to better understand themselves, and become independent thinkers. To develop responsibility, young people need to know they are able to influence others through action. Ways 4-H volunteers can encourage independence include:

- Encourage officers to lead and follow through on duties. Club leaders are there to guide and advise.
- Encourage youth to make decisions for the club
- Allow youth to plan the year's meetings and events and encourage their input. Encourage youth to contact speakers, call venues for meetings, etc. to take on responsibility
- Give youth the chance to work through problems and come up with solutions
- Commend youth who recognize the limits of their independence and ask for help



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Generosity

Young people need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By participating in 4-H community service and civic engagement projects, youth connect to communities and learn how to give back to Others. Strategies to encourage generosity include:

- Participating in community service projects during club meetings and outside of club meetings (examples: making blankets for chemo patients, making cards for soldiers, playing bingo with nursing home residents, making pet toys for animal shelters, beautifying a park, planting a community garden, collecting canned goods for a local food shelter, etc.)
- Highlight the effects of a person's behavior on others (both good and bad) and reinforce gestures of caring and compassion
- Help youth understand other cultures and how to show respect and concern for everyone
- Connect skills learned and how they can be used in other positive ways
- Encourage youth to put themselves in others' shoes and recognize the feelings of others

Overall Tips

- Involve youth in the planning process for all club events. They are more likely to participate and be engaged if they have ownership of the event and it's something they will enjoy.
- Give younger youth the opportunity to take on responsibility in a small way, such as serving on a committee or being in charge of refreshments
- Get feedback from 4-H members and their parents to help make your club even better. For instance, does your meeting time work for most of the group? Do new members feel welcome in your club? Do older members feel engaged? If not, why not? Get feedback on programs, meeting times, etc. to get maximum engagement.
- Build self-confidence and feelings of worth by focusing on each member's assets and strengths. "I like the way you handled that." Recognize improvement and effort, not just accomplishment.
- Ensure that meetings are organized and run smoothly so that youth and parents know what to expect from the club.
- Keep club members and parents informed by communicating regularly. This can be done via email, a club newsletter, remind apps, facebook groups, or other ways.