

**The Education of Judging**

**Communication for Judges**

**Presentation Notes with Experiential Learning for Judges & volunteers**

**January 16, 2021**

Judging Prerequisites

* Know and understand the county project requirements/guidelines/ expectations.
  + Counties generally provide a handbook with project requirements ahead of time. Take the time to read them and become familiar with criteria.
  + If offered, participate in judges briefing before judging begins. Even if you have been a judge for years, each county can be different.
  + If you have questions, ask your assistant or other designated person before judging, or privately during judging for additional information.
  + Ask County if score cards are available for the project.
* Understand the audience. Keep in mind that ability, personality and confidence span a wide range in youth ages 8-18.
  + Ages 8-10-literal thinking; not goal setters, concerned about the process more than the product.
  + Ages 11-13-wide range of ability in academia, interests and reasoning skills; beginning to think logically; view things at extremes, great vs horrible.
  + Ages 12-14-frequently have self-esteem difficulties; developing abstract thought & able to begin to hypothesize; are able to think about thinking.
  + Ages 15-18-abstract thinkers; can imagine impact on the future; enjoy demonstrating knowledge; can create new possibilities from information.
    - *McFarland & Hebner-University of Minnesota, 2008*

The Philosophy of Judging-“To Make the Best Better” implies we need to know what our best is, before we can make it better. The evaluation allows the youth to discover where they are, and where they could go.

* Be Fair
* Be able to be Flexible and Adaptive
* Be Friendly
* Be Consistent

Judging Essentials

* Understand the core values of 4-H: Empowering young people in developing positive skills and attributes that can be used in making the world a better place for themselves and their communities. This is accomplished through creating experiences that build self-confidence, inquiring minds, interpersonal cooperation, community concern, and decision-making through real life participation.
* Use a standard score card or evaluation tool.
* Provide positive, constructive, and relevant comments. If “closed” judging, provide written comments to all exhibitors.

The Judging Experience

* Judging can be held using open judging or closed judging. Open judging occurs when the member is present while the judge evaluates the project. Closed judging occurs without the member present and provides written comments for members.
* The judging experience should be one of the most meaningful parts of a youth’s 4-H experience. Take advantage of this teachable moment!
  + Through the process of asking questions & discussing the project, the judge can help youth make connections between the project; what they learned and skills they developed.
  + Explain your judging criteria and rationale. Explain why some parts of the project are more important than others.
  + Note achievement and success of the child’s investment no matter how small. Praise the child for completing the project and having the courage to show their work.
  + Evaluation helps youth know what they did well and prompts discussion about how the project could be improved.
  + With intentional discussion, youth make connections between skills and knowledge gained in the project and application in the real world.
* Communication is a two-way process between you and the youth. You must be a good listener as well as a good interviewer.
  + Provide a welcoming atmosphere. Greet youth immediately, use a warm tone of voice, smile, make eye contact and be relaxed.
  + Lean forward as youth speak to show you are actively listening. Use silence, hearing, observing, self-control, encouragement
  + Listen with your heart to identify components of youth answers.
  + Encourage youth to describe their work and recognize their own gifts and talents.
* The experiential learning method used in 4-H curriculum, requires youth to explore and create a project. Judges further the process by taking youth through the next steps: **S**hare what was done, **P**rocess or identify what was most important (life skill) in the project, **I**dentify how to use what was learned in real life, and **T**hink about what the next step could be. [SPIT]
  + Think of being a mirror, reflecting back to the youth information to help them discover ways to see accomplishments and actions leading to improvement. Celebrate the youth’s strengths.
* Provide feedback; not criticism.
  + The term constructive criticism gives the impression of failure in some sense. Feedback is a positive way to identify strengths, as well as, identify areas for improvement.
* “Words...can encourage or discourage; diminish or degrade.” Michigan State University Communications Toolkit.
  + Words are powerful! A miss-spoken word has the power to crush a spirit.
  + Be honest in your evaluation and plan ahead how you will offer words of encouragement and words suggesting areas needing improvement.
* Craft questions & feedback to the individual standing before you.
  + You need to ask questions to discover more about the child and their’ abilities before making assumptions about their capabilities.
  + While some special needs youth are visually identifiable, many with developmental delays and handicaps are not.
  + Create a bank of questions which will help you discover what the child knows about the project, what they did, etc.
  + Special need youth have a wide range of functioning. Some will be able to answer your questions easily, while others will have no clue what you are asking them, or don’t have the words to answer you. In this case, you may need to ask help from the parent/caregiver present with the child. You may ask the child what they liked about the project? What they did not like, etc.,to prompt a reply.
  + Many special need youth need something visual to help them communicate. If you don’t get much response from the youth, ask the parent or guardian with the child to assist you getting information.
    - Acknowledge their work with specific comments and show them as you talk.
    - Point out different colors, shapes, designs etc they have used to try to pull additional information from them and help them understand how to talk about their project.
  + Some special need youth are not communicative and in this case please assume they can benefit from your comments. Praise what they have done well and suggest areas of improvement. Just because they don’t speak well does not mean they cannot understand what you say.

Crafting Questions

* Great Resource available for developing probing questions: *Experiential Learning Guide: a field guide for volunteers, mentors, coaches, fair judges, etc.* University of Minnesota Extension
* Helping kids share about the Project.
  + What did you do? Did you get help from other? How did others help you? What did you want to accomplish in this project? What was your project goal? What did you learn by completing the project? Did you share your project with others?
* Helping kids share about the process. Can you help them discover what life skills were most important in completing the project?
  + How did you make decisions about your project? What problems did you have? How did you handle problems? What was the biggest challenge? What did you learn from this project that you didn’t know before? What was an important or useful thing to do to complete the project?
* Helping kids connect and transfer the knowledge gained in the project, to their lives in the “real world.”
  + What key points have you learned? How is this life skill important to you? What ways do you like to learn? What advice would you give someone who wants to learn about this project/life skill? Have you had similar experiences/challenges in your life?
* Helping kids apply what they learned or life skills developed through completion of the project.
  + How could you use these skills in different situations?
  + What principles or guidelines you developed completing the project, can be used in real life situations?
  + What have you learned in this project that can help you continue learning throughout your life?

Problems may arise if:

* Exhibitors are not fairly evaluated against the standards.
* Application of standards is too rigid or too lax.
* Age and ability are not taken into consideration when a project is evaluated.
* Participants receive recognition they do not deserve.
* The judge is seen fraternizing exhibitors and families being evaluated prior to judging.