



Involving Parents in 4-H

Parents are invited and encouraged to become involved in 4-H by supporting their child and helping with the 4-H club.

The late Dr. C. B. Smith, a pioneer 4-H Club leader, once said: "Extension agents and local leaders may kindle the flame in youth, but it takes the good will and help of parents to keep the fire burning."

Upon investigating the extent of parent involvement in North Carolina 4-H, the overwhelming response from 4-H parents is "nobody asked me." The purpose of this leaflet is to provide support for involving parents in the 4-H program.

In a survey of 458 parents, three-fourths were willing to help with 4-H but only one-eighth to one-half actually did. One-half to two-thirds were willing to help with projects and programs but few of them did. One-third were willing to serve on councils, committees or be leaders but only one out of 100 actually did. Nearly 100 percent were willing to help select projects, provide support, assist with records and encourage members to take part in 4-H activities, but only one-half to two-thirds actually did.

Why Involve Parents?

Extension agents and 4-H leaders should involve parents in 4-H for several important reasons.

- Parent interest and cooperation is necessary for proper emotional development of the child.
- 4-H provides an atmosphere in which parents can show love and concern for their child by maintaining a keen interest in his activities and assisting in meeting his goals.
- If the parents are enthusiastic and willing to help in any way they can, it creates the same attitude in the club member.
- Parent interest and cooperation is important in developing community interest in and support for the 4-H club and its activities.

What Parents Want to Know About 4-H

1. They want to know what their child will gain from participation in 4-H. What are the objectives of 4-H and how does the club operate?
2. They want to know what is expected of their child as a 4-H member. Will it interfere with school work?
3. They want to know what is expected of them as parents. What and how are they expected to provide cooperation and support?
4. Parents like to feel that they are needed and that they have an important role to play as parents of a member.

Tips on Building Better Parent Cooperation

1. Ask parents:

- for their consent when their child first joins the club.
- to come together occasionally to discuss the club's program.
- to attend meetings of the club whenever possible.
- to help with parts of the club program in which they may be interested or have special ability.
- to attend club, district or regional 4-H activities.

2. Inform parents:

- by making them aware of the objectives of 4-H and how 4-H can benefit their child.
- by making them aware of what materials or assistance their child will require to complete the project.
- by making them aware of what might be expected of them by way of duties or responsibilities.
- by holding regular meetings in parents' homes.
- by conducting planned tours to members' homes.
- by discussing objectives and projects at meetings or with parents.
- by personally visiting members' homes at least once a year.
- by taking the opportunity during meetings to discuss the club program and their child's progress. (Remember, parents' interests are almost always related to their child's membership and progress.)

3. Involve parents:

- by specially inviting them to public or community events planned by the club.
- by providing the opportunity for them to assume some of the duties and responsibilities in club work requiring adult assistance.
- by both privately and publicly giving recognition and expressing appreciation for their help.

Recognizing Parents

- Make sure that parents' accomplishments receive recognition and gratitude from the club.
- Encourage members to recognize their parents' efforts.
- Include parents' names in 4-H news stories.
- Recognize parents along with their children for 4-H achievements and at achievement programs and other 4-H functions.
- Invite a couple or two to be guests of honor at each 4-H meeting.
- Plan parent appreciation night for your club meetings.

Parents want to be a part of 4-H and their child's activities, but they want evidence that what they are doing is important and appreciated.

References

"Involving Parents in 4-H," Communico Canada 4-H, Ontario, Canada.
"4-H is a Family Affair," A Guide of Ideas for Volunteer and Salaried Staff to Involve Parents in the 4-H Program. 4-H Western Regional Leaders' Forum, Portland, Oregon, 1981.

Prepared by
Lathan F. Smith, Jr., District Extension Program Leader

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