



Remember to Educate, Evaluate, and Encourage 4-H Textiles & Clothing Judging

Following is an incident a 4-H leader told about a judging experience and gave permission to share.

Sewing is becoming a lost art just as knitting and crocheting are. Many of the people judging these project areas are being WAY too critical of the 4-H'ers. They are not judging based on the goals set by the 4-H'er, but rather by some unreachable standard. This standard would only be attainable by someone who not only had expert adult assistance, but also would have needed to be quite well versed in sewing before they even attempted the project. This is a huge travesty as it has many times totally discouraged the 4-H'ers from learning skills that can be life long learning. Here is one very specific example.

A 4-H'er, who was about 15, wanted to learn how to make a quilt. Her mother had never sewn nor did they have a sewing machine. The neighbor volunteered to let the 4-H'er use her sewing machine and could give her some help with the project. The pattern was a simple 4" x 4" multi-colored quilt that she made up as she went. Her goal was to learn some basic skills about sewing—cutting and sewing straight. The judge ripped her project up one side and down the other, telling her that she should be ashamed to bring such a poorly constructed product to be judged at the fair. The girl was DEVASTATED. I found her sobbing in the corner of the 4-H building. After finding out what had happened to her, I made sure that no one else from my club would be judged by this lady. Unfortunately, the damage was already done. This girl said she would never sew again, and she has not. I found out later that she had gone home and burned her quilt!!

Judges need to be KEENLY aware that they hold that 4H'er's psyche in their hands. This exhibit that had been brought to them for judging was the blood, sweat, and tears of that 4-H'er intricately intertwined within the project.

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Here are some specific ways to:

ENCOURAGE

1. Validate the time and energy involved in the construction.
 - “I hear from your description of what you did that you put a lot of time into making your first quilt. It was a huge undertaking for your first quilting effort.”
2. Validate the young person’s feelings.
 - “It sounds like you are really proud that you were able to complete this exhibit and have something to put on your bed. Finishing a quilt is a big accomplishment in and of itself. Congratulations!”
3. Affirm the learnings and skills that the young person mastered. Keep in mind the experience and age of the young person.
 - “You’ve mastered getting all the squares the same size. You’ve also mastered consistent 1/4 inch seams. Both are basic quilting skills you will use on any future quilting projects. Way to go!”

EDUCATE and EVALUATE

1. Talk with them and show them **TWO** or **THREE** (not more) things they can do the next time they tackle a similar project.
2. Be specific. Whenever possible, actually show them the technique or even a sample.
3. Try not to overwhelm the exhibitor.
4. Keep focused on the next skill level. This is where it is handy to take along a few small samples to show them what a quality finished project would look like.
 - “Did you have trouble getting the intersecting seams to match up? I had trouble with that also. Let me show you a little trick to use straight pins to line them up.”
5. Don’t be condescending!

END WITH MORE ENCOURAGEMENT

1. Express your excitement that they tackled this type of project!
2. Encourage them to sign and date their project and keep pictures!
3. Tell them you hope they will continue to develop their sewing or quilting skills!