



Tips for Conducting Club Meetings

Structure Meetings Appropriately

The way club meetings are structured depends largely on the size of the group and the age of the members. Remember to keep the meeting interesting and to change the pace of the meeting every 15 minutes or so. The average attention span for youth ranges from 10 to 20 minutes. Kids join 4-H for fun, friends, voice and choice. They want to have fun with friends and make new friends, have a voice in the club decisions and activities, and show their independence through being actively involved in making decisions that affect them and their club. (They don't join 4-H to have exhausting business meetings ☺.)

In general, 4-H meetings are divided into four parts:

1. Pre-Meeting: bridges the gap between the time members begin to arrive and the time the actual meeting begins. Kids want to be engaged when they arrive at the meeting site. They can't help it if they got dropped off 15 minutes early—they want to be doing something. Activities for the pre-meeting time can include mixers, word games, puzzles, writing thank you notes, preparing invitations, member working exhibits, etc. These could be organized by members, youth leaders, parents, the meeting host and/or leaders. Pre-meeting activities can greatly enhance the club experience for your members.
2. Business Meeting: members learn how to conduct a meeting and practice democratic decision making. If business is requiring more time than suggested for the age group you're working with on a regular basis it is suggested that committees be formed for more efficient meetings. Business meetings should be brief (15-20 minutes).
3. Educational Program: usually related to the project work of the youth, but may involve special presentations or activities conducted by resource people, parents or older members. Your educational program might last 20-30 minutes.
4. Recreation/Refreshment/Social Activities: provides members an opportunity to develop and practice social skills. There is a "magic" that occurs with friends, food and fellowship. Allow plenty of time for this informal fun time (20-30 minutes).

The order of these segments and the amount of time devoted to each may be varied to suit the specific activities planned, the time and place the meeting is held, etc. Here are some specific suggestions:

1. Clubs that meet right after school may want to have refreshments available as the members arrive. Quiet recreational activities such as two-person pencil and paper games can be used to keep order and foster interaction until the start of the meeting.
2. When members can't settle down and focus on the task at hand, a short, active game followed by a quiet one can release energy and get the group ready for more "serious business."
3. While Cloverkid groups do not conduct business meetings, starting each meeting with the same opening ritual establishes a structured routine that is important for this age group. Use of a closing ritual is also recommended. Members can be assigned "officers of the day" to help conduct these rituals. Rituals may include saying the 4-H and Pledge of Allegiance or answering roll call.
4. The timing of meeting segments must relate to both the attention span of the age group and the nature of the activities planned.
5. Sharing club leadership with your members is important. It makes your job easier and it develops life skills for the members.
6. Beyond the four segments there are many little things you can do to make your 4-H club meeting fun and educational. Contact your local 4-H County Youth Coordinator for ideas.

Roles of Officers

President

- Presides at all meetings.
- Appoints committees as needed.

Vice President

- Serves in absence of president.
- May serve as program chair for meetings.

Secretary

- Keeps complete and accurate minutes of all meetings. Handles club correspondence.
- Keeps the secretary's record up-to-date.

Treasurer

- Takes care of all group funds.
- Collects dues when required by the club. Pays bills when approved by the club.
- Keeps the treasurer's record book up-to-date.

Reporter

- Writes interesting reports of meetings and special club events for the local newspaper. May include photos with reports.

Historian

- Collects newspaper clippings, programs and pictures of the club's activities and events and puts them into a club scrapbook.

Photographer

- Takes pictures of club members during 4-H activities.
- Shares pictures with Reporter to use in news articles, Historian for scrapbook and members for their records.

Recreation (committee)

- Responsible for providing recreation (games, songs, etc) for club during monthly meetings.
- Takes leadership in organizing and leading activities.
- Gathers ideas from club members, leaders and Extension staff.

Manage Project Activities for Safety, Efficiency and Effective Learning

Detailed information about the purpose of 4-H projects and use of experiential learning methods can be found in the *Projects* section of this Guide. This section covers the practical matters of time, space and organization.

Setting Boundaries

Working with youth, especially other people's children, can be a challenge. While some children are better behaved than others, they all need acceptance and the opportunity to learn. In mixed groups, the challenge of a youth leader is to see that disruptive youth do not impede learning or fun for others. Their very presence in the group, combined with your wise guidance, will help them learn how to be respectful, positive members of a learning community.

The following information will help you understand children and youth better and provide some ideas on how to deal with undesirable behaviors with minimal disruption of the learning situation.

What Is Normal, Acceptable Behavior?

This depends on the children's ages and the situation. What is okay for nine-year olds at a recreation activity is probably not appropriate for teenagers on an educational tour. The fine line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior is crossed when any of the following occur:

- Anyone is in danger of physical or mental harm.
- The behavior is disruptive to the activity of the group.
- The rights of others (in the group or bystanders) are infringed upon.

How can you detect unacceptable behavior?

- When you notice that any of the above three items have occurred or are likely to occur.
- When you observe negative reactions from other children.
- When you, as an adult, are not comfortable with the behavior. (Make sure your views are not so strict or lenient that they do not allow for mainstream interests and actions of children. If in doubt, ask some other parents.)

Prevention is Better Than the Cure

Understanding the motivations of youth is important to understanding their behaviors. Through your actions, you can help youth be motivated. You can help motivate in the following ways:

- Use a variety of teaching methods. This helps keep both the teachers and the learners from becoming bored. Boredom is a major enemy of motivation, and often leads to unacceptable behavior, as children battle the boredom.
- Involve as many youth as possible in planning and doing. This gives them ownership in the group and therefore, a feeling of belonging. Also, kids will usually be more interested in something *they* say they want to do, as opposed to something that *someone else* thinks they want to do.
- Try giving a disruptive member a special job to help you or the club. Often, disruptive behavior is a plea for attention. Help the member channel that energy and need in a positive direction.
- Focus on *doing* more and watching less. Kids want to try things themselves. Remember the “Learn by Doing” philosophy off 4-H.

Key Thoughts to Positive Learning and Discipline

Positive discipline is the art of catching children doing things right —and letting them know it.

- At the beginning of each new 4-H year involve all members in setting (or reviewing and accepting) all rules and group norms.
- Don't assume that youth know what you expect. They may be accustomed to totally different rules and expectations at school, at home, church and in other groups.
- Catch 'em doing something good! Keep alert for helpfulness, generosity, kindness and other good things your members do and say. Acknowledge their positive behavior – doing so aids in building respectful and pleasant relationships.

How to Respond to Unacceptable Behavior?

First and foremost, determine that the problem is really a problem. Ask yourself, “Whose problem is this really?”

- Use the least obtrusive discipline method possible.
- If one approach does not work, try something else. Approach behavior problems with creativity and humor.
- Consider laws and liability issues. Dealing with other people’s children may be different than dealing with your own. Use methods acceptable to most people.
- Earn respect and credibility. Be a role model that leads by example.
- Be firm but fair.
- Follow through with consequences as set by club.
- Practice your skills in patience! Practice your patience! Practice your patience!

Use Ceremonies to Build Cohesiveness Among 4-H Members

Participation in ceremonies produces a sense of kinship/belonging among the members of an organization (i.e., we believe in the same things and we’re in this together). Depending on their nature, ceremonies may also foster teamwork, reinforce expectations, proclaim an organization’s values to the general public or provide recognition to members.

Evaluate Meetings Regularly and Take Action When Problems Arise

After the group has been meeting for four to six months, take a close look at how things are going. The *Making Clubs Better Survey* (Toolkit 3) should be used with club leaders, members, and parents mid-way through the club year (February/March) to gain their perspective on club meetings and experiences, inform plans for improvement, and/or reinforce what the club is currently doing. This survey could be done again at the end of the 4-H year in September to review what the club has done and used to identify changes needed, as well as, what worked well while planning for the new year.

Even though every effort has been made to keep things running smoothly, problems will occasionally arise. When they do, it is important to address them as soon as possible, before they get out of hand. The key to effective problem solving is identifying the cause. If you don’t know why the problem exists you are likely to be merely “treating the symptom” rather than “curing the disease.” *Troubleshooting 4-H Problems* describes some common 4-H club problems, lists possible causes, and suggests alternative solutions.

Motivate Members Through Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is the single most effective tool for motivating youth. It is also very important in discipline. Youth need constant reinforcement for their positive activities. But providing positive reinforcement is not easy. It requires a positive outlook on your part and must be practiced. It comes in two forms: verbal and nonverbal.

When giving positive reinforcement it is important to be specific and sincere. Don’t say, “John, you’ve done a good job.” Say specifically what the child did: “John, your carrot cake looks good and tastes great—good job!” Being too general with positive comments may appear artificial or phony.

Unfortunately, most people find it easier to be critical than positive. To overcome this, focus on the strengths and successes (even small ones) of your members. Help them to accept themselves so that they can accept others. Following your lead, they will also learn to give positive feedback to others. Give positive reinforcement constantly.

Here are some simple ways to do it:

- A smile.
- A nod.
- An enthusiastic and encouraging comment.
- Saying “thank you”.
- Asking a member to demonstrate skills to the rest of the group.

There are literally thousands of ways to show positive reinforcement. As you see the results of your words and actions, the importance of positive reinforcement will be quite clear and you will find your own ways to provide it both verbally and nonverbally.

Involve the Parents

Everyone benefits when parents are involved in the 4-H club program:

- **4-H members** need their parents’ support and encouragement to attend meetings and activities, complete projects and fulfill responsibilities to the club.
- **Parents** have an opportunity to spend time with their children and enjoy activities together. In many ways, 4-H is a “partner in parenting.”
- **4-H leaders** have a lot to juggle. Being able to delegate some of those responsibilities, even the smallest ones, can be a big help.
- **The community** benefits when families support community-minded organizations like 4-H. Involved families are more knowledgeable about community issues and therefore more likely to support community efforts as well.

Keep these benefits in mind when you invite parents to become involved. **Here are some suggestions on how, when and whom you ask.**

- **Meet with parents at the beginning of each year.**
This parent meeting may take place before, after or as part of the club’s planning meeting. While members should make the final decision about their projects and activities, it is important to know early in the year the ways in which parents can support the club program. Consider using the interest survey and/or activity sign-up sheet to encourage commitment and to keep track of everyone’s interests and availability.
- **Maintain good communication.**
In order for parents to feel like a part of the group and that they share responsibility for its success, they must be kept informed about the “when, where and whys” of both the club’s activities and the 4-H club program in general.

Some ways you can stay connected with parents are:

- * Ask parents to assist at club meetings on a rotating basis. You may even want to meet in the members' homes on a rotating basis.
 - * Encourage members to ask their parents for help when working on projects at home.
 - * Send information sheets home with members prior to special activities such as project trainings.
 - * Make time to chat with parents whenever they bring their child to an activity.
- **Create opportunities to get to know parents better.**
For example, hold "parent nights" or "family days" during which members can "show-off" their accomplishments and parents can socialize with one another. Learn about their personal interests, hobbies and family activities. Later requests for help can then be based on the things you know they enjoy and can do well.
 - **When you need help:**
 - * Ask an individual, basing your request on that person's interests, skills and abilities. Generic calls for help don't work!
 - * Be honest and specific about the commitment and time frame.
 - * Ask well in advance of when the job needs to be done.
 - **Express your appreciation appropriately.**
Regardless of how much or how little a parent has done, she/he deserves a "thank you." Whether it is delivered in the form of a phone call, a hand-written note or public recognition, that may include a certificate or small gift, will depend on what was done and the person's personality— one size does not fit all!

Involve Youth Leaders

Youth Leaders are 4-H teens who partner with adults to provide leadership for 4-H clubs and countywide 4-H activities. Depending on his or her age and experience, a youth leader can serve as general assistant, teach a project, mentor individual members, coordinate activities or assume almost any other 4-H leadership role under supervision of an adult. Involving youth leaders in your club not only "lightens the load" for you; it also adds sparks of energy and enthusiasm, provides role models for your members and provides teens with valuable opportunity to practice their leadership skills.

Communication: An Important Two-Way Street

You will be receiving both regularly scheduled communications (such as a 4-H newsletter) and special mailings from the County Extension Office and State 4-H Office. Often they will contain registration instructions for up-coming events. Occasionally, they will request information needed by 4-H staff for reporting purposes. The information you provide is important and submitting it on time eliminates the need for duplicate mailings or phone calls that needlessly waste time and money.

Given the busy world we live in, it is very tempting to let our paperwork pile up until we have some “down time.” (Does it ever come?) In the end it is usually a lot easier to take it one paper at a time. So please reply to 4-H mailings as soon after they arrive as possible.

The following suggestions will also help to facilitate communication:

- **Note deadlines.**

When you find a form in a 4-H mailing, immediately look for the deadline date and mark a day **at least two business days earlier on your calendar**. If you will need to gather information from members or parents and you will be having a club meeting before the deadline, it may be easiest to put the paperwork on the meeting agenda. If not, decide right away when and how you will collect the information you need.

- **Please call us.**

If you are not sure you understand a question on a form or exactly how the information should be recorded, call **the person who sent you the form**. This is not being “pesky;” it is being helpful. Chances are that you are not the only person who is perplexed. Your call alerts the sender that there is a communication problem and provides an opportunity to clear it up for everyone.

- **Be aware of the schedule.**

Certain information will be requested from you at the same time every year and 4-H events that require registration also take place at about the same time each year. Anticipating the arrival of these mailings will help you to gather the needed information in advance.

- **Look for expected mailing.**

Checking up on the whereabouts of a mailing you were expecting to receive but did not, may help you avoid missing an opportunity. Things really do “get lost in the mail” sometimes. The two busiest times for paperwork are the beginning of the school year and prior to fair. Be on the look out.

Reference:

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... and justice for all

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