



Helping 4-H'ers Learn

Being a 4-H volunteer can be very rewarding when you begin to see youth develop these skills, and appreciate that you are helping to guide and direct them. It's a lot like being a coach on a sports team. As a coach, you focus not only on the fundamentals of the sport, but also on sportsmanship, cooperation, and collaboration among the team members. In 4-H, volunteers are coaches in the fundamentals or content areas of the club or after school program activity. In addition, volunteers model important life skills such as good decision-making, communicating and relating to others, responding to the needs of others and of the community, and finally, and maybe most importantly, encouraging youth to have a positive self image.

Like any good coach, the major ingredient to success is enthusiasm for the job! All of the educational literature supports the notion that it is generally better to be the 'guide on the side' for your audience encouraging and cheer leading them to successful mastery and confidence with the content.

4-H: Learn By Doing

Think back to your childhood. When were you most interested in learning? Probably when some action surrounded an activity. The same is true today. Youth are more willing to learn and be attentive when there is something to do, rather than just to listen.

We remember:

- 20% of what we read,
- 20% of what we hear,
- 30% of what we see,
- 50% of what we see and hear,
- 70% of what we see, hear, and discuss, and
- 90% of what we see, hear, discuss, and practice.

The unique part of 4-H is the experiential learning process, or learning by doing. Many times you, as the leader, will tell and show members how to do something, but the actual experience of doing it themselves is the best way to reinforce learning. This sheet provides some helpful hints on how to help youth get the most out of their 4-H experience.

Principles of Teaching and Learning

When planning your educational activities, please keep these helpful hints in mind.

Youth learn when they are:

- In an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.
- Actively involved in setting their own goals and in planning their activities.



- Recognized as having different abilities or learning styles and are allowed to learn at their own rate.
- Are self-motivated to participate and are supported by a strong caring adult (self-motivation verses external motivation).
- Are encouraged to measure their own growth and progress in the content area.

Preparation

Preparation is the key to successful teaching. Keep these points in mind when planning your club activities:

- Know the purpose of the program. What do you want to accomplish?
- Know your audience. What is the size of the group? What is the age-range of the group?
- Know the physical set-up. How are the chairs and tables arranged? Is the lighting adequate?
- Know what equipment and other materials you will need and be sure that it is all in working order.
- Know the subject you will be teaching. You don't need to be an expert, but you should have resources available.
- Be comfortable. If you are well prepared, you will enjoy teaching and will have fun with your club.

Teaching Methods

There are many different ways to teach in the 4-H setting. Remember, involve members in ways that will motivate them to learn.

Group Discussion, Questioning

Questioning strategies may be the single most important tool you can use as a 4-H volunteer. Questions can facilitate and enhance learning at every stage of the club experience—inviting youth into activities and ideas by creating interest in a new topic, helping guide explorations, introducing new concepts, and encouraging youth to apply their ideas to different situations. It is important for you to lead the discussion in a balance of asking and telling:

- Ask a broad question. (Open ended questions generate discussion in a safe environment.)
- Listen to responses and thinking. (Acknowledge all ideas in an accepting manner.)
- Ask for evidence or explanations. (What makes you think that? Why do you say that?)
- Ask for alternative opinions or ideas. (Does anyone else have another idea?)
- Ask a question leading back to the main topic. (Summarize the input from the youth and encourage group consensus.)

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an opportunity to encourage creative thinking with your youth. A useful technique might be a “think, pair, share” where you ask each member to think about his/her ideas individually (for example themes for the county fair or community service projects etc). Then pair up with the person next to them to share their ideas, and finally pair with another pair to share their ideas more broadly. This is a way to involve everyone in the creative part of the task.



Record Keeping

Besides being a good business practice, record keeping is the best way to measure progress of group and individual goals. Members learn more about their projects through record keeping. They learn about costs, materials, and how to evaluate finished products. Record keeping doesn't have to be boring. Besides record books, members can show progress through a scrapbook or online portfolio. This is a good way to help a member keep an ongoing record of his or her 4-H career.

Collage

A collage (an artistic composition of materials on a surface) is used to convey an idea or theme to others. Materials that can be used include: magazine and newspaper pictures and texts, tissue paper, markers, poster board, etc.

Demonstration

Demonstrations are used to show "how" to do something. They are a hands-on expression of skills needed to complete a task such as baking, a science experiment, or animal handling technique. Hands-on activities are best done by the youth to encourage mastery of new skills, practice communication skills, and gain confidence.

Audio Visual Aids

Movies, videos, PowerPoint presentations, and other methods help young people learn. Be sure to preview any visual aids you plan to use. Videotaping presentations or club meetings is another way of teaching and providing feedback. The county 4-H office, libraries, and schools are good sources of visual aids.

Field Trip

This method is an excellent way to reinforce something already discussed in a club. See *Planning a Successful Field Trip*.

Simulation Games

Real-life dilemmas or problems are presented through simulations or games where participants must make decisions. Their choices often lead to additional challenges and decision-making opportunities. For example, youth might stage a mock election with candidates representing the real time demographics of their town. Such activity may present dilemmas around fundraising, ethics, and conflict resolution.

Role Playing

In role playing, small groups of participants act out a real-life situation in front of the members of the club. They have no script but are given a situation and individual roles that they must act out. Participants create their parts as they act. The performance is then discussed in relation to the situation or problem under consideration. An example of a role-play is parents and a teenager discussing curfew time.

Skit

A skit is similar to a role-play, except that the script is prepared and the presentation has been rehearsed. Participants act out an event or situation that can be real-life. Skits can be humorous or serious. An example of a skit could be a group dramatizing how to prepare a campfire.



Summary

These teaching methods allow you to help members learn in a variety of ways. As you teach members both project and life skills, remember the following hints:

- Catch the interest of the members.
- Focus their attention on the subject.
- Establish a rapport with the group. You don't have to be a buddy, but you need to have mutual respect.
- Be sure your club knows what you expect of them. They should be part of the planning.
- Processing the experience is when much of the learning takes place. Discussing the activity helps members understand how it relates to them.
- Learn to have fun while teaching the members.
- Good luck and best wishes for success!

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References

Communicating Ocean Science for Informal Audiences (Regents of California 2008).

Improving Teaching Effectiveness: A Guide for 4-H Volunteers (Kentucky 4-H).

Georgia 4-H Teaching Technique (Georgia 4-H).

For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit www.nj4h.rutgers.edu.

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