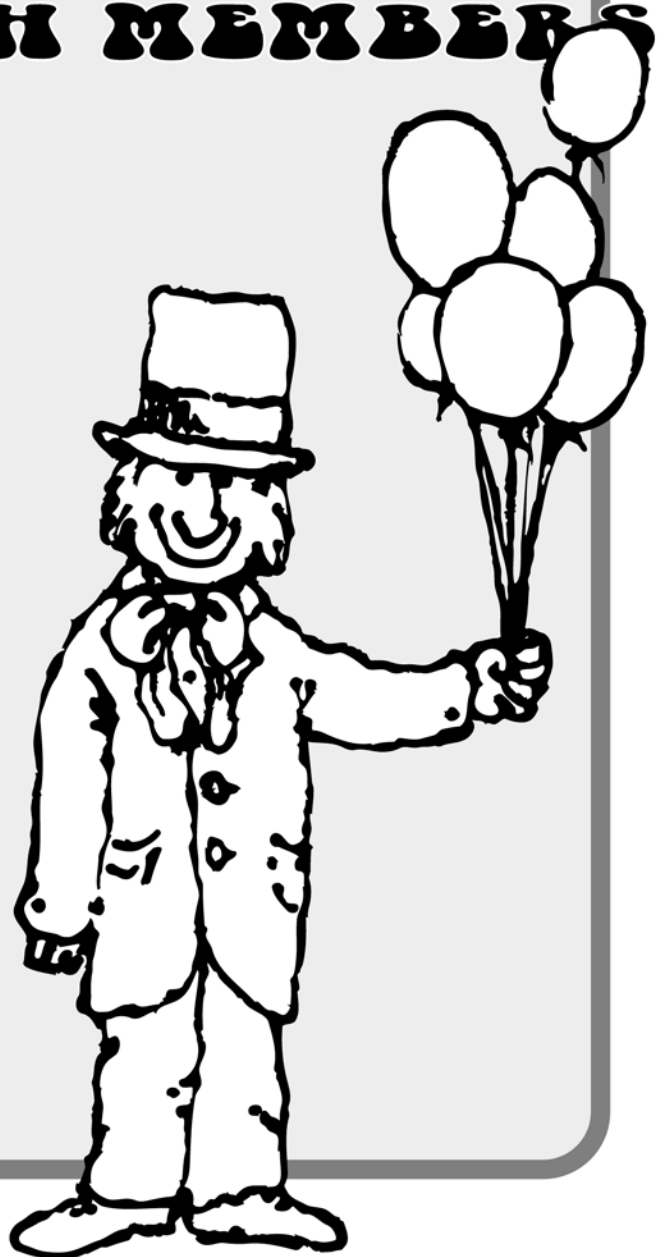


JUST FOR LEADERS

WORKING WITH
PRIMARY 4-H MEMBERS



WELCOME TO 4-H



4-H is the youth development program of Washington State University Extension and is available in all counties. You may obtain support and access to resources through your county Extension office.

The mission of 4-H is to help young people acquire knowledge, develop life skills, and form positive attitudes, enabling them to become self-reliant, contributing members of society.

Washington State 4-H reaches youths in grades K-12. Primary members are in kindergarten, first, or second grade. The Primary program enhances children's development through fun, hands-on activities. The program is noncompetitive, participatory, and multi-subject. It is process-oriented, not result-oriented. The program's goal is to teach children life skills, such as decision making, communication, and positive self-esteem, through a variety of new experiences.

While helping children grow and develop, you will enjoy new challenges and have fun.

POLICIES

Grades: Primary members are in kindergarten, first, or second grade.

Events, Activities, and Exhibits: Primary 4-H members are encouraged to participate in 4-H events, activities, and exhibits and be recognized for their participation. Provide each child with information and encouragement about his or her project or activity.

Primary members may not be judged in competitive situations.

Projects: Specific, appropriate project materials are available for Primary members. See *4-H Projects and Publications*, EM2778, for more information.

Primary members may not enroll in large animal projects, including beef, sheep, swine, horse, dairy, and dairy goat. They are also ineligible for Shooting Sports projects.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIMARY 4-H MEMBERS

(Adapted from *Ages and Stages of Child and Youth Development—A Guide for 4-H Leaders*, North Central Regional Extension Publication No. 292)

Physical Growth: Early elementary-age children's growth is slow and steady.

Five- to eight-year-olds learn how to use their bodies by mastering physical skills. This includes small-muscle skills (printing with a pencil) to large-muscle skills (catching a ball). Because these skills are not yet polished, craft projects often end up messy, with crooked nails and too much glue, yet active projects are necessary for learning. Provide opportunities to practice skills, but use projects that beginners can complete successfully.

Growth in Thinking: Children's thinking is concrete. If they have never seen, heard, felt, tasted, or smelled it, then they have a hard time thinking of it. Rather than simply giving instructions verbally, capture the children's interest by demonstrating an activity. Doing things is important for you and the children.

During this stage of development, children are more interested in working on a project than completing it. Eventually, finishing a project will become as important as beginning it.

Early elementary children are learning to sort things into categories. This skill makes collecting things important and fun at this age. Collecting-type activities can be good for both group meetings and individual projects.

Social Growth: School-age activities take children away from home and parents and put them in environments where they face new responsibilities and demands. As children move away from dependence on parents, they need to

transfer that dependence to another adult, so the leader may become a central adult figure.

Children are just learning how to be friends and may have several “best friends” at a time. Boys and girls sometimes enjoy playing together, although by the end of this period the separation of the sexes will occur during most play. Conflicts, although occurring often, seldom have lasting effects.

The opinion of peers becomes important. Often, five- to eight-year-olds care more about being successful when their peers, rather than adults, are watching. Small group activities are effective, but the children still need an adult to share approval.

Emotional Growth: Early elementary-age children are wrapped up in themselves. They can not yet imagine clearly what other people think and feel. “Dramatic play” (making believe they are someone else) is the way children at this age begin to empathize. Five- to eight-year-olds need and seek the approval of adults because they are not yet confident enough to set their own standards.

Children at this stage like to play games. Rules and rituals become fascinating, but children are not yet ready to accept losing. Success in any degree needs to be emphasized. Cooperative games in which every child wins can be especially enjoyable. Failures should be minimized, and some measure of success should be found in every experience to ease the blows to young egos.

When an activity fails, you can help the children interpret the reasons behind the failure. This helps them learn how to cope with problems. **The usual 4-H practice of awarding competitive ribbons is not acceptable with this age group.**

WAYS TO INVOLVE PRIMARY MEMBERS IN 4-H

For the benefit of members and leaders, an adult leader, or a teen leader under adult supervision, should work directly with Primary members.

Kindergarten, first, and second graders can participate in 4-H in these ways:

1. Short-term projects
2. Their own clubs of kindergarten, first, and second graders
3. Clubs of grades K-12, if the needs of all the youths are met
4. School-age child care programs
5. School Enrichment programs
6. Parent-child home learning
7. Other ways that fit with the 4-H philosophy statement

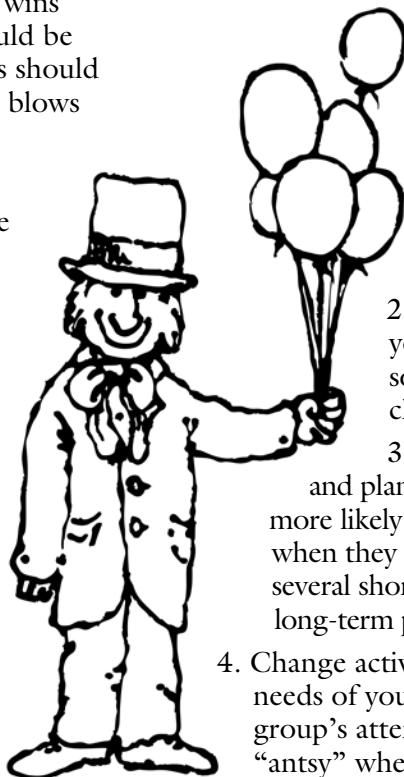
PROGRAM PLANNING SUGGESTIONS

(This section adapted from material by Christine Nelson, Ph.D., Michigan State University)

As a 4-H leader, you must consider the development of kindergarten, first, and second graders as you plan your program. You need to contrast what is generally known about children this age with the specific behaviors you observe in your group.

In general, 4-H meetings involving kindergarten, first, and second graders will be a better experience for the children (and for you) if you consider the following when planning your program:

1. Have one adult (or older youth) for every six children. (Some activities will require fewer children to every adult.)
2. Remember how important you are to children this age. Find something positive to say to each child at each meeting.
3. Involve the children in selecting and planning the activities. They are more likely to maintain interest in activities when they have helped plan them. Consider several short-term projects rather than one long-term project.
4. Change activities often according to the needs of your group. Get a sense of the group’s attention span (children become “antsy” when they are having difficulty



sticking with an activity). Change to a new activity when you first notice children shuffling their feet, looking around, and being “busy bodies.” Children have a short attention span and a tremendous amount of energy. They need to be active most of the time. Try not to talk to them as a group for more than 5-10 minutes at a time.

5. Encourage the children to talk and work with each other.
6. Keep an eye out for children who may feel left out and who need help to be part of the group. One way to do this is to pair such a child with another and tell them that they are each other’s helper.
7. Occasionally, you will observe behavior that is harmful to the group or individuals in the group (such as teasing or bickering). Avoid this behavior by establishing limits and guidelines at the first meeting and gently, firmly, and consistently enforcing them. Knowing the characteristics of this age group will help you learn what to expect. Remember to enjoy and appreciate the kids’ individuality.
8. Sharing your group’s work can be fun. Display their work and give participation awards. Use the children’s art and crafts, drawings, experiments, or other activities when you share their projects with others. These opportunities might include bulletin boards, window displays or community events. **Kindergarten, first, and second grade children should not participate in situations where they are judged.** Their self-esteem is too vulnerable for competition.

Offer and encourage family involvement in activities. The most important group for the five- to eight-year-old child is the family. Communication is the key to family and parental involvement. Some ways to accomplish this are through parent letters, parent meetings, group newsletters, or 4-H family events.

Parents and families who get involved in the 4-H program often stay involved.



This leader guide was compiled and written by the Primary Task Force, October 1990

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PARENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Parents and families are strongly encouraged to actively participate in the Primary 4-H program. Parents can become 4-H leaders or support the Primary members by sharing hobbies, offering homes for meetings, assisting with projects, providing snacks, helping with transportation, contacting members and other parents, and in a variety of other ways. Remember, in order to get participation, you must ask people to get involved.



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