



## Get Parents Involved In Your 4-H Club



When you have a chance to watch really strong 4-H clubs, chances are, you will see 4-H clubs that have made it a priority to involve the entire family. Those clubs understand how important parents can be to the success of their club and they have made parents an essential part of their program.

It's important to understand and accept that families have changed in many ways....it's more common today than in the past for both parents to work outside the home, blended families, and families with joint custody. The 4-H program needs to be aware of how these changes can affect a family's ability to participate. We need to review the rules we have and ask "Does this rule strengthen the club or create a barrier that keeps families from joining?" The strongest 4-H clubs believe 4-H is a family affair and they encourage parents to attend and participate as much as they can, when they can.

Benefits....Having parents involved will help your 4-H club!

- When parents are involved, there is a better chance they will understand the mission of 4-H -- to provide positive youth development opportunities to meet the needs of young people to experience belonging, independence, generosity and mastery.
- The club has more people to help with everything – organizing community service projects or contacting guest speakers, more ideas for club meetings, help with club paperwork, serving snacks, providing transportation, recruiting new families, keeping discipline during club meetings, etc
- Members will have more support in their project work at home
- Families will spend more time together in activities they all enjoy and develop a positive relationship with others in their community
- The club will become stronger and more active

How....Here are tips you can use to involve parents

- Create a climate where parents feel welcome too
  - Have a new family gathering to help parents get acquainted and to explain what 4-H is, what is expected of the 4-H members and how parents can be of help – remember to include experienced families so they can share how they make 4-H work in their family
  - Extend a personal invitation to attend the club meetings – If you grew up in a 4-H family it's easy to believe that everyone understands 4-H is for the whole family. But, if a family has only been involved with youth groups where it is common to drop the child off and return in an hour to pick him up, it may not even occur to parents that they are welcome, let alone encouraged, to stay and participate in the 4-H club meetings. Personally invite them to participate when they can.
  - Greet parents by name when they enter the meeting room
  - Introduce them to other parents/leaders. Help them to develop friendships and begin to have fun at the meetings too.
  - Make sure they understand their younger children are welcome also
  - Arrange a special social event with parents (i.e. club cook out, softball game between members and parents, bowling night, etc)

- Involve parents in setting club goals and planning the programs each year
  - Dedicate a meeting just for planning and invite all members, parents and leaders. That's a great time to have parents sign up to help with your clubs activities.
  - Gather parent's ideas through a survey
- Ask parents to help – many parents would be willing to help but they don't know how, when or where their help might be needed, that's why it's important to ask.
  - Use the Parent Interest Form to find out what and how parents in your club could help.
  - Throughout the year, ask for specific help with a 4-H club or county activity or event. Help parents understand there are a variety of ways to help and many will fit the time they have available. Just make sure to be realistic about the time commitment when asking someone to help.
  - Take advantage of chance meetings to talk about 4-H
  - Here are a couple of examples of how you could ask parents to get involved:
    - “I saw on your interest form that you like to work with detailed instructions to complete a task, would you be interested in helping to complete our Club Charter paperwork?”*
    - “I noticed your family does a really good job of making 4-H a family affair, would you be interested in mentoring a first year family in our club?”*
- Recognize parents and acknowledge their contributions
  - Use notes, newspaper articles and telephone calls to say thanks and show appreciation
  - Publicly recognizing parents during the club meeting helps to communicate to other parents that their help is wanted and appreciated
  - A sincere thank you may be just the encouragement a parent needs to sign up as a 4-H leader in the future
- Communication with parents is essential
  - Make sure parents understand how your club is going to communicate with the members.
    - Is there a club newsletter?
    - Does the club have a web site and use e-mail to keep families informed?
    - Is there a calling tree to remind families what is coming up?
    - What about texting reminders?

If parents are involved right from the beginning, there is a much better chance for a successful 4-H experience for their family and your 4-H club.