

**4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series**

# Involving Parents in 4-H

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Parents are a vital part of a successful 4-H club. They share in the work and success of the club. Much of what boys and girls gain from 4-H depends upon the attitude and involvement of their parents.

## Why Involve Parents in the Leadership Team?

Parents and other family members are a tremendous resource as members of the leadership team. When parents participate in 4-H, the members gain support and confidence from working with interested adults. Parents gain the opportunity to become acquainted with their children's friends, interests and concerns and to share important experiences. Parents also gain new friends, become acquainted with other families and learn or further develop skills and knowledge.

## A Look at Parents

It is important for 4-H club leaders to be aware of the general types of parents. Social scientists classify parents into four groups:

**Balanced Parents** – Balanced parents share planning, decision making and home project work with

their children. 4-H becomes part of the family. These parents teach their children the self-discipline necessary to do 4-H projects. They use a kind but firm hand. These parents need less guidance than some of the other types, but they will want to be constantly informed of any new developments, projects or activities that are available.

### **Overindulgent Parents** –

Overindulgent parents protect and pamper their children. These boys and girls may join 4-H only because their parents think it will be good for them. These parents frequently do much of the project work and record keeping for their 4-H'er. They find it easier to do the work than to guide and teach their children the self-discipline necessary to complete the work. Their children may develop lack of initiative. These parents want to protect their children.

### **Overstrict Parents** –

Overstrict parents are the fault-finders who give very little constructive criticism and no praise. Frequently these parents force adult standards on their youngsters, making it impossible for the 4-H'er to succeed. Their children may be insecure, frustrated or rebellious and may not complete the project for fear of it not being "good enough."



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**Unconcerned Parents** – Unconcerned parents give their boys and girls no encouragement. Their children tend not to join clubs at all, or if they do, they become only “members.” If they do start a project, it is seldom finished because of the lack of guidance or enthusiasm at home. These parents should be contacted frequently and kept informed of their child’s progress. Try to find some areas the parents can share which might develop interest in the child’s work.

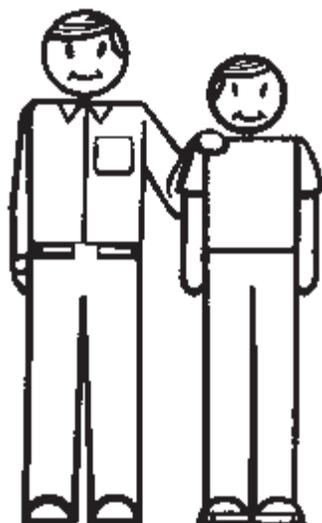
Each type of parent is different and each will require various ways to be reached. Consider each child and each parent in the light of individual differences as you set up the 4-H program.

Recognize parent support at club meetings, parents’ meetings or special parents’ dinners. Help 4-H’ers remember to say thank you.

## Holding Parent Interest

It is one thing to create interest, another to hold it. Here are some ideas for maintaining the interest of parents:

- Parent-achievement nights
- Kick-off meetings with parents
- Fun nights
- Special club programs
- Regular club meetings (parents invited by both leader and member)



## Talk With Parents

- Personally ask for help
- Take advantage of chance meetings to talk 4-H
- Make telephone calls
- Ask for advice and use it when you can
- Take 4-H project tours to member’s home

## Recognize and Thank Parents

- Ask for specific help and be sure it is meaningful
- Call on special abilities parents may have
- Use notes, newspaper articles and telephone calls to say thanks and to show appreciation
- Include recognition of parents in achievement programs

## What Parents Can Do

Parents are willing to help, but are not sure how, when or where they may be involved. Use the fact sheets “Information for 4-H Parents” and “The 4-H Project Home Helper” to help 4-H parents understand their responsibilities and opportunities. 4-H members’ parents should be encouraged to complete the parent willingness questionnaire, “Sure I’d Like to Help,” and give it to the organizational leader of the 4-H club. This questionnaire will help inform parents as well as identify potential helpers for the club.

## How You See Parent Involvement

4-H leaders differ in their ideas about how parents should be involved in 4-H. Some leaders see parents serving as:

**Chore Helpers Only** – Many leaders expect help only with ordinary and necessary chores. These include refreshments, transportation, hosting meetings, providing funds for members’ projects and similar activities.

**Activity Helpers Only** – Other leaders think parents are helpful only with club activities. They expect parents to help with fairs, tours, fund-raising projects and local club social events.

**Project Helpers Only** – Some leaders don’t feel they have time to teach subject matter at club meetings. They expect parents to be interested in the member’s project and do the project teaching at home.

**4-H Supporters** – These leaders encourage parents’ interest and participation in everything the

club and its members do. They inform parents about all parts of the club program. These leaders strive for a balance of chore help, activity help and project help. Leaders with this attitude gain parents with the best attitudes and the most interest and cooperation.

## Ways to Gain Parent Support

Hold a special meeting for parents at the beginning of the year to get acquainted and to explain what 4-H is, what is expected of the 4-H member and how parents can be of help. Use the fact sheets "Information for 4-H Parents" and "The 4-H Project Home Helper."

Have parents complete the parent willingness questionnaire, "Sure I'd Like to Help," and give it to the 4-H club organizational leader.

Ask parents to help. Find out the types of skills, knowledge and interests parents have by using the parent willingness questionnaire. Try to involve parents through their interests. Ask them to do a specific job for a specific length of time. Outline meaningful and challenging aspects of the responsibility.

Encourage fathers to participate and take leadership positions. One of the better ways to do this is to ask both parents to help at the same time, even though they may be assisting in different ways.

Keep parents informed about 4-H activities through club calendars, newsletters, telephone calls and home visits.

Review and use information on how to recruit parents as helpers. Refer to the fact sheets "Gaining Parent Cooperation Checklist," "Recruiting Volunteers for Your Club" and "The 4-H Project Home Helper."

Encourage the 4-H club to conduct at least one family activity during the year. This could be a potluck dinner, a picnic, a weekend outing, etc.

Identify two to four sets of parents on which to concentrate your efforts to get involved in helping with the 4-H club. Write down their names and check them off when you reach your goal of getting them involved; then set a new goal.

Visit or phone each parent personally.

Encourage parents to attend 4-H meetings and activities.

Form or maintain a 4-H Club Advisory Committee involving some 4-H parents. The committee will be responsible for establishing the 4-H club, recruiting the club leadership team and the youth membership and providing support and guidance to the leadership team. See the fact sheet entitled "The 4-H Club Advisory Committee" for more information.

To plan your strategy for involving parents, see the fact sheet entitled "Gaining Parent Cooperation Checklist."

## Home Visit Guidelines

A leader's visit to members' homes shortly after they join 4-H is an effective way for leaders and parents to become acquainted. Leaders should be particularly eager to try this, because parents and leaders working together can do much more for boys and girls than either can do alone.

Let parents know you would like to visit, and then find a time for both of you.

Don't complain or demand help during your visits. Have a positive reason for your first visit, such as explaining the purpose and aims of 4-H, telling about your local program, describing a child's project or relating a special achievement their child has made.

Include the 4-H'er in your conversation with his or her parents. The 4-H'er is a natural opener for a conversation.

While visiting, casually observe the member's project resources. Look at the place the 4-H'er has to work, materials and equipment available, parents' interest in 4-H and their willingness to help with 4-H work. This information will influence how you work with the member and his or her parents.

Explain your role as a 4-H leader. Be sure parents understand you are a volunteer and what help and guidance you can provide their child.

Explain what you expect of the 4-H'er. Members are sometimes very vague about this at home. Parents should know what project their child is taking and what the club plans for the year. Most clubs expect parents to help at least once a year. Make sure this activity is challenging, worthwhile and interesting, but within parents' capabilities.

Give at least one genuine, deserved compliment and one challenge during your visit.

You and the member's parents are helping the member grow. Through cooperation, experiences which the child gains in 4-H will be greatly expanded. Relax and enjoy parent visits.



Revised by Beverly Hines, former 4-H specialist, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas. Some of the information used was taken from Georgia 4-H leader guide material.

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