

Behavior Management Keeping Your Cool While Working with Youth

4-H volunteers strive to insure that every 4-H member has the opportunity to participate in physically and emotionally safe environments, in welcoming and inclusive environments, and in appropriately structured environments when they participate in 4-H programs. These are three of the essential elements of positive youth development.

Planning Group Guidelines Together: The Four H's Plus One

Young people want to cooperate and be a part of a group. 4-H volunteers need to help youth identify and develop their own group guidelines that support the positive youth development elements mentioned above. Young people are more likely to accept guidelines if they have been included in the development of those guidelines. Giving them ownership of their behavior and helping them to set their own guidelines encourages the group to monitor their actions and utilize peer pressure in a positive manner to model the appropriate behavior in a group.

Setting group guidelines has been tied to the 4 "H's" we know so well – Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. When developing group guidelines, keep the 4 "H's" in mind, plus add one more. The fifth "H" is for hush or a quiet signal.

Head – The group should think about how they should act and what to expect from each member. Logical, reasonable, possible guidelines that apply to everyone are most desirable. Guidelines need to be easy for everyone to understand, written in simple language and not be debatable. Fewer, easy-to-understand guidelines are better and easier to enforce. Avoid using the words "never" and "always."

Heart – Caring, sharing, cooperation, and conflict resolution are the heart of planning group guidelines. Good guidelines help members develop these social skills. The guidelines also need to be a shared responsibility between the group's members and the adults. Both parties should suggest guidelines and consequences, as they each have a stake in the outcome.

Hands – Just as your hands do the work on a project, the group guidelines should do the work for the group. Guidelines should be needed and necessary. They should also assist members to be responsible and promote teamwork within the group. Consequences should be developed when the guidelines are proposed and designed, but the consequences should be appropriate for the rule. Working together for the group's goals should be the end result.

Health – Respect and self-worth of each member should be considered when developing guidelines. They need to be stated in a positive manner to promote good behavior, rather than punishment for misbehavior. If consequences need to be enforced, the offender should not be humiliated or embarrassed. Guidelines and rules should also keep members physically safe.

Hush – As a group, agree upon a quiet signal. Rather than the volunteer raising his/her voice to get the group's attention, the quiet signal should be used and the participants encouraged to abide by the signal. Then just WAIT until the group is quiet and activities can resume. Screaming, red-faced adults make for a lot more fun than a calm collected leader who just uses a quiet signal. This type of volunteer is more likely to end up with a productive group of youth.

Each 4-H club/group should create their own set of guidelines with guidance from volunteers and parents. These should be voted upon by the group and a copy distributed to each family. A set of the guidelines may also be listed on a poster that hangs in the club/group meeting space so that 4-H members can help to monitor the actions of the group and refer back to the agreed upon guidelines.

Setting behavior guidelines is important for creating safe and properly structured environments. Youth benefit from having some "ownership" in the club/group of which they are a part. They also need opportunities to work in cooperation with adults. In positive youth development terms, we want to create a structured environment that provides opportunities for self-determination of goals and activities involving caring adults who help create a welcoming environment with the opportunity for mastery of skills and knowledge.

Besides planning group guidelines, planning ahead, understanding the uniqueness's of each youth, and striving for positive relationships with each youth and the group as a whole, the tips below will provide leaders with the basis for great group meetings and activities.

Planning Ahead

Planning and preparing ahead of time gives more time for youth to work at a task, which in turn provides you with flexibility. Planning ahead can also help you prevent many disruptive situations.

- Plan activities carefully – read, understand and practice or think through giving directions for new activities
- Have all materials ready
- Allow enough time to complete the task
- Set up the activities so each child has a choice during some part of the activity

Location:

- Have the meeting in a safe place – Remove potential hazards and make sure rules are clear regarding hazards that cannot be removed (i.e., youth know they are to stay in the cafeteria and not go into the school's kitchen)

Schedule and Rules:

A predictable schedule and rules provide the structure needed for a feeling of security.

- Make the meeting/program schedule predictable (i.e., each meeting begins with the president calling the meeting to order and the group saying the pledges, etc.)
- Have “crystal clear” rules. Have the group vote on rules. Post the rules and the consequences for not following these rules at each meeting

Appropriate equipment, materials:

- Make a list of materials necessary for the meeting and prepare them at least one day before the meeting

Transition Times:

Transition times can be very crucial to the success of your program. Therefore it is important to do extra planning for the beginning, in-between and ending activities.

Beginning:

- Create a quiet signal to help bring the group together.
- Provide "gathering" activities to get youth interested when they first arrive.
 - (a) Doodling: newsprint or a blackboard where youth can write/draw
 - (b) Music: Have music playing when youth arrive
 - (c) Games: Have games that allow for adding new participants

In-Betweens:

- Make sure you have the group's attention before you speak. Have them face you, sit down and/or stop action. Use the quiet signal, if needed.
- Use “pause” phrases to get ready for action. Instead of saying, "Now we are going outside" which will result in them bolting to the door, try saying, "After I finish explaining what we are doing, we will be going outside."
- In addition to telling youth what to do, explain how to carry out your directions. Instead of saying, "Move the chairs to the wall," you might say, "If your birthday falls during the first half of the year, you may move your chair quietly to that wall and then come back and sit on the floor."

The End:

- Successful youth gatherings have a definite ending. Children will be more likely to focus and participate in the final activities, even when parents begin to arrive to pick them up.
- Effective endings are usually simple; conclude with a certain song, saying, or game.

Take an Interest in Each Child

As you plan for youth activities, take into consideration each person's interests, learning style, personality, and the environment they come from. Below are a few tips for planning for these individual differences.

Shy youth:

- Pre-assign youth partners.
- Have ice-breaker activities that ensure that all youth participate.
- Call the youth by name and ask for their participation, assistance, etc.

Forming small groups:

- To encourage new friends or stop cliques from forming, use devices such as: colored name tags or post-it notes, a deck of cards, matching toys, or a number sequence (e.g., 1, 2, and 3) to divide groups.
- To form interest-based groups allow youth to choose from several activities.

Youth leaders:

- Have pre-created roles for "helper/leaders" that emerge in the group.
- Ask youth to assist with leading some activities.

Early arrivals:

- Establish clear arrival procedures. (arrival time, activities that are allowed until the program starts)
- Have crossword puzzles, word searches, matching games, or other activities that help them begin to focus on the theme or goal of the meeting, if there is one. (i.e., 4-H leader's activity guides may have great ideas)
- Have pieces of paper on the wall for members to create a mural about the theme or goal.

Early Finishers:

- Plan open-ended activities that extend until the time period ends. (i.e., Instead of "write three ideas for the project," say "You have five minutes, write as many ideas as you can think of.")
- Have an area where early finishers can read books or magazines related to the current topic, write, or play games that can incorporate new members.
- Use early finishers as helpers for those who are having trouble.

Age-appropriateness:

- Younger children are more interested in the process; older youth want to complete an item and have the activity serve a purpose and be meaningful to them.
- Set up the activity so that completing it can be simple or complex. (i.e., younger members complete three texture rubbings, while older members may be asked to do three rubbings that show different types of lines)
- Refer to other VRKC lessons that contain details about Ages and Stages of Youth Development and how to plan age-appropriate events and activities.

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

The members of a group want to be accepted. Those who do not feel like they are part of the group will tend to lose interest and create disturbances. To prevent this, it is important to promote acceptance and cooperation among the group rather than competition!

How do we encourage acceptance?

- Accept each person for who he/she is - try to understand what is going on in the child's life. Show concern, ask about interests, and give praise and attention.
- Separate the child from the behavior when approving or disapproving of their actions. Instead of saying, "I am angry with you," try saying "I am upset that you kicked Tommy-that really hurt him." In this way, you show that you accept the child, but not his action.
- Help members of the group to be considerate of each other. Encourage open dialog among members of the group and assist them in rephrasing inappropriate statements if necessary. They too can learn to separate the person from the behavior.
- Look for ways in which each child can contribute and feel valuable to the group. Everyone has a special talent to share. If a member is being disruptive, give him/her a job to do. This will distract from the disruptive behavior and allow them to feel helpful.
- Promote a cooperative environment rather than a competitive environment. Plan activities that require all members of the group to work together. Set goals that compare the individual to him/her instead of others. Instead of saying, "Sammy is cleaning up faster than you" say, "You did so well cleaning up last time; let's see if you can do that again this time."



STRATEGIES WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

Planning and strategizing ahead of time will make a huge difference in the atmosphere and success of your group. But, no matter how well your group does in developing group guidelines, planning ahead and focusing on relationships and individual needs, there will almost always be at least a few youth who don't follow guidelines or disrupt the fun and learning in your group. Let's turn our attention to problems that may arise."

GENERAL STRATEGIES

- Ignore the behavior when the goal was to get your attention. But, remember ignoring is only one of many techniques you use to deal with disruptive behavior. Explain that you will accept a contribution when they choose to behave appropriately.
- Make it clear that their decision will affect whether they will be allowed to continue participating in the activity. Try using phrases such as, "You can help..., we need..., or you can help us finish quickly by picking up your things."
- Allow natural consequences.
- If the child isn't hurting anyone, simply restate the choice they have.
- If the child is harming someone, the options you give will be different. (i.e., "Do you want to help the group finish or would you like to sit by yourself until the others finish"?)
- If you separate the child, begin the process again. When a child sees that their last tactic did not work and the stability has been restored to the group, give the child a chance to start over.

PHYSICAL MANAGEMENT

- Catch the student's eye and flash a mildly disapproving warning. (i.e., frown, clear your throat)
- Stand close to the student.
- Change physical placement. (i.e., put troublemaker close to teacher)
- Separate troublemakers or isolate the disruptive child.
- Consider how to use the space available. Place chairs in a circle so all can more easily contribute to the conversation.
- Physical restraint - Last resort: **ONLY** use when there is a threat of harm to others or self.
- Seek help/call 911.



VERBAL MANAGEMENT

- Establish ground rules.
- Redirect or distract.
- Don't give the youth attention - it frequently stops the behavior.
- Be observant of youth's activity and provide helpful feedback.
- Sometimes asking a totally unrelated question catches them off guard. Be sure to provide a suggestion of what to do that is positive.
- Broken record technique: Keep repeating request until youth complies with request.
- Request student to perform a specific behavior.
- Defining Limits: how far is too far.
- Catch them doing something good.
- Tell "what to do" rather than "what not to do".

EXTRA TIPS

- Don't assume the child knows how to read.
- Rewards for completing activity by giving a small treat. This can be an incentive if youth know prior to the activity that they will be receiving it.
- Restructure the situation if necessary.
- Talk with disruptive student during break.
- Set a good example – adults follow rules set for the youth.
- Demonstrate to the child or observe another person – some disruption is due to frustration over a lack of experience or skill.
- Allow time for practice.
- Use a sense of humor – poke fun at yourself rather than the children.
- Involve youth in leadership and planning – when youth are involved in planning they take ownership of the idea and are much more supportive of any task related to the idea.

Each youth group leader is unique as well as each group member. Review the ideas in this fact sheet and strive to add new techniques and strategies to your repertoire or “bag of tricks” for working with youth.

Note: Some of the content for this fact sheet was adapted from: Nagel, Myra. *What To Do Instead of Screaming!* Galleon Press. 1980 (Out of Print).

Credits: Developed by the University of Illinois 4-H Volunteer Development Work Group: Cathy Blunier, Johnna Jennings, Deanna Roby, Sheri Seibold, Melinda States, and Judy Taylor. Content was adapted from earlier materials created by Carolyn Ashton, Judy Schmidt, Melinda States and Judy Taylor, University of Illinois Extension. 12/08



University of Illinois • U.S. Department of Agriculture • Local Extension Councils Cooperating
University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.
The 4-H Name and Emblem are Protected Under 18 U.S.C. 707.

Prepared for Nov. 17, 2011 North Central Region 4-H Volunteer e-Forum Session – *Keeping Your Cool While Working with Youth*. Presented by Pat McGlaughlin and Sheri Seibold, University of Illinois 4-H Youth Development Specialist

QUICK REFERENCE OF TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

Below you'll find an abbreviated list of potential behavior techniques. Keep this fact sheet as you're preparing for that next club/group activity. Which ideas might address the situations you expect to encounter during the next group gathering?

- Give choices
- Use a variety activities – teach to all learning styles
- Use humor
- Set clear expectations (rules, schedule, actions, etc.)
- Carefully plan and prepare for activities
- Choose age appropriate activities
- Plan for transitions (before, in-between and after)
- Show interest in and get to know each child
- Emphasize cooperation over competition
- Show concern
- Separate the child(ren)
- Use natural consequences
- Ignore the behavior
- Involve youth in planning
- Tell what “to do” rather than “what not to do”
- Allow time to practice
- Demonstrate the task or skill
- Redirect or distract
- Surprise them with unexpected response or action
- Provide rewards
- Seek help/call 911
- Other

Credits: Developed by the University of Illinois 4-H Volunteer Development Work Group: Cathy Blunier, Johnna Jennings, Deanna Roby, Sheri Seibold, Melinda States, and Judy Taylor. Content was adapted from earlier materials created by Carolyn Ashton, Judy Schmidt, Melinda States and Judy Taylor, University of Illinois Extension. 12/08



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION



University of Illinois • U.S. Department of Agriculture • Local Extension Councils Cooperating
University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.
The 4-H Name and Emblem are Protected Under 18 U.S.C. 707.

Prepared for Nov. 17, 2011 North Central Region 4-H Volunteer e-Forum Session – *Keeping Your Cool While Working with Youth*. Presented by Pat McGlaughlin and Sheri Seibold, University of Illinois 4-H Youth Development Specialists