



4-H Club Management

KEEPING YOUTH IN 4-H: WHY DO SOME LEAVE?

Activity Plan – Wisconsin 4-H Leader Training Series

ACTcc003

Intended Audience:

- Adults and youth providing 4-H Club leadership

Learning Objectives:

Club leaders will:

- Review research on why youth leave 4-H
- Learn about the “4 Essential Elements of the 4-H Experience”
- Discover tools to assess a 4-H club’s operation
- Explore ideas that clubs can try to create positive experiences for youth

Target Essential Elements:

Belonging, mastery, independence and generosity are introduced as essential elements of the 4-H club experience.

Time: 20-30 minutes

Supplies Needed:

Top 10 Reasons Members Leave Activity

- Paper and pen/pencil for participants
- Research on why youth leave on flipchart, overhead, PowerPoint presentation or handout

BACKGROUND

4-H clubs become stronger as members gain new knowledge and confidence from their previous experiences. Returning 4-H members continue to learn new things, have fun and are in a better position to contribute their ideas and skills to help others in the club. When youth drop out of our 4-H clubs, they miss new experiences and the club misses their potential contributions.

WHAT TO DO

Activity: Top 10 Reasons Why Members Leave 4-H

(Hand out paper and pencil if people need them.) Let’s pretend this is late night TV. We will create our own Top 10 list . . . Top 10 reasons why youth drop out of 4-H. Take a few minutes to write down your own top three reasons. We will record your reasons on a flip chart.

Why Do Members Leave?

Let’s compare our top choices with those of youth in an Indiana study that included 184 youth from 10 counties. Half of the youth were between the ages of 10-13 and the other half were between 14-18 (Ritchie and Resler, 1993). (Note: You could do this TV emcee style and unveil #3 first, then #2, and finally, with a drum roll, #1.)

Youth said they were:

1. Displeased with their 4-H club (boring meetings, not enough project help)
2. Too busy with sports
3. Too busy with a job

Parents said their child was:

1. Not happy with the club
2. Too busy with sports
3. Dissatisfied with projects

Note: Only eight of the drop-out children’s parents helped with a club activity and most only gave their children a little help with their projects.

Other studies have found:

- New families leaving 4-H said: they lacked understanding of the 4-H program, its goals, activities, events and time commitment; never felt welcome or part of the group; and project groups didn’t meet often enough to satisfy children. Some in this study moved or had conflicting time commitments as reasons for not re-enrolling (Astroth, 1985).
- Members who don’t complete projects are more likely to drop out (Woloshuk, Brown, Wagaman, 1999).



Handouts

- Reasons Youth Drop Out of 4-H (optional)
- Meeting the Needs of Youth: Tips for 4-H Leaders
- Wisconsin 4-H Community Clubs Feedback Form
- Using the Results from Wisconsin 4-H Community Club Feedback Form
- Evaluation

Do Ahead:

- Write question for “Top Reasons Why Members Leave” activity on flipchart, overhead or PowerPoint presentation.
- Have supplies and handouts ready.
- Recruit someone to record the reflection discussion to use as an evaluation (optional).

Sources:

- Created by Linda Kustka, Professor Emeritus, Department of Youth Development, UW-Extension.
- Based on information from the following sources: “The Challenge of Retaining 4-H Members” by Kirk A. Astroth; “Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development” by Cathann Kress; “Why Youth Drop Out of 4-H” by Robert M. Ritchie and Kenda M. Resler; and “4-H Projects: Is Completion Important?” by Jean M. Woloshuk, Guendoline Brown and Gena D. Wagaman. Check the “Additional Web Links” section for more information on these sources.

4 Essential Elements of the 4-H Experience

The research on member retention can help all of us improve the experiences we are currently providing. The research shows us that some of the reasons youth and their families leave 4-H are beyond our control, such as schedule conflicts and moving away. But we have control of things related to the quality of the 4-H experience . . . things that the club leadership team of officers, youth leaders, project leaders and general/organizational leaders can do. This is not the responsibility of one or two people, but everyone on the team.

Let’s look at the four essential elements that should be part of the 4-H experience. These elements are based on research and were identified by the National 4-H Impact Design Team. The handout, “Meeting the Needs of Youth: Tips for 4-H Leaders,” describes four needs of youth that can be met through positive 4-H club experiences.

Using the Elements to Strengthen Our Club

The assessment tool, “Wisconsin 4-H Community Clubs Feedback Form,” is built around the four Essential Elements and will help your 4-H club determine strengths and areas to improve in meeting the needs of members. Have everyone on your club leadership team or all youth leaders, parents and adult volunteers complete the form. Then consult the handout, “Using the Results from Wisconsin 4-H Community Club Feedback Form,” for tips on using the information you gather.

Acknowledge your club’s strengths and build on them. Take a close look at the areas most often identified as needing improvement. For example, remember the reasons why youth did not re-enroll. Use the survey results to plan actions to improve the member experience at club meetings and their project work.

Closing

This discussion is a starting point. 4-H Youth Development staff members are available to meet with your club leadership team to discuss the feedback form and provide ideas to help strengthen your group.

TALK IT OVER

Reflect:

- What are the most common reasons that youth do not rejoin 4-H?
- What is the most important thing that clubs should do to keep youth interested?

Apply:

- What tips would you give to add to the 4 Essential Elements to your club meeting?
- How might your 4-H club use the feedback form?

ENHANCE/SIMPLIFY

Enhance:

- This lesson can be combined with the “Keeping Youth in 4-H: Supporting New Members and Their Families” and “Keeping Youth in 4-H: Retaining Older Members” lessons.
- If time allows, add an activity related to the discussion of 4 Essential Elements. After everyone has briefly reviewed the “Meeting the Needs of Youth: Tips for 4-H Leaders” handout, give them post-it notes to write tips on other things that might be done to meet the needs of youth in a 4-H club. Have signs for each element and post each tip related to that element under the sign. Quickly read out loud the tips given. Option: type up the tips and mail them to the participants. The link for this handout is listed below.
- Share the “Does Participation in a 4-H Club Make a Difference in a Young Person’s Life?” article listed under web links.
- Display and/or promote resources related to club strengthening. Promote the new state 4-H web site resources related to community 4-H clubs.

Simplify:

- If you need to do this in less time, modify the “Top 10 Reasons Why Members Leave 4-H” activity. Have participants think briefly about why members don’t re-enroll. Then, present the reasons.
- Shorten the discussion on the club feedback form. Say this is a new resource and that you’d be happy to share this with clubs with some additional discussion.

EVALUATION

It is important to use an evaluation that is consistent with your teaching objectives. The short evaluation in the handouts can be modified to meet your needs. An alternative to a written evaluation is to record the Reflection discussion under “Talk It Over.” Recruit someone ahead of time to take notes while you are leading the discussion. Remember to share the evaluation results with 4-H Youth Development Extension staff in your county.

ADDITIONAL WEB LINKS

- Kirk A. Astroth, “The Challenge of Retaining 4-H Members,” *Journal of Extension*, Fall 1985, Vol. 23, No. 3. This article is online at www.joe.org/joe/1985fall/sa4.html.
- Cathann Kress, “Does Participation in a 4-H Club Make a Difference in a Young Person’s Life?” National 4-H CSREES. This article that clearly documents the benefits of belonging can be found at www.national4-headquarters.gov/library/4-H-YES.pdf.
- Cathann Kress, “Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development.” Several versions are available online at www.national4-headquarters.gov/library/4h_presents.htm.
- “Meeting the Needs of Youth: Tips for 4-H Leaders” brochure at www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/resources/about/documents/MeetingtheNeedsofYouth.pdf can be used for new volunteer orientation.
- Robert M. Ritchie and Kenda M. Resler, “Why Youth Drop Out of 4-H,” *Journal of Extension*, Spring 1993, Vol. 31, No. 1. This article is online at www.joe.org/joe/1993spring/rb3.html
- “Wisconsin 4-H Community Clubs Feedback Form” on the Wisconsin state 4-H web site at www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/clubs/documents/Effective4HClubsChecklist.pdf.
- Jean M. Woloshuk, Guendoline Brown and Gena D. Wagaman, “4-H Projects: Is Completion Important?” *Journal of Extension*, Oct. 1999, Vol. 37, No. 5. This article is online at www.joe.org/joe/1999october/rb5.html.

Finalized by the Strengthening 4-H Club Leadership Work Team on September 2005.

Reasons Youth Drop Out of 4-H

Youth said they were:

1. Displeased with 4-H club (boring meetings, not enough project help)
2. Too busy with sports
3. Too busy with a job

Parents said their child was:

1. Not happy with the club
2. Too busy with sports
3. Dissatisfied with projects

(Indiana Study, Ritchie, 1993)

Other Related Research:

- Drop-outs lacked understanding of 4-H program, its goals, activities, events and time commitment. (Astroth, 1985)
- Drop-outs never felt welcome or part of the group. (Astroth, 1985)
- Project groups didn't meet often enough to satisfy children who quit. (Astroth, 1985)
- Those leaving moved or had conflicting time commitments. (Astroth, 1985)
- Members who don't complete projects are more likely to drop out. (Woloshuk, Brown, Wagaman, 1999)

Why Youth May Drop Out of Your 4-H Club

List the reasons youth may drop out of your 4-H club. Then list things you might change within your club to help meet the needs of new members.

Why Youth Leave Our Club	Ideas to Meet Their Needs

Using the Results from Wisconsin 4-H Community Club Feedback Form

Optional Ways to Use This Tool:

- Have everyone on your club leadership team or all youth leaders, parents and adult volunteers complete the feedback form.
- The feedback form could be completed and discussed at one time. Allow 60-90 minutes for adequate discussion.
- The feedback form could be completed at one time. Then an individual or small group could compile the results and determine the average score for each item. Make copies of the tool with the average for each item for later discussion.

Scoring the Feedback Form:

1. It will be easier to do the math if you make a copy of the feedback form and then leave several rows after each item to do the counting.
2. For each item, record how many people gave each of the ratings. For example, if there were 10 people responding to “Youth & adults participate equally to plan, implement & evaluate club program,” you might have the following responses:

1 = 5 responses 2 = 3 responses 3 = 1 response 4 = 1 response

3. Multiply the answer # by the # of responses. In our example, you’d get:

$$\begin{aligned} 1 \times 5 &= 5 \\ 2 \times 3 &= 6 \\ 3 \times 1 &= 3 \\ 4 \times 1 &= 4 \end{aligned}$$

4. Add the above results: $5 + 6 + 3 + 4 = 18$.
5. Divide the result total by the number of people responding to get the average for each item:

$$18 \div 10 = 1.8$$

6. Record the average on the page that you’ll share with others.

Discussing the Results:

- The purpose of this tool is to identify strengths and areas where work is needed. No club will have 1.0 as an average to every question.
- Give people reviewing the results time to look over all the ratings.
- Allow plenty of time for discussion. Keep notes on strengths and things you want to work on.
- Discuss each category under the 4 Essential Elements. For example, under Belonging, talk about results under Positive Relationships with a Caring Adult.
- After all the categories are discussed, ask those present to list the top five things they think the club should improve. Develop a list of suggestions on how to improve each of the top five things. Develop a plan to implement these ideas.

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Evaluation

1. How useful will this information be to help your club strengthen experiences for members?
(Circle one response.)

Very Useful Somewhat Useful Not Sure Not Useful

2. Do you feel better prepared to support club committees?

Yes No

3. What will you do as a result of this program?