



IMPLEMENTING 4-H PROJECT EXPERIENCES: MANAGING COMPETITION

Intended Audience:

- 4-H youth and adult project leaders

Learning Objectives:

Project leaders will:

- Understand how peer competition may impact participants of different ages
- Understand how to manage competitive activities to maximize their positive impact on youth
- Understand the importance of preparing youth for competition and the role of the coach at competitive activities.

Target Essential Elements:

Participating in competitions helps members develop and practice a *mastery* of project-related knowledge and skills.

VRKC Taxonomy:

Volunteers will increase their expertise in *educational design and delivery* as they develop skills in *implementing* learning opportunities that effectively promote positive personal development.

Time: 30-40 minutes

Supplies Needed:

Winning Isn't Everything Activity

- Bags of Legos or similar building pieces, with rules, prepared in advance
- Prizes for the winning team or for all participants

BACKGROUND

Competition can be defined as any activity or event in which individuals or teams contend for recognition as the *best*. Recognition may take the form of ribbons and trophies, jackets, monetary awards, or other prizes. Competition may serve to foster learning and often provides members with opportunities to practice their skills and to compare what they know or can do with the knowledge and skills of others in the same project. However, many youth enter competition with winning as their primary goal and equate *not winning* with losing and failure. In addition, parents or leaders may pressure youth to win, even if winning comes at the expense of others. In this lesson we will learn about the potential impacts of competition on youth and explore ways to manage competition so that it supports the 4-H program's primary goal of positive youth development.



WHAT TO DO

Introduction

Among the many roles of a 4-H project leader is that of “coach.” Leaders serve in this role as they help members prepare for and do their best in a variety of project-related competitions, such as horse or dog shows, project quiz bowls or skillathons, project completion “judging” at the fair or other event, or other competitive events.

Activity: Winning Isn't Everything

Select four team captains. Ask each to take turns picking members for their team. When everyone is on a team, give each team a bag of Legos or similar building pieces and game rules. Prepare the bags and rules as described in the “Winning Isn't Everything Activity Preparation” handout. Play the game as described in the handout.

Process the activity by asking the leaders how the competition made them feel. You may hear any or all of the following comments:

- It wasn't fair
- The rules were different for different groups
- We couldn't win because we didn't have enough pieces
- We couldn't win because we had too many pieces
- Picking teams that way was bad; it made the people who were picked last feel bad
- I didn't want to play
- I hate playing with Legos
- Shouting when we won was stupid
- They cheated
- We cheated
- The prize wasn't so special
- Our team failed
- Our team is better than everyone else's

Handouts

- Winning Isn't Everything Activity Preparation
- Bill of Rights for Young People in 4-H Competitive Events
- Evaluation

Do Ahead:

- Have supplies and handouts ready.
- Prepare supplies for "Winning Isn't Everything" activity as directed on handout.

Sources:

- Developed by Carolyn L. Belczyk, 4-H Youth Development Educator, UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development Program.
- Claudia Mincemoyer, "Cooperation, Competition, and Kids," a learn-at-home series for volunteers, parents, coaches, and anyone who works with youth, Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences-Cooperative Extension at <http://pa4h.cas.psu.edu/166.htm>.
- "4-H Memos," pp. 4-5, June 2004, University of California Cooperative Extension – San Diego County, http://cesandiego.ucdavis.edu/newsletterfiles/4-H_Memos_Newsletter5516.pdf.

Agree with the leaders. In fact, the competition wasn't fair, you didn't ask them if they wanted to play, but made them play anyway, etc.

In many ways, this game is typical of 4-H and other youth program competitions. Although it's often said that competition is part of the American way of life, participating in competitions that aren't fair, for which we aren't prepared, or in which we don't choose to participate can be damaging, especially to younger youth.

Discussion

Let's take a look at competition and its effects on youth. It should be noted that much of the research regarding youth competition comes from the field of youth sports, but many of the findings can be generalized and applied to 4-H.

What Youth Believe

A Youth Sports Institute survey found that three of the top 10 reasons for dropping out of a youth sports program are:

- It was no longer fun
- There was too much pressure
- There was too much emphasis on winning

Sound familiar? Another survey found that youth ranked "to have fun" as the number one reason for participating in youth sports. They ranked "to win" as number 12. In general, youth believe:

- Competition is fun for the winners
- Some winners do not have fun
- They enjoy cooperative learning more
- Friendships and fun are first

Competition as an Educational Tool

Competition can be an effective educational tool. It may motivate some youth, and it may provide opportunities to practice and perfect project-related skills and knowledge. To maximize the positive value of competition:

- Accentuate the skill component
- Minimize the reward component
- Minimize the competition during learning
- Give youth feedback on skills
- Help youth identify personal goals
- Allow for individual differences
- Strive for clarity and fairness
- Maximize the self-directed component

Skills to teach through competition include:

- Learning to play fair
- Being a good winner and loser
- Enjoyment of the competition – win or lose
- Not to over-generalize the results

Competition – Not for All Ages

Competition is not equally appropriate for youth of all ages. Youth under age 8, such as Cloverbuds, are concrete thinkers who like to accomplish a task. They're enthusiastic learners who enjoy playing and learning. They are not ready to handle winning or losing and should not be involved in any competitive activity, as this would not be considered developmentally-appropriate. Review national and state policies regarding the Cloverbud program for additional information regarding Cloverbuds and competition.

Eight-12 year old youth drop out of unhealthy competitions. They seek recognition and approval. Youth who are 12-14 years of age will also drop out of unhealthy competition, especially when competing is no longer fun. Older youth are better equipped to recognize the advantages and disadvantages of competition and are better able to strike a healthy balance.

The Role of Leader as Coach

You wouldn't send youth out to play competitive sports without first getting them into shape, teaching them the fundamentals of the game, and working with them on game-related skills. Most sports teams practice frequently and continue to work on the basics even after the competitive season gets underway.

The same steps need to be taken to prepare youth for participation in 4-H competitions. Distribute the handout, "Bill of Rights for Young People in 4-H Competitive Events," and ask leaders to read through it. Lead a discussion on the implications of the bill of rights for programming in your county or area.

Closing

Remind leaders that competition can have both positive and negative impacts on youth. Leaders serve in the role of coach when preparing youth for competition. Encourage them to respect the principles in the "Bill of Rights for Young People in 4-H Competitive Events" and to work hard to prepare youth for age and skill appropriate competitions, to focus on the positive, and to provide honest feedback on the members' performance in order to maximize the positive youth development aspects of 4-H competitive activities.

TALK IT OVER

Reflect:

- Can you think of an example of a 4-H competition in this county that reflects the principles in the "Bill of Rights for Young People in 4-H Competitive Events"?
- What about an example of one that is more like the competition in our first activity? What changes could we make to that competition that would make it a better situation for our members?

Apply:

- Have you ever seen adults behave inappropriately at a 4-H competition? What can be done to encourage them to behave in a more supportive, positive manner?
- Are all 4-H members in the county expected to participate in competitive events? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?

ENHANCE/SIMPLIFY

Enhance:

- Introduce "Cooperative Learning" as an alternative to peer competition. Planning activities in which youth cooperate to achieve a goal helps young people learn many important life skills—cooperation, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, goal-setting, and more. Five characteristics of cooperative situations have been identified. They are:
 - Goals – all members of the group agree on the same goal.
 - Rewards – when a group cooperates, all members receive equal rewards.
 - All members do their share – to succeed everyone "must pull his or her share of the load." Cooperative learning is a "sink or swim" situation. Each person is responsible for the other person. Groups should be made up of youth with different skills and abilities to take advantage of each person's uniqueness and strengths.
 - Activities are coordinated – plans must be made, work assigned and completed.
 - Leadership is shared – someone may act as a leader and coordinate the group's efforts; however, shared leadership allows each person to have some responsibility for leading the group.

Competition is learned. So is cooperation. Parents and professionals who work with youth have a unique opportunity to teach children how to work cooperatively rather than competitively. Check out the many games in *Teamwork & Teamplay* by Jim Cain and Barry Jollif, available at <http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com/books.html>, or try playing the following version of musical chairs to illustrate the point:

As always, start with one less chair than you have people playing. After the music stops at the end of each round, instead of eliminating the person who did not find a chair, everyone remains in and tries to fit on the chairs that remain – a task that becomes harder and more fun as the game goes on and additional chairs are removed. The result is a group of giggling players all trying to fit on a single chair!

Simplify:

- Omit “Winning Isn’t Everything” activity. Instead, discuss competition and its potential impact on youth, and review and discuss the “Bill of Rights for Young People in 4-H Competitive Events” handout.

EVALUATION

It is important to use an evaluation that is consistent with your teaching objectives. The short evaluation provided at the end of this lesson plan can be modified to meet your needs. An option to a written evaluation is to record the Reflection question discussion. Recruit someone ahead of time to take notes while you are leading the discussion.

ADDITIONAL WEB LINKS

- “4-H Recognition Model” at http://www.national4-Hheadquarters.gov/library/4h_recmo.pdf.
- “Recognizing Your 4-H’ers Achievements,” *New Jersey 4-H Leader Training Series*, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, at <http://www.rcrc.rutgers.edu/pubs/pdfs/4h/e148/421-424.pdf>.

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Winning Isn't Everything Activity Preparation

Set out five identical sets of 15-20 pieces of Legos or similar interlocking building pieces. Use a number of different colors and shapes, but make sure all five sets are identical.

Connect the pieces of the first set in a random fashion to form a three-dimensional object. This is the model.

Number each of four lock-top sandwich bags, 1-4. Place a set of the pieces in each bag. Take a single piece from Bag 3 and add it to Bag 4.

Place a set of the rules in each of the corresponding bags, as follows:

Bag 1, 3, and 4: Rules for "Winning Isn't Everything" activity:

Rules for "Winning Isn't Everything"

1. This is a competition. Only one team can win. Members of the winning team will get a fabulous prize.
2. To win, your team must be the first to build an exact duplicate of the model.
3. You must use all of the pieces in your bag.
4. Only one person from your group may examine the model at a time. This person is the observer.
5. Team members may ask the observer questions as needed, and the observer may help with the building.
6. Each of the team's members may take a turn at being the observer.
7. No team member may examine the model a second time until every team member has examined it once.
8. When your team has successfully finished building a duplicate of the model, stand up and shout as a team, "By George, I think we've got it!"

Bag 2: Rules for "Winning Isn't Everything" activity:

Rules for "Winning Isn't Everything"

1. This is a competition. Only one team can win. Members of the winning team will get a fabulous prize.
2. To win, your team must be the first to build an exact duplicate of the model.
3. You must use all of the pieces in your bag.
4. Only one person from your group may examine the model at a time. This person is the observer.
5. Team members may ask the observer questions as needed, and the observer may answer them.
6. Once a person has observed, s/he may no longer touch any of the pieces until the contest has ended.
7. Each of the team's members may take one and only one turn at being the observer. Remember, however, that once a member has observed, s/he may no longer touch the pieces.
8. When your team has successfully finished building a duplicate of the model, stand up and shout as a team, "By George, I think we've got it!"

To play:

Place the model inside a large box, shielded from the teams or on a table outside the room. Ask each team to build an exact duplicate of the model, following the game rules in their bag. Remind them that this is a competition.

The team that finishes first, constructing an exact duplicate of the model, using all the pieces, and standing and shouting “By George, I think we’ve got it!” is the winning team. Give the captain of that team a special prize, and give each team member a smaller prize. You may continue play and award second or third place prizes if time permits.

Note: Generally, the team with Bag 1 will win. They have standard rules, know they’re competing for fabulous prizes, and have just enough pieces in their bag to duplicate the model.

The team with Bag 2 has different rules. Their task is harder and will take longer; in fact, they may not be able to succeed, because each member can only observe the model once and because it’s against the rules to touch the pieces once they’ve been the observer.

The teams with Bags 3 and 4 have the same rules as the team with Bag 1, but they will need to work together if they are to succeed, because Bag 3 is missing a piece and Bag 4 has an extra piece. In a competitive situation such as this, most teams won’t be tuned into cooperating with another team, especially since the rules indicate that only one team can win.

Bill of Rights for Young People in 4-H Competitive Events

Young people participating in 4-H competitive events have a:

1. Right to decide if they will participate.
2. Right to participate at a level commensurate with their maturity and ability.
3. Right to appropriate preparation before participating in 4-H competitive experiences.
4. Right to have appropriate guidance by parents, qualified 4-H volunteers, and professional staff.
5. Right to have informative evaluative feedback.
6. Right to compete as a young person and not as an adult.
7. Right to share in the leadership and decision-making for the competitive learning experience.
8. Right to compete in a safe and healthy environment.
9. Right to equal opportunity to strive for success.
10. Right to be treated with dignity.
11. Right to have fun while competing in 4-H.

Handout

Implementing the 4-H Project Experiences: Managing Competition Evaluation

1. Please rate the following: How useful will this information be in helping you prepare youth to participate in 4-H competitive events?

Very Useful Somewhat Useful Not Sure Not Useful

2. Please answer the following: Do you feel better prepared to manage competition in 4-H as a result of this program?

Yes No

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