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# WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF 4-H

BASICS FOR NEW LEADERS

# What is 4-H?

## Key ideas

- What is 4-H?
- How does the 4-H program work?
- What's more important—the 4-H project or the 4-H boy or girl?
- What is the 4-H leader's job?

**W**elcome! You've volunteered and have been selected to be a new 4-H leader! Congratulations! You're starting an interesting, challenging, and rewarding experience. Because we know you have lots of questions about this new venture, we believe you'll find the following information helpful.

This is the first of a four-part series, **Welcome to the World of 4-H—Basics for New Leaders**. The other three parts are: *Starting a 4-H Club or Group* (4-H 0272L), *Planning and Conducting 4-H Club Meetings* (4-H 0273L), and *Leadership and Teaching Techniques* (4-H 0274L).

As you review this material, make note of your ideas and questions. Highlight information you find especially useful.

## What is 4-H?

4-H is an experiential youth education program for boys and girls in kindergarten through 12th grade. For youth in grades K-3 (4-H Adventures), the program is designed to meet the developmental characteristics of young children. It emphasizes cooperative learning and excludes competitive events. Youth in grades 4-12 usually belong to 4-H clubs or groups and select projects or activities from the large number available

to them, and may choose to enter fairs or other competition.

In Oregon, 4-H is a part of the Oregon State University Extension Service. Each county has an Extension office which administers the 4-H program. At the national level, 4-H is a unit of the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the federal partner of the state land-grant university system. 4-H is the youth development program of the land-grant universities Cooperative Extension System. This relationship is described in more detail in the publication *4-H and the Extension System* (4-H 0245L), which is available at your county Extension office.

Volunteer adults who serve as 4-H leaders are considered volunteer faculty members of Oregon State University. As a volunteer, you have access to research and information from the university by contacting personnel in your county Extension office.

A good description of the 4-H program in Oregon is given in the publication *Facts About 4-H* (4-H 0244L). If you would like a copy of this or other references listed, pick one up at your county Extension office.

## How does the 4-H program work?

It's often said, "It is better to build a child than to mend an adult." This, in a nutshell, is the main objective of the 4-H program.

In 4-H, volunteer leaders encourage youth to gain knowledge and learn practical life skills, and to apply both in their project area. Members learn to work together as a team and develop a sense of fair play.

4-H members learn decision-making skills through project work, judging contests, and other 4-H activities.

As 4-H members mature, they have opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills within their own club, at county activities, and during state events. They also begin to develop an appreciation and understanding of their community through individual or club service projects.

Members improve their communication skills through working together and interaction in the club, presentations, and 4-H recordkeeping. They also develop positive attitudes about themselves and others, learn basic health and safety practices, have educational and vocational experiences, and learn how to set and achieve realistic goals for themselves through individual time management.

All of this doesn't happen at once, but develops gradually as members continue their involvement in 4-H under the guidance of their leader.

## How is the 4-H program delivered?

The structure of an individual 4-H club or group may take on one of several forms. These include:

- **Community or project clubs:** 4-H curriculum is taught to youth organized into groups (clubs) that function for several months or throughout the year. This method is the "traditional" 4-H delivery method.
- **School enrichment:** 4-H curriculum is utilized in the classroom during regular school hours. The classroom teacher or another resource person teaches the subject matter.
- **Short-term/special interest:** 4-H curriculum generally is taught over a specified amount of time (e.g., 1 week, 6 weeks, 2 months) and outside of regular school hours. After-school programs, community school programs, special interest group programs, cooperative programs with other agencies and organizations, and school-age child care programs are examples of this delivery method.

## What's more important—the 4-H project or the 4-H boy and girl?

The 4-H member, of course! *4-H is a people program.* The objective is to develop boys and girls. Projects are tools for teaching youngsters by engaging their interest. The ultimate goal is for the 4-H member to know more and be able to do more at the end of the year. A commonly stated example of the 4-H philosophy is, "A blue ribbon 4-H'er with a red ribbon project is more desirable than a red ribbon 4-H'er with a blue ribbon project."

## What is the 4-H leader's job?

1. To help 4-H members learn specific project skills. 4-H members have fun with projects while "learning by doing." Youth remember better if they actually experience something and have an opportunity for "hands-on learning."

Learning takes place within the learner—it is not something done to the learner. We encourage skills that will be useful to the young person now and in the future. We help each member develop good habits, experiment with new ideas, and practice problem-solving skills. By doing this, we help them become self-directed, productive, contributing members of society.

2. To teach 4-H members *how* to think, not *what* to think. We help develop creative thinking in young people by giving them a chance to make decisions on their own. They'll learn from their own choices.
3. To recognize and encourage each 4-H member so they feel noticed and important. The most significant recognition that can be given to members is sincere praise, attention, or compliments—letting them know they are important and what they have done is worthwhile.

This is what 4-H is all about—the personal development of the boy and girl.

Welcome to the world of 4-H!

## Action steps

- Talk with other adults who might take on club leader roles.
- Learn more about how clubs in your area are structured.
- Attend scheduled leader training(s).
- Gather needed 4-H reference materials.

## Reference materials

(Copies are available at your county Extension office.)

*Facts About 4-H*, 4-H 0244L

*4-H and the Extension System: How It Fits Together*, 4-H 0245L

To learn more, ask for the video *Welcome to the World of 4-H: Basics for New Leaders* (PNW 003-VT).

## Contacting your county Extension office

To locate an address and phone number, look in your local telephone directory. It may be listed in any number of ways in the white pages or in one of the special sections. For example, it might be listed as: 4-H; Oregon State University Extension Service; or (county name) Extension Service.



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