

Problem Solving to Address Challenging Member Behaviors

Occasionally you may come across a 4-H member or two that takes your patience to the limit. Perhaps they disrupt the meeting with their noise or their constant state of motion, or maybe it is their poor sense of judgment with the ideas that they bring to the group and their lack of follow through and commitment. You may be thinking “If I could only get Jordan to join another club” or “I am going to kick them out if they don’t...”. These are common frustrations of advisors and teachers of young people.

It is important to remind ourselves of the 4-H goals and objectives. We are about helping young people develop and mature and we will not help them if we remove them from our program. You may make more impact on the “troubled” child’s life than all of the rest of your members combined. But a positive caring outlook doesn’t help much when your trying to manage a room full of energetic 4-H’ers. Consider some of the following strategies to deal with your problem child:

Natural Consequences

The 4-H program believes that young people learn best “by doing” things. With active participation come trials, errors, successes and failures. We need to give 4-H’ers enough room to make their own decisions and to evaluate the results. Life provides many valuable lessons that we reinforce in stronger ways than lectures, penalties, and punishments. Let the natural consequences of their actions guide them towards future decisions and behaviors. A child will quickly learn that their inappropriate behavior may cost friendships. If they fail to fulfill commitments at a club meeting, they may hear the disappointment from their fellow members. Responses from their peers will speak louder than anything you can say or do as an advisor.

Helping Youth Choose Behaviors and Resolve Problems

A survey of parents, conducted in public schools across the United States, identified their number one educational priority for their children: “to teach them skills on how to make decisions and solve problems”. As a 4-H advisor, you have the unique opportunity to teach young people not only how to make decisions and solve problems but also to identify behaviors that will lead them to success. If you develop a helping caring relationship with your 4-H members, you will be in position to help them look at their own behaviors that may be getting in their way of reaching their goals. Consider the six-step process for solving problems as a way to explore *with* your 4-H members their behaviors and the impact they may have on reaching their club goals.

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Problem Solving Model

Step 1

What is the problem or behavior issue?

Step 2

Identify appropriate behaviors, solutions, and alternatives to resolve the concern:

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

Step 3

Select from step 2 the behavior, action, or alternative that you feel will bring about the best solution.

Identify the positive outcomes, if you take this action:

- a)
- b)
- c)

Identify the negative results or outcomes, if you take this action:

- a)
- b)
- c)

Step 4

Try your solution.

Step 5

Evaluate. If the problem or the problem behavior continues, look for another solution by reviewing steps 2 & 3.

Step 6

Provide encouragement and positive feedback to the 4-H member as they work through issues.

Establish the atmosphere for learning within your 4-H club. Empower your members to make decisions as a club. Let your members discuss items and make group decisions. Allow club officers and members to carry out responsibilities. Provide members with lots of encouragement and motivation to help build positive self image. Talk with them regularly and help them identify and measure their progress towards reaching 4-H goals. Recognize their achievements and help them cope with disappointments. By establishing a supportive learning environment in your club, members will accept your role as a helper and allow you to assist them in finding solutions to problems and inappropriate behaviors.

Time Out

Sometimes it is necessary to take immediate action and address the 4-H'ers behavior especially if they are placing people or property at risk. An effective approach to use for children (and hockey players) is to place the in a "time out". You simply remove the young person to an area where they can sit and watch the other members participate. Typically, they sit out for one minute for each year of their age. A five year old would sit for five minutes and a ten year old for ten

minutes. It is important that counseling occur with the time-out. Explain to them in positive terms what behavior you expect. i.e. "Please walk while in the house".

If a 4-H member repeats the same offense, it is necessary that you repeat the time out and lengthen it to two minutes for each year of age. Counseling is once again appropriate. If the actions continue, you may warn them that it may be necessary to discuss their behavior with their parents. If you decide to issue this warning, be sure that you are willing to follow through with the threat. When you talk to the parent, explain the steps that you took and ask them for advice on how to proceed. Often the parent will take discipline matters into their hands and address the situation.

Non-Participation in Activities

Occasionally you may come across a 4-H member that fails to respond to counseling and time out techniques. You may need to set limitations on the types of involvement the member is able to participate in at club meetings and events. It may be necessary to request that the child's parents attend the meetings and control the young person's behavior. When you face this type of problem, contact your county Extension 4-H Youth Development Educator for guidance.

Illegal Behavior

Possession of drugs, alcohol, firearms, inappropriate touching, sexual activity, and any activity that violates the rights of people and property are serious behavior problems. As the adult advisor, you need to take immediate action to prevent harm to the 4-H'er and other participants. This includes seizure of items like alcohol, drugs, and weapons. It is advisable to do this in the presence of another adult serving as a witness. It is appropriate for you to contact law enforcement professionals when illegal behavior occurs. Notify the parents immediately and then contact your county 4-H Youth Development Educator.

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