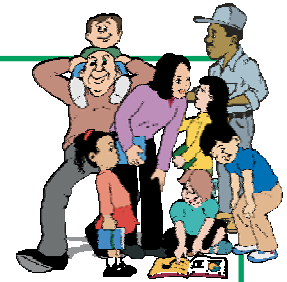




4-H for Families



“4-H Teaches Communication”

Successful families communicate about topics common to everyone by identifying problems and discussing how to solve them together. Strong families also spend time talking with and listening to one another to stay connected. Most importantly, families talk about everyday happenings in their lives, problems they may have encountered and successful moments. These conversations reveal important information which helps smooth out the bumps of family living.

With today’s busy lifestyles, these conversations don’t just happen. We must work at making them happen. When 4-H is part of family life, there is a common thread that every family member can discuss. In 4-H, there are opportunities to practice communication skills.

Communication occurs in many different ways, which need to be learned. 4-H provides families with opportunities to practice this life skill in a learning environment. Following are some important communication skills and 4-H examples or scenarios that can help families grow, learn and practice positive communication skills:

1. Sharing feelings. For some people, it isn’t easy to share feelings. Sometimes when we keep our feelings bottled up, they explode. Sometimes people just explode first and think later. Neither is a good idea. 4-H families can communicate with each other and avoid either extreme.

When parents see a ribbon placing that

is lower than anticipated, their first reaction is to get upset. 4-H’ers can manage disappointment better if they don’t also feel that they have disappointed their parents. If you get a low placing when you show your rabbit and Mom ridicules the judge or snaps at you for forgetting the name of the breed, it can be pretty rough. A more positive way to communicate disappointment is if, instead, parents would say, “We were expecting a higher placing, weren’t we? Are you okay? Let’s work a little more on that showmanship next year.”

2. Being Able to Compromise. Sometimes we get so involved in what we’re working on that we think that other people should change to accommodate us. Being able to make choices based on compromise is an important skill for everyone to learn. Part of compromise is learning to deal with disappointment. If adults try to protect their child from every disappointment, the child will not learn an important life skill and things could be very difficult for them later when they face life’s disappointments. In 4-H, we can practice handling disappointments as a family. For example, if a 4-H’ers bunny is sick it cannot be taken to the fair. The 4-H member may wish to take the bunny anyway. It is not fair to either this bunny or to the bunnies of other 4-H’ers. To compromise, a parent should help the 4-H member understand the risks involved. Make the 4-H’er realize: “I can’t be in the rabbit show, but that will give me a chance to watch the dog show.”

3. Playfulness. Humor works wonders when stress builds. Sometimes we are

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serious and concentrate so hard that the job seems harder. Parents play an important role in helping their 4-H'ers learn to take things in stride and see the lighter side. 4-H is a journey and a playful approach to communication. It can help families enjoy the trip and not dwell on the pot holes of life and learning. An example of how this works with a beginning 4-H'er: "Oh, I can't clip this part. I'll never learn. The clippers are hard to handle. My hand hurts. Oh, no. I cut too much." The 4-H'er is being extremely hard on their abilities. By using the more playful approach, the situation gets better: "Well Princess, I'm not too good at this yet. You may be the shaggiest calf at the show."

4. Agreeing to disagree. Sometimes we just can't reach an agreement with someone. Believing that we have to agree can lead to hard feelings. Recognizing that we sometimes won't see things the same can really help. Mom loves style revue and wants her daughter to participate. The daughter, on the other hand, wants to show hogs. Using compromise, playfulness and other skills, will allow people to agree to disagree.

5. Avoid blame. Is it anyone's fault that the things listed above happened? Even if it is, is it going to do any good to lash out? Which type of communication works better? "Mom, if you hadn't gotten home from work so late last night, we could have hemmed my dress. It's all your fault." Or what about, "Mom, I am so tired. I wish my dress was done. Is there any easier way to hem?" This is much more likely to result in

a hemmed dress and a better learning experience.

4-H is about learning the lessons in life as a family. Throughout the process, we can learn to communicate in a manner that leads to good experiences and fond memories for everyone.

Communication is also about expressing ourselves and sharing our ideas and knowledge with others. In 4-H, youth have the opportunity to practice public speaking skills, give presentations, and creatively express ideas. A good communicator is also a good listener.

4-H Club/Family Discussion Topics:

- Name your favorite book
- Scar and Tell: Tell about a scar you have and how you got it.
- Tell the funniest thing that happened to you in 4-H.
- Bring/find a picture of something you enjoy doing and share why it is fun for you.

4-H Examples of Projects and/or Activities that Teach Communication Skills:

- Photography
- Presentations
- Public Speaking
- Judging Contests
- Theater Arts
- Posters

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