

# What is 4-H?

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*Dear Leader:*

*So 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 many questions about this new venture, we believe you'll find the information in this and subsequent letters helpful.*

*This is the first in a series of six letters that you will receive in the next few months, along with supporting materials. We suggest you keep these materials together in a notebook for easy reference. When you have all six letters and the additional reference materials, you will have a useful 4-H leader's handbook.*

*At the end of each letter is a section titled, "How I can use the information in this letter?" This section gives you the chance to think about the information in each letter and how you might use the information effectively in your club.*

## What is 4-H?

4-H is the youth audience of the Cooperative Extension System in the United States. Young people, between the ages of 8 and 19, participate in individual and group learning experiences that help them learn skills for living. Five- to seven-year-olds learn life skills through Clover-Kids group activities.

In Missouri, 4-H is part of University Outreach and Extension. The State 4-H Office is located on the Columbia campus of the University of Missouri.



### **In this letter you'll find:**

- Introduction to the letter series.
- What is 4-H?
- How does the 4-H program work?
- What's more important – the 4-H project or the 4-H boy and girl?
- What is the 4-H leader's job?

4-H leaders are considered volunteer staff members at the University of Missouri. At the local level, each county has an Extension center which administers the 4-H program. At the national level, 4-H is under the leadership of the United States Department of Agriculture.

The most widely recognized symbol of 4-H is the 4-H clover. This emblem is a green four-leaf clover with a white or gold "H" in each leaf, representing Head, Heart, Hands and Health.

The 4-H name and emblem may

be used by local chartered 4-H clubs and other officially affiliated 4-H organizations. The use of the 4-H name and emblem should be consistent with the educational purposes, character-building objectives and dignity of the 4-H program. It cannot be used to endorse commercial firms, products or services. If there are questions about the appropriate use of the 4-H emblem, contact your local University Outreach and Extension center.

## How does the 4-H program work?

It is 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. 4-H is a learn-by-doing program. This "experiential learning" occurs when youths participate in an activity, look back to reflect on the activity, draw conclusions or observations from the experience and relate the experience to other or future experiences in their lives. Through the experiential learning process, young people develop basic, transferable skills useful in real life experiences today and in the future.

Through experiential learning, youths learn skills for living. Life skills may be categorized as three types:

**Competency** — developing skills and knowledge; strengthening and using decision-making skills; communicating with and relating to other people.

**Coping** — responding to life situations; developing a positive self-

concept; establishing priorities consistent with one's values.

**Contributory** — sharing with others; developing leadership skills; responding to the needs of others and of the community.

These life skills enable youth to become self-directing and productive, to lead satisfying lives, to contribute to society and to function effectively in a changing world.

Of primary importance in this learn-by-doing approach, is the 4-H project. The project is a set of activities centered around a specific subject. (See Y 603, *4-H Clover*, for a list of projects.) Each member or group selects one or more projects according to interest and ability. Each project requires the member or group to establish goals, work toward those goals and evaluate the progress made.

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

The 4-H members, of course! 4-H is a people program. Its objective is to assist in the development of boys and girls. Projects are tools for teaching young people by stimulating their interest. A commonly stated example of the 4-H philosophy is, "A blue ribbon 4-H'er with a red ribbon project is better than a red ribbon 4-H'er with a blue ribbon project."

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

- To help youths develop skills from their experiences in club groups, leadership activities and projects. Youngsters remember better if they actually experience something and have an opportunity for some "hands-on learning." 4-H encourages skills that will be useful to them now and in the future. 4-H helps each member develop good habits, experiment with new

## How can I use the information in this letter?

1. New ideas to use in our club: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Other people who could help us and how they might help: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Questions to ask University Outreach and Extension staff and other leaders: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

and challenging ideas, and practice problem-solving skills.

- To teach 4-H members how to think, not what to think. 4-H helps develop creative thinking in young people by giving them a chance to make decisions on their own. They'll learn by making their own choices.
- To recognize and encourage 4-H members so they feel noticed and important. The most significant recognition that can be given to members is praise, attention or compliments letting them know they are important and what they have done is worthwhile. For some, 4-H may be the only place they get this support.

This is what 4-H is all about — the personal development of boys and girls.

### Welcome to the world of 4-H!

Missouri 4-H recognizes the importance of good character in everything that is done. 4-H staff and volunteers as well as 4-H members

and their families know that a person of character:

- Is a good person — someone to look up to and admire;
- Knows the difference between right and wrong and always tries to do what is right;
- Sets a good example;
- Makes the world a better place;
- Lives according to the "Six Pillars of Character" — Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship.

Another helpful MU publication is LG 783, *Learn by Doing* (available from MU Extension Publications, 1-800-292-0969).

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