



Conference Judging

"HOW CONFERENCE JUDGING CAN BE USED TO ENHANCE A CHILD'S SELF-CONCEPT"

As we look at the area of conference judging, we have to look at the whole philosophy of 4-H. If we believe that the purpose of 4-H is to develop youth, then how can conference judging help in youth development? Some youth in 4-H are not concerned about the competition part of the 4-H program, so for them judging is not a major concern, but for those who like competition we want judging to be a positive experience.

Judging is a process of critiquing. In order for that critiquing to be a positive growth experience the judge needs to be sensitive to the feelings of youth and to understand how children develop a positive self-concept. As a judge critiquing the work of youth, we have the opportunity to both compliment and critique. As a judge our challenge becomes to give compliments that are sincere and honest and to give constructive criticism that the youth may benefit from, without giving criticism that shatters the youth's confidence and ego.

Few of us like to criticize another, but there are occasions when we are called upon -- or duty requires us -- to do so. If on these occasions we could make our critiquing session as objective and impersonal as possible, we would be way ahead of the game.

Following are a few suggestions to keep in mind that will aid us in our critiquing session:

1. Criticize the Act not the person -- and make it clear that we are doing so. This will show our intent to help -- and not destroy.

The way we communicate with the child whose project we are judging will help determine whether the experience makes them feel good or bad about themselves. We communicate both verbally and non-verbally as we critique - if we can communicate acceptance the child can grow, change, and feel good about himself/herself. Accepting the youth, just as he/she is, makes it easy to communicate. Youth who feel accepted will be more likely to share their feelings and problems. Remember! We can accept a young person without necessarily approving of their behavior or the project they have completed. In the process of judging if we find it necessary to criticize the project based on identified

standards it is very important to make the youth aware that we are criticizing the project -- not the youth! It is important to convey to the young person that you respect their ideas and attempts even if the project did not produce a blue ribbon exhibit.

When critiquing a young person's project tell them what to do - rather than what not to do. Talk to the young person as you would an adult friend - emphasizing what could be done to improve the project rather than just criticize or belittle the person for their attempts. Always talk "with" the young person - not "at" them. Talking "with" the young person means a two-way conversation where you not only talk but also listen to what the young person has to say. Suggestions for improvement and encouragement help build the young person's self-confidence and gives them incentive to try harder and accomplish more.

2. Always have a constructive attitude -- the purpose of criticism is not to find fault, which is purely destructive, but to help others improve and do better. Criticism is an educational process, and the reason so few of us react favorably to criticism is that so few of our critics make much of an attempt to take a strictly constructive approach.

All of us wear an invisible sign that says "Fragile -- Handle With Care". We pretend to be thick skinned when in actuality our ego is quite tender. Therefore, while critiquing a performance or an individual we should handle people with care, and I'm sure that those of us being critiqued will find the critiquing sessions much easier to take -- and most important -- will profit by it.

Allow the young person to share their ideas and feelings about their project whether they have positive or negative feelings. Hiding bad feelings can be self-destructive and can lead to headaches, ulcers, and violent reactions. Not being allowed to express feelings is a frustrating experience. Actions can be labeled good or bad, but not the feelings. Feelings are neither good or bad, they exist, and their existence must be recognized.

In one of his unique poems, Ogden Nash makes a statement about the desire for a feeling of self-worth.

*I HARDLY KNOW ANYBODY WHO WOULDN'T RATHER BE A SUCCESS THAN
A FAILURE.
JUST AS I SUPPOSE EVERY BIT OF CRAB GRASS IN THE GARDEN WOULD
MUCH RATHER BE AN AZALEA.
AND IN CELESTIAL CIRCLES ALL THE RUN-OF-THE-MILL ANGELS WOULD
RATHER BE ARCHANGELS OR AT LEAST CHERUBIM AND SERAPHIM.
AND IN THE LEGAL WORLD ALL THE LITTLE PROCESS SERVERS HOPE TO
GROW INTO GREAT BAILIFFIM OR SHERIFFIM
INDEED EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE A WOW,
BUT NOT EVERYBODY KNOWS EXACTLY HOW.*

A major goal of youth development is to give every child the chance to feel he is a "wow".

3. Use of the "Sandwich Method" -- this is slipping our criticism or suggestion for

improvement in between layers of compliments. The compliments, of course should be sincere and honest --not mere flattery.

Many children have ability but lack a positive sense of self-worth. They do not believe in their own capabilities because people cannot be competent until they know what they can do. As adults, we can help youth to recognize and be impressed with their own competencies and capabilities. It has been found that a person's self-concept is based less upon what they do or see with their own eyes than on what others tell them and show them about their being and performance. The young person's self-image is derived from relationships with others. There is a tendency to live up to other's expectations -- the self-fulfilling prophecy. Persons with low self-esteem expect to be cheated, stepped on, depreciated by others, because they feel they are of little worth. Expecting the worst, they invite it and usually get it.

A young person's good feelings about himself/herself hinge on other's acceptance of him/her as an individual in his/her own right, with his/her own abilities and limitations. Another ingredient in building a young person's self-concept is acquiring skills - 4-H should be able to shine in this area. Developing skills builds a young person's image among his peers. Young people who have skills that other youth respect are likely to be accepted by their peers. Throughout life all need the confidence that comes from doing small things well.

A strong relationship has been found between self-concept and creativity. Young people who are given the freedom to be creative develop self-confidence, emotional maturity and independence. They develop the ability to sustain concentration over long periods of time while involved in challenging projects. They derive personal satisfaction from their creative tasks which is not the same as the satisfaction derived from successfully completing a math or reading assignment. A completed project in creativity is seen by the child as an expression of his/her own individuality. The young person who has a low self-concept is not as likely to develop unique ideas, for he/she is sensitive to criticism and shrinks away from independent decisions and leadership responsibilities.

If the goal of the 4-H program is youth development - then we must be sensitive and analytical at every phase of the program, including judging. We need to determine if our steps toward meeting that goal are being carried out in such a way as to develop positive self-concept in the youth we are working with. If the 4-H program is developing responsible young people with positive self-concepts, then we are without question meeting our goal. In order to help make a positive growth experience keep in mind a few more guidelines:

- 1) First criteria for evaluating has to be clearly understood from the beginning (specifically on what the exhibit will be judged)
- 2) The length of the session did not have too great effect with kids, but they didn't like to be cut off when they had more questions, but neither did they want to be kept if there was not more to be said.

- 3) The member preferred a judge (evaluation) who did not just look for what was wrong, but complimented on a job well done.
- 4) Members should be aware of the fact they can ask questions of the judge in conference judging.
- 5) If the placing is going to be based on the knowledge about the project areas as well as the exhibit, the member should know this also.
- 6) In most cases, the members can about tell you the ribbon placing they feel they should receive and why.
- 7) It makes little difference when the announcement of ribbon placing is given, if the explanation is thorough enough to be understood as to why.
- 8) The member wants to learn something from conference judging so as judges we need to know subject matter well. Keep the questions challenging.
- 9) As an evaluation, always remember that the member is most important - not the exhibit, so watch for reaction.
- 10) The more advanced members need to be challenged. Maybe they need to be involved in the judging more.
- 11) A conference judge must be a very sensitive person who can always see some positive in each exhibit; not only negative. They must know subject matter but also know and understand kids.
- 12) If we could change the word from judging to evaluating, it would give more positive feelings.

Reprinted with permission.

Revised by: Judy Taylor, Youth Development Educator; Dan Dawson, Prevention Educator; Angie Ford, Prevention Educator; and Diane Ryals, Family and Youth Educator from earlier materials prepared by Iowa State University

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Cooperative Extension Service, 1992. College of Agriculture/State/County/Local/USDA Cooperating.

The Illinois Cooperative Extension Service provides opportunities in programs and employment.