



Communication and the 4-H Volunteer

Communication is a key element in the success of any organization. As a 4-H volunteer, it's important to understand that **communication builds relationships**. This means that your relationship with your 4-H members will be built on the communication which takes place among all of you as a group.

Communication: A Two-way Process



Communication is a two-way process. It involves a sender and a receiver, both sending and receiving messages. To communicate effectively, individuals involved in a communication exchange must be responsible speakers and listeners.

Communicating as a 4-H Leader

How often does a 4-H leader communicate? The following are some examples of times you'll need to use your communication skills.

Communicating with 4-H'ers/Parents

- Teaching your 4-H'ers a skill, helping with projects
- Reminding your 4-H'ers/parents of the next meeting date, supplies needed, etc.
- Informing 4-H'ers/parents of the next county-wide event
- Assisting 4-H'ers in preparing for the 4-H fair (filling out exhibit tags, etc.)
- Helping 4-H'ers and parents complete 4-H member registration forms
- Training club officers
- Recruiting parents to assist with your club

Communication with the County 4-H Office

- Receiving training from the 4-H staff
- Reading 4-H newsletters, e-mails



- Accessing available 4-H website
- Completing paperwork
- Requesting educational materials and information about the 4-H program
- Volunteering to assist with county events

Communicating with Other 4-H Volunteers

- Participating in 4-H Leaders' Association meetings
- Serving on association committees
- Training a co-leader/teen leader
- Asking for/lending moral support
- Sharing ideas informally
- Attending volunteer forums/conferences

Other Opportunities for Communication

- Informing local press of club activities
- Organizing a club fund raiser and/or soliciting donations from local businesses
- Serving on your county-wide 4-H advisory council or NJ State 4-H Association

Types of Communication

It's important to know that there are many ways to communicate. The two main types of communication are **verbal** and **non-verbal**.

Verbal communication entails one person speaking and the other listening.

Nonverbal communication comes in a variety of forms. It entails one person observing another person who is engaging in one of the activities listed below:

- Facial expressions (i.e., smile, frown, rolling the eyes)
- Gestures (i.e., handshake, nod, making a fist)
- Other forms of body language (i.e., turning away from someone, dozing off)
- Sounds that are not words (i.e., laughter, snort, groan)

Keep in mind when working with 4-H'ers that there are many ways to communicate. Be aware of facial expressions or other forms of nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication often sends the strongest message and can cancel a verbal message. Listen by observing and you'll be able to build better 4-H club relationships.



4-H Leader Communication Tips

1. Listen! This means working to understand what the speaker is saying.
2. Maintain eye contact with children and adults—it lets them know they are communicating with you.
3. If you don't understand what your 4-H'er, parent, or 4-H staff member is saying, ask!
4. Be honest and straightforward—set a good example for your 4-H'ers.
5. Be aware of the nonverbal communication going on among your 4-H'ers.
6. When necessary, set aside an appropriate time and place for communication (conference with a parent, etc.)
7. Encourage your 4-H'ers to communicate. Ask them, "What questions do you have?" and let them do the talking as often as possible.
8. Respond to the requests made by the 4-H staff; that way, they know you're still out there and surviving!

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References

Peer Plus II. 4-H Youth Programs, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI. 1984.



 *Did You Know...* 

The New Jersey Association of Extension 4-H Agents works to support the mission of the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents and provide professional development opportunities for 4-H staff.

For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit www.nj4h.rutgers.edu.

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