

Helping New Families Understand the Culture of 4-H

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First generation 4-H members, or youth who don't have a family history in the 4-H program, often find it hard to navigate the unique culture they land in when they join the organization. The new terminology, customs, and traditions can be overwhelming to these families. In fact, studies show that more members drop out of 4-H during or after the first year than any other year of membership (Astroth, 1985).

The 4-H club leader is the first line of defense to protect these families from becoming overloaded with so many new things to learn. There is a staggering amount of information that new members need for success, and it is difficult to convey everything in a fashion that will help them stay in the program. Communication is key in providing an environment that is welcoming and inclusive for all members but communicating to new families is crucial in setting them up for a positive 4-H career. This resource provides strategies for club leaders to assist new families as they embark on this new journey.



The 4-H culture is packed full of long-standing traditions, special terminology, and a sense of community that is what makes the organization so impactful, but to new families, those things can make the program seem unwelcoming.

Family or Parent Meeting

A family or parent meeting hosted prior to the 4-H year provides club leaders with an opportunity to set a strong foundation for relationship building and encouraging an open line of communication between leaders, members, and parents. The Ohio 4-H Grab and Go Club Toolkit shares a sample agenda for club leaders to use while planning a family or parent meeting.

[Ohio 4-H Grab and Go Club Toolkit](#)

Member Mentors

Fostering relationships between new and seasoned 4-H members is an innovative way to encourage continued engagement by providing role models for new members. The role of a mentor includes answering questions, checking project progress, and sharing information about upcoming 4-H programs at every club meeting. Ohio 4-H offers the One-on-One project which guides the mentor through the process of serving others while developing their own personal skills.

Club Handbook

Club Handbooks are designed to be a tangible guide for all 4-H club members, new and returning, to have continuous access to necessary club information. A template for creating a Club Handbook can be found here: go.osu.edu/meetingsmatter. This customizable resource allows club leaders to add contact and meeting information, as well as information regarding club dues, project expectations, and attendance policies.

New Member Orientation

Sometimes new members and parents are intimidated by other families who seem to have figured out the 4-H culture. Providing them with a safe space to ask questions without worry of judgement from others is an excellent way to help them feel more at ease with this new experience. A new member orientation is a unique platform to create the opportunity for judgement-free time to ask questions and learn the 4-H way.

