

Use Positive Behavior Management Techniques

Behavior management, whether exercised by youth themselves (self-discipline and peer influence) or by adult authority starts with a shared understanding of behavioral expectations. While expectations that relate to the health and safety of participants and the values of the organization are nonnegotiable, youth want and need to have an active role in defining limits and establishing the rules that will govern their club. Once established, they want, expect and will support consistent reinforcement of those rules. Here are some tips on where to start and how to both build on and reinforce behavior limits and a set of rules.

1. **Use the 4-H Member's Code of Conduct** (Tool L-5) to clarify and enforce the nonnegotiable expectations. Discuss the code by asking these questions after each item is read: "What does this mean?, Why do you think this is in the code?, What would happen if members did not follow this rule?"
2. **Discuss ways members can make additional rules.** Connect discussion of club rules to the code of conduct. "The 4-H Member's Code of Conduct is for all 4-H members in this County."

Do you think our club needs to have any more rules?" If ideas are presented let the club president lead the discussion. Suggestions should be presented as motions and voted upon at the next business meeting. Let members know that they can always discuss rules they feel should be changed or added. Using a suggestion box might be helpful for members who seldom speak up at meetings.

2. ***Eliminate temptation.*** When members are busy and having fun they are not looking for ways to "get in trouble." So, plan ahead to eliminate "down time" - portion out the supplies and arrange equipment before members arrive; ask the recreation leader to bring some puzzles or brain teasers on days when you know some members will finish their activities before the majority of the group; keep ideas in mind of ways members can help each other or tasks that need to be done for the group before the next meeting, etc. As you identify ways that individuals test the rules or push the boundaries think of ways to eliminate the things or situations that create temptation for those individuals.
3. ***Catch 'em doing something good!*** Keep alert for helpfulness, generosity, kindness and other good things your members do and say. Then thank or compliment the member directly but "matter-of-factly" - "Katie, it was very nice of you to show Jim how to..." - While bolstering Katie's self-esteem you are also sending the message to others that the way to get attention is to do something good.
4. ***Do more listening than talking.*** When an individual is acting out or there is conflict between members, those involved are in a heightened emotional state; they can't "hear" what you say. Follow these steps:
 - a. Separate the member(s) from the group (s/he doesn't need witnesses or a jury).
 - b. Calm the situation by speaking softly - have member(s) look at you, not the group.
 - c. Find out what happened but place the emphasis on discovering why it happened.
 - d. Create a sense of responsibility without placing blame.
 - e. Help member(s) recognize the potential consequences of the action. Try to use questions - "What would happen if..." - to lead the thought process.
 - f. Help member(s) decide how to handle a similar situation in the future. Again, guide the thought process without prescribing the solution. When children decide for themselves how they should behave they are more able to exercise self-discipline. If you dictate you put yourself in the role of disciplinarian.
5. ***Consult with parents when behavior problems persist.*** Use tact and sensitivity when talking with parents about their children. Here are some do's and don'ts:
 - a. ***Don't*** inform the member(s) that you intend to talk to the parents - it may be taken as a threat.
 - b. ***Do*** request the parent's assistance - "I hope you can help me solve a problem I've been having during 4-H meetings."
 - c. ***Do*** present the facts, but ***don't*** use labels (troublemaker) to describe the child's behavior.
 - d. ***Do*** explain the behavior management techniques you have tried and the child's response.
 - e. ***Don't*** tell the parents what they should do, but ***do*** ask if there is anything they can do to help and if they have any suggestions for you.

Use Ceremonies to Build Cohesiveness Among 4-H Members

Participation in ceremonies produces a sense of kinship among members of an organization ("we believe in the same things and we're in this together"). Depending on their nature, ceremonies may also foster teamwork, reinforce expectations, proclaim an organization's values to the general public or provide recognition to members. Four ceremonies commonly used by 4-H clubs are the Installation of Officers, Tool L-6, the New Member Induction, Tool L-7, the Presentation of Colors (flags), Tool L-8, and the 4-H Candle Lighting Ceremony, Tool L-9.

Evaluate Meetings Regularly and Take Action When Problems Arise

After the group has been meeting for 4 to 6 months take a close look at how things are going. First question yourself using Tool L-10, Room to Improve Your 4-H Club Meeting. Have you been doing what it suggests? Next, use Tool L-11, Lesson for Evaluating Your 4-H Meeting and Tool L-12, 4-H Meeting Checklist during one of your regular meetings.

Schedule a special meeting with all leaders, officers and perhaps some parents to summarize and analyze the data. Follow this procedure:

1. Use a clean copy of the checklist to tally "yes" and "no" responses.
2. Based on the responses, answer these questions:
 - Are we providing enough opportunities for individuals to make contributions?
 - Are we making everyone feel good?
 - Are 4-H'ers learning anything?
 - Do we use group involvement strategies in the meeting?
3. Next, decide what can be done to improve meetings? Who will do it?

If you have more "yes" responses than "no" responses you should feel good. "No" responses indicate a need for better planning or implementation of meetings. This process of evaluating the meeting should be done two or three times a year.

Even though every effort has been made to keep things running smoothly, problems will occasionally arise. When they do, it is important to address them as soon as possible, before they get out of hand. The key to effective problem solving is identifying the cause. If you don't know why the problem exists you are likely to be merely "treating the symptoms" rather than "curing the disease." Tool L-13, Troubleshooting 4-H Club Problems, describes some common 4-H club problems, lists possible causes and suggests alternative solutions.