Creativity and Cloverbuds
Working with the Youngest 4-H Members

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What Are Cloverbuds?
"Cloverbuds" are the youngest children in the 4-H program. Because youth mature at different ages, Cloverbuds are classified by grade level rather than age. A Cloverbud in the New York State 4-H program is a child who is physically, emotionally, and educationally developed enough to be in kindergarten through third grade.

A Different Kind of Audience
The average age of Cloverbuds is five to eight years old. Many people feel unqualified to work with this audience, but if you have had limited experience working with this age group, relax: it is a wonderful and refreshing developmental level to work with. From this material you will learn to develop or enhance skills that will help make your job working with this audience a delightful experience that you will cherish for a lifetime.

Not Just a Group Leader But a Teacher
Youth in this developmental stage are constantly learning. You will need to be an effective group leader and teacher. This is not meant to scare you away from your role as a staff member, 4-H leader, or volunteer but to make you aware of the level of respect these children have for you and what they expect of you.

Interaction
Certain patterns of interaction apply to both adults and children. Because most of the interaction in the Cloverbud program takes place in small group settings, we will look specifically at this type of interaction.

When in a group setting, there are four basic components of interpersonal relationships:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Communication and Interaction Rate</th>
<th>Social and Emotional Interaction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Task Behavior</td>
<td>Outcome or Goal Attainment</td>
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The group leader can
- stimulate and challenge the communication and interaction rate.
- channel interaction in a positive way. Group leaders must be sensitive to the social and emotional "baggage" each of us brings to interpersonal settings.
- direct task behavior so as to either increase or decrease creative energy. Leaders can affect creativity and stimulate the group's potential.
- set a group's tone or level of expectations and have a significant impact on the outcome or goal attainment.
Key Characteristics of Successful Groups

If groups are to maintain a healthy atmosphere and survive, they must possess certain key characteristics:

Values: Group members must share some common identity and some commitment of values.

Norms: The group must have rules to coordinate its activity and enough feeling of solidarity to stay together to complete the task.

Leadership: Group members must be able to exercise enough control over their membership to be effective in reaching their common goal.

Resources: Group members must have or be able to generate the skills and resources necessary to reach their goal.

Children's Needs

Every person has needs, regardless of age. It is recognized that when people's needs are met they are happier, better adjusted, have higher self-esteem, and are more creative.

Children need
- to belong and feel accepted. Belonging to a group helps young people grow. Children's feeling of personal worth is based on what others think of them.
- to feel safe and welcome. If children trust the adults and the youth they are with, they will feel physically safe in their environment and emotionally secure that their ideas and work will not be criticized. Avoid putting children in situations of potential embarrassment, shame, or failure.
- to feel independent. Healthy youth are eager to learn to be independent of parents, teachers, leaders, and relatives. Youth show their independence through impatience with adults. Children need to be given the opportunity to make up their own minds.
- to achieve. Youth want to know that their effort was worthwhile and appreciated. Activities should allow for success. Keep ability levels in mind to avoid frustration and minimize the potential for failure.
- to have new and different experiences.
- affection, approval, and love. Young children need to know they are wanted, needed, and valued.

Children's Self-Esteem

When dealing with young children you must develop a keen sensitivity to and understanding of self-esteem. There are three general conditions of self-esteem that everyone experiences:

Sense of uniqueness

Everyone wants to feel
- there is something special about them.
- that they know or can do something that no one else knows or can do.
- that other people think they are special.
- that they are creative and imaginative and have the opportunity safely to express their creativity.
- respect for themselves.
- affirmed for what they are rather than for what they are not.

Sense of uniqueness is increased if children are
- helped to understand what makes them special (personal characteristics, skills, affiliations, achievements).
- given a wide variety of ways to express themselves (writing, speaking, drawing, dancing, sports).
- praised for things they value about themselves.
- not ashamed of characteristics they do not have control over.
- in an environment that provides positive recognition of a wide variety of their personal attributes.

Sense of connectedness

Everyone wants to feel
- related in an important way to people, places, and things.
- identified with a group of people.
- connected to a past heritage.
- satisfied about the things they feel a part of.
- that the people or things they feel a part of are well thought of by others.
- comfortable with their bodies and trust them to work well.

Sense of connectedness is increased if children
- have many important connections with people, places, and things they value.
- experience satisfaction from their connections.
- see that the people and things they feel connected to are valued by other people.

Sense of power

Everyone wants to feel
- competent.
- that they have the resources to demonstrate competence.
- that they have the opportunity to use their competence to influence important circumstances in their lives.

Sense of power is increased if children
- believe they can do what they set out to do.
What Makes a Good Teacher? A Toolbox for Successful Teaching

A good teacher is one who is not only qualified to teach but one who can motivate students to learn. The following tools can help you become a successful teacher:

**Courage**

Don't be afraid to take risks; children respect this. Don't be afraid to try something different. When the outcome is unknown, everyone learns, even the teacher!

**Fun**

Allow for play, humor, and fun in the learning environment. Children need to learn to play in order to learn to work. Humor, fun, and playfulness create a safe environment for children. Play is the real work of childhood.

**Spontaneity**

Allow children (and yourself) to be spontaneous, curious, and original. This stimulates motivation. Take advantage of unforeseen educational opportunities.

**Creativity**

Stimulate children's creativity. Be outrageous and novel to capture children's attention, create enthusiasm, and increase spontaneity.

**Ambiguity**

Learn to tolerate ambiguity by accepting something that is not 100 percent correct. Help direct children to a more correct answer. Accept their best effort.

**Disorder**

Learn to tolerate disorder so as to help stimulate a creative and fun environment. Make sure youth understand that after disorder, there is a need to clean up any mess and get things back into order. This teaches learned responsibility.

**Daydreaming and imagination**

You don't need to stimulate a child's imagination; you only need to provide privacy, resources, context, and opportunity for imagination and creativity to find an outlet. “It's like going to the movies in your head!”

**Respect**

Don't allow criticism of a child's imagination or creativity. Demand respect for it!

**Be yourself**

You can't fool children. They instinctively know if you are being genuine.

Honor yourself

People who respect themselves usually respect others and get respect in return.

Informal vs. Formal Education

By now you are probably saying, “Relax! Be yourself! Have fun!” That's easy for you to say!” Well, it's true. We are giving you this information to make you think and to have something to refer back to if you need ideas, help, or support. Learning to be a good teacher takes time. To help imagine yourself as a good teacher, just close your eyes and remember when you were in school. Which teachers did you consider to be good ones? Why? Now imagine yourself doing the things that made them good teachers.

The 4-H program is an informal educational environment. It's okay to have fun and be yourself. Don't be afraid to be different—enjoy it! Not being afraid to be different is the underlying foundation to creativity. The 4-H program has a tremendous amount of flexibility, no set curriculum, and no principal or board of education watching over your shoulder.

Exploratory Learning Model

**Explore**

Apply Reflect

Educators and leaders are vital in creating enthusiasm and helping youth grow and develop in a positive learning environment. Research documents that exploratory, experience-based, action-oriented learning has the greatest long-range impact on learners.

Explore an activity. Youth explore and learn when they are involved in a hands-on activity.
- Observe
- Communicate
- Organize

Reflect on the activity. Youth reflect on an activity when they can share their thoughts about it.
- Compare
- Relate
- Ask reflective questions.

Apply the activity. Youth need to apply what they have learned to everyday life.
- Infer
- Apply
- Ask questions or put youth in situations where they must apply what they have learned. The more applicable it is to their everyday life the more likely they are to retain the information.
Mottoes to Use When Working with Youth

Youth development through positive life experiences
Learning + fun = positive self-esteem
We are here to have fun. If we do well besides, then we had more fun!
When we get into a difficult situation, take one step back and ask the question, What is for the good of the youth?
Set clear-cut expectations. Both youth and adults will usually live up to expectations that are clearly defined and understood by all.

Conclusion
Remember that you, as the teacher/leader, are key in creating enthusiasm and helping the youth grow and develop in a positive learning environment.

Also remember that you
- are teaching lifelong skills to these youth.
- need to question yourself because the way a child looks at or thinks about something may be light years beyond your mind-set.
- shouldn't be narrowly focused.

Most important, remember that the most creative people are children and those that never lose the playfulness of youth.

References

For additional information
4-H Clover Kids. An educational program for children five to seven years old. Sponsored by University Extension and developed by Missouri State 4-H faculty, 1987. Publication no. LG 4811.

For the New York State 4-H Cloverbud policy, contact Ron Jones, New York State 4-H Program Leader, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Roberts Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

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