

Good sportsmanship important for kids and adults

If you ask parents why they bring their children to the 4-H Program, why they encourage, cajole, put up with and work alongside their kids in 4-H, most of the time they answer that the values of 4-H match what they want their children to learn - honesty, hard-work, responsibility, team-work, citizenship, and so on...

And then the fair comes. Sometimes the ideas of competition, winning and written rules cloud or mix up those values and objectives. Many adults think of competition in terms of boxing or football. Participants go head-to-head and toe-to-toe against their opponent. The contest is often brutal, with injuries expected. Generally the event isn't a contest that builds friendships.

Instead, in 4-H we ask that competitive youth events be viewed in terms of golf or track. The runner or golfer competes against their earlier performance, their knowledge, and against the "course".

If the adults in 4-H encourage members to "play the course" instead of "beating their competitors", it can be ensured that your child will try to do his or her best, still have friends after the contest and act out the values that first brought you to the 4-H Program.

Many adults think of winning in terms of the final score kept by the officials or the amount of money paid.

Instead, in 4-H we ask that winning be viewed by the achievements and the learning that takes place during the process while getting to the finish at the fair.

If the adults in 4-H don't look for the approval of the judge as the measure of the finished project and point out and approve of the member's personal progress before the competition ever starts, then, less pressure and stress during the show will bring fewer tears of disappointment and feelings of failure.

Many adults think following the rules means looking for gaps that might give an "edge" over less-experienced competitors. A "minimum compliance" attitude looks for how far the rules can be stretched and still remain legal.

Instead, in 4-H we ask for a "maximum compliance" attitude. We expect our members to rise above the minimum. The motto "Making the Best Better" applies directly. A truly ethical person looks for the spirit of the rules and applies that spirit to their behavior. 4-H wants



youth and adults to know the rules, apply the 4-H philosophy - then exceed the basic requirements. And if that cannot happen, personally withdraw themselves rather than ask for special favors or violate the ideals of the program.

Following is a checklist for adults involved in 4-H:

- Teach Sportsmanship by example - don't just talk the talk, but walk the walk too.
- Be honest about your child's skills and the quality of their fair exhibits - have realistic competitive expectations. Poor show performance isn't always someone's fault - sometimes it just happens.
- Applaud for you child AND all the others too. Show appreciation to those who deserve it-including those who don't win.
- DO NOT boo, heckle, make rude remarks, or insult anyone. That includes rival clubs, youth, adults, judges and administrators. This is just plain good manners.
- Be polite during shows. Be quiet

or applaud when it is appropriate. Remain until the end of the event - don't walk out because you are disappointed or your child just finished. Those in the last class deserve an audience too.

• Take the things that happen with grace and good temper. Accept that the judge (not you) has been hired to evaluate, and that they may make a decision that does not match yours. Learn from them.

• If you truly feel a wrong has been done, submit concerns and suggestions in writing with your signature. Object in a mature way. Enjoy the program knowing your good attitude helps model the capable, fair and generously competitive behavior that is one of the goals you were seeking when bringing your child to 4-H.

Sections above were taken from "Sportsmanship for 4-H & FFA Parents and Supporters" (1995) by Chris Warburton, and "Horses, Kids, and Ethics" (1997) by Jeff Goodwin.



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