COMMUNICATION

Communication is a key element in the success of any organization. Communication builds relationships. 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 both parties 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 Leaders & Parents
  - Teaching your 4-Hers a skill, helping with projects
  - Reminding your 4-Hers/parents of meeting dates, supplies needed, etc.
  - Informing 4-Hers/parents of upcoming county-wide events
  - Assisting 4-Hers in preparing for the 4-H fair (filling out exhibit tags, etc.)
  - Helping 4-Hers and parents complete 4-H member registration forms
  - Training club officers
  - Recruiting parents to assist with club communication with the local Extension office
  - Receiving training from 4-H staff
  - Reading 4-H newsletters
  - Completing and submitting paperwork
  - Requesting educational materials and information about the 4-H Program
  - Volunteering to assist with county, state and regional events

⇒ Communicating with other 4-H Volunteers
  - Participating in 4-H Volunteers meetings
  - Serving on advisory and program committees
  - Training a co-leader/teen leader
  - Asking for/lending moral support
  - Sharing ideas informally
  - Attending leader 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 county or statewide 4-H advisory committees or programs
**TYPES OF COMMUNICATION**

It is important to know that there are many ways to communicate. The two main types of communication are verbal and nonverbal.

**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 engaged in one of these activities:

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

Keep in mind when working with 4-H members 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**

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

**USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

- **Be Active:** Social media should be social. Engaging with others can be rewarding, when done constructively. Sometimes it is better to not engage too.
- **Be Respectful:** Social media is a unique social environment. Be respectful of others’ views, regardless of how unartfully or inappropriately communicated.
- **Think Twice:** Social media is a public platform. Consider whether you would make a statement on social media at a conference or to the media before posting.