

Ohio State University Fact Sheet

State 4-H Office

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Appreciating Diversity in 4-H

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"I want to appreciate you without judging; join you without invading; invite you without demanding; leave you without guilt." -Virginia Satir.

"The self grows out and expands only in the presence of respect and acceptance that it can feel."
-A. Maslow

Diversity is acknowledging, understanding, accepting, valuing, and celebrating differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and public assistance status.

Diversity is valued in youth development programming because it is both a good preparation for handling the diversity of adult life and also important in the present.

OSU Extension's nondiscrimination policy states: All educational programs and activities conducted by The Ohio State University are available to all potential clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, sex, age, handicap or Vietnam-era veteran status. This statement is a reminder of the law and to be responsible in programming.

Appreciating and valuing diversity, however, is more than a legal requirement or concept. As an attitude of openness, it involves the emotions and commitment. Positive experiences with different people is important in producing a level of comfort in the midst of diversity.

Leadership by Example

4-H members learn to accept individuals and value diversity when they see attitudes modeled by adults and youth leaders who advise them through their projects and activities. Youth will notice even subtle signs of prejudice or nonacceptance in the actions or speech of adult leaders.

Leadership in Programming

Dealing positively with diversity is a value transmitted by example. Specific 4-H programming efforts can enhance this attitude through understanding. These include: experiences, education, and problem solving.

Experiences

4-H programming provides an array of opportunities that can build experiences for 4-H members and volunteers.

Exchanges and camping with other 4-H members bring those involved, in contact with people different than themselves. Differences experienced may include socioeconomic, racial, religious, or a host of others. When such experiences are for several days, they provide opportunity for significant personal growth.

Some 4-H programs are aimed specifically at multi-cultural experiences and growth. 4-H international exchange programs and global awareness camp are examples.

Service activities often bring 4-H members into contact with people different than themselves. These individuals may include: the aged, those with different or limited abilities, and the homeless.

When these experiences take place in an atmosphere of openness, interest and sharing, they provide a setting for growth in understanding. The opportunity to process experiences and feelings in a nonthreatening setting contributes to a positive outcome. When a difficult or negative experience occurs, leaders must be ready to assist participants to process without generalizing, stereotyping, scape-goating, or name-calling which underlie bias and prejudice.

Education

Experiential education programs and lessons are available. As an example, Ohio 4-H Cloverbud Activities Program encourages young members to think about the disabilities that people have and how best to respond. Several national curricula, including: Many Faces, One People, the SPACES curriculum, and Teaching Tolerance, all provide in-depth series of activities that allow people to explore their feelings and reactions to diversity. These, or other resources may be obtained through the OSU Extension office.

Problem solving

The best growth in understanding sometimes comes after a problem arises. Effective leaders monitor the reactions of their group and watch for teachable opportunities to help the group grow through reflection of an experience. Effective leaders watch for these teachable moments to address intolerance, insensitivity, or the cruelty that sometimes comes from prejudice or misinformation.

There are three steps in correcting insensitive and offensive behavior in a group. These three steps include the following.

Step 1: Stop and reflect: Create an opportunity as soon as possible to have a group discussion of the incident. Ask individual members of the group to state what happened. This is not a time for blame or shame. It is best to stay away from motives or judgements. However it is important to be honest about what did happen.

Step 2: Understand the offense and the values: Assist the group members to answer the question: "Does this action show equal respect for all and is it consistent with the 4-H pledge.

Step 3 Taking corrective action: Help the group to list options for handling similar situations in the future and see if there is any remedial action that would be helpful.

References

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