

New
Jersey **4-H**

Leader Training Series



Working With Teen Leaders

Many 4-H teens want to become leaders in the 4-H program so they can

- share what they know
- learn new skills or
- assume new responsibilities.

In many counties, you will find teens as co-leaders of 4-H clubs with adults, as judges of county 4-H events, as summer camp counselors, as 4-H fair division chairs, as well as leading county events and being role models for other 4-H youth. (*See Appendix H – NJ 4-H Teen Leadership Project.*)

As the adult partner in one of these leadership experiences, you can provide the direction and support that will help the teens reach their goals with a feeling of success. Teen leaders may discover their new leadership opportunities through their own 4-H club, the county teen council or as part of a county event committee, such as the fair, awards event, or public presentations.

Who Is Eligible?

Youth enrolled in grades 8–13 are eligible to become teen club leaders. They are selected (by adult volunteers) because of their interest in or knowledge of the projects of the club and their desire to develop leadership skills. They are usually good teachers and enjoy working with children.

Teens involved in a county teen council are also considered teen leaders. In addition to working with younger members, they also concentrate on designing their own programs and working cooperatively to accomplish goals as a group of teen leaders.

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What Can a Teen Leader Do?

Teens can take responsibility for many tasks such as

- organizing a club business meeting,
- teaching members specific project material or skills,
- leading recreational activities,
- organizing portions of a county event,
- designing and implementing a community service project.

Since each teen leader has unique interests and abilities, duties will be customized and vary from person to person.

What Supervision Is Needed?

Teens are encouraged to take on as much responsibility and authority as they can comfortably handle, but they must never be left alone with the children. An appointed 4-H leader must be present at all times. The adult leader may be in an adjoining room, or working with a nearby group of youngsters, but must be handy and supervise the activities of the total group.

What are Some Coaching Skills I Could Use?

Getting to Know Each Other. No matter what the task, it's best to start by getting to know both the strong points of the teen as well as any area where skills will need to be developed. You, as the adult coach and mentor, can encourage trust by sharing which skills you plan to develop in this teamwork experience.

Some teen leaders will have as much experience with the 4-H club activities as the adult. Others may need a lot of orientation to this new situation. By getting to know each other, the give and take of ideas and suggestions can begin.

Welcoming New Ideas Encourage new ideas and their development by the teen leader by asking questions such as: "Have you ever done that before or is this something new you would like to try?" "How would you carry that out?" "What effect do you think that would have on the club members?" "What kind of assistance would you need?" "What things might not work as planned and what would you do?"

By avoiding phrases such as, "We don't do it that way," and "That won't work!" the enthusiasm and energy created in a partnership will grow. When the teen suggests something that has been a failure in your past experience, look for a piece of it that can be incorporated into another method so that the teen feels

included in the decision-making process and you feel confident as the coach.

Sharing Responsibilities Plan each person's role in each meeting: who will make announcements, who will lead recreation, who will advise the officers of new developments, etc. Advance planning and discussion of each step while planning, will prevent the automatic dominance of either leader.

Consider the needs of the club as well as the needs and interests of the leaders when planning. Neither partner, teen or adult, wants to feel that tasks were dropped on them for which they are not prepared.

The teens you coach can grow into great leaders by learning new skills, testing their limits and abilities and discovering how to handle challenging responsibilities. As teen leaders mature they can be given increasing responsibility and independence. The timing of each additional duty should be decided cooperatively by both teen and adult leaders.

Delegating Delegation has two elements—responsibility and authority. Ideally, the elements are both assigned to the same person. When delegation is used properly, one person (often the teen leader) is given responsibility for a task, and the authority to implement or direct it.

If you as the adult leader find it difficult to transfer authority to a teen leader, check to see if your planning is thorough. When carefully planned and implemented, sharing responsibilities can become a growth opportunity for the teen leaders, and a liberating experience for you.

When transferring responsibility to a teen, it is important for you to choose words that form a request rather than an order. By considering each opportunity from the teen leader's perspective, you will easily delegate in a way that shows respect for the teen's feelings and abilities.

Supporting Each Other Your role as coach and mentor of the teen leader includes letting the members know that the teen is an official 4-H leader, and that the members are expected to listen, follow directions and cooperate. The teen leader is responsible for generating some of this respect but needs your consistent support.

**Celebrate Your
Success as an
Effective Team**

As the adult volunteer you may quietly support ideas and suggestions made during club discussions or project enthusiasm for the projects of the teen leaders. You can also serve as backup for unanticipated occurrences. As you demonstrate these support skills to the teen, you may discover similar support being provided for you by the teen.

Congratulate each other on each step of progress made and goals achieved. Take time to celebrate the success of your club and also your partnership. Thank each other for support and assistance given. Then start to make plans for meeting the next challenge.

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