K-3rd Grade

Parent/Partner Guide
Dear Parent,

Welcome to the 4-H K-3rd Grade Youth Program. We are delighted that you selected this program to assist your child in mastering physical skills, and in broadening their self-understanding, and social and decision-making skills. This program also utilizes planned activities for parents and their youth to strengthen positive family interactions. The 4-H program provides learning opportunities for youth to use their head, heart, hands, and the health in constructive, experiential learning.

A strength of 4-H has always been the involvement of parents in programs. There are many 4-H projects which parents and their children can enjoy together in their home. These at-home activities can be short-term, such as identifying the parts of an insect, or long-term, such as starting and maintaining an insect collection. Whatever the activity, the home is a natural learning center which allows many opportunities for constructive, wholesome, and meaningful interactions between parent and child.

With your assistance and encouragement, your child can learn many new things and develop a positive self-concept through their 4-H club meetings and activities. As a parent, you and your child can increase communication and interaction while having loads of fun with the K-3rd Grade Program!

Sincerely,

Shirley Rouse McNeil, Ph.D., 4-H Extension Specialist
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Experiential Learning

The mini-projects that your child selects, and their 4-H club activities, will introduce your child to experiential learning - an educational method which accelerates skill development for children ages 5 to 8. Experiential learning takes place when youth are involved in an activity, share the results with others, look back at it critically, determine what was useful or important to remember, connect the experience to real-life situations, and use this information to perform another activity.

Some steps in experiential learning will not be problematic for most of the children, while some steps may require assistance. Children 5 and 6 should be able to complete an activity and share it. Children 7 and 8 should
be able to go steps further, and analyze, generalize and process the activity.

Parents must provide assistance when the children are introduced to experiential learning and becoming accustomed to using it. As you work with your child, using the parent activity guides and other curricula, make sure that you ask your child questions which will stimulate thinking about negative as well as positive reactions to experiences. Help them analyze what took place during an activity, assist them in connecting the experiences to other real-life situations, and help them apply the activity to other situations or events.

Use every opportunity to ask children the following questions about their learning experiences:

- What happened during the activity?
- What was most difficult?
- What are some of the problems you had with this activity?
- If you did this activity again, would you do anything differently?
- Did you learn anything about yourself through this activity?
- How does this activity relate to other things you do?
- How will you use what you learned in other situations?
- What will you do differently in the future as a result of what you learned in this activity?

Cooperative Learning Strategy

Although there are three basic teaching strategies for effective learning, a cooperative teaching strategy is usually most effective in work with children 5 to 8. The other two teaching strategies are individualistic and competitive. The individualistic learner is participating alone. The child works against an established criteria to show achievements. In competitive learning, youth work against each other to establish who is best. They are striving to win. Competition encourages the highest levels of individual achievement, but does so by creating win-lose situations where there will be only one or a few winners, and many losers. Losing is difficult, devastating, and unacceptable to the average child between the ages of 5 and 8. Losing is disastrous for a child between 5 and 8 who has low self-esteem. Children are unable to separate the negative feelings brought on by loss, because they cannot think or reason abstractly. They are unable to recognize that the loss does not mean that they are losers, but that their product might not have met the standard. Because many young children are not equipped to deal with losing, competition for children 5 to 8 is discouraged.

In the cooperative teaching strategy, youth work together to achieve common goals or products. A cooperative teaching strategy is best for children between 5 and 8 because it encourages the development of social interactions skills, which are important growth experiences for this age group.

Cooperative behaviors create working environments which promote:

- Encouragement
- Nurturing
- Positive interdependence
- Face-to-face interaction
- Individual accountability
- Improved performance

Curricula Design

K-3rd Grade Program curricula utilize educational methods which encourage active participation by the youth and their parents. All the curricula take children through the experiential learning steps: doing the activity, sharing the experience with others, analyzing what was learned, and applying it to other areas of their life. Each activity in the project activity guides has specific objectives - life skills with immediate relevance which also help children develop self-confidence.
Each curriculum has three parts:
1. Step I Mini-Project Book
2. Step II Mini-Project Book
3. Project Activity Guide

Step I is designed for children 5 and 6. All Step I Mini-Project Workbooks include a list of learning objectives and specific life skills the project nurtures. They also contain coloring exercises, and other activities which require little reading and writing. At the beginning of the book is a “Fun Things To Do” planning worksheet, and, on the back page is a “Fun Things I Did” worksheet for youth to complete with parental assistance. This worksheet can serve as a record of the things that the children learned. Assist your child in starting the project by scheduling a planning session to help them complete the worksheet at the beginning to the project book.

Step II is designed for children 7 and 8. The Step II Mini-Project Workbooks are a little more advanced than Step I. As with Step I workbooks, Step II workbooks include a list of learning objectives and targeted life skills, coloring, fun exercises and activities. Step II workbooks usually contain activities which require some reading and writing. Children 7 and 8 will probably not need as much assistance in completing the preliminary and concluding worksheets in the Step II workbooks, but parents are nonetheless encouraged to help their children complete these records. Children may also need assistance as they complete the exercises and activities in Step II Mini-Project Workbooks. Ask them periodically if they understand the books, and read the “Notes to Parent” section in each project book.

Working With Children 5 to 8

The 5-year-old is interested in a health and social studies themes which focus on the routines of bathing, brushing teeth, saying good-night, and going to sleep. Such themes connect home, school, and subject areas in a way that the five-year will find irresistible.

The 6-year-old is interested in exploring the lives of artists and their styles of painting or drawing. They learn primarily through their senses. This theme is tactile and visual, and brings the child up close to the work of great artists.

The 7-year-old is interested in comparing fairy tales and folk tales from different cultures and eras. This theme broadens youth’s understanding of difficult cultures.

The 8-year-old is interested in comparing the lives of artists and their styles of painting or drawing. They learn primarily through their senses. This theme is tactile and visual, and brings the child up close to the work of great artists.

For each Step I and Step II subject, there is a complementary project activity guide, designed to extend the subject matter to experiential learning. Each project activity guide has background information and a list of materials needed as well as the learning activities per se. The project activity guides include exercises for children 5-6, and exercises for children 7-8. The activities are designed for small groups and should be completed in about fifteen to twenty minutes. It may be necessary to divide the activities into two periods if they become too long. They include activities, and suggested activities. These activities are appropriate for use in large or small group settings.

The 7-year-old is interested in comparing fairy tales and folk tales from different cultures and eras. This theme broadens youth’s understanding of difficult cultures.

The 8-year-old is interested in a conceptual theme; an examination of the history of fashion in the 20th century, for example. Children at this age are especially interested in looking at changes in clothing, and how clothing is designed, made and marketed. They are also interested in social issues, such as using animals to make clothes. They have a fascination for how things work.
Creating the Learning Environment for Children 5 to 8

Working with children 5 to 8 is an exciting, active, and stimulating experience. As meetings and activities take place, it is important to keep in mind the developmental tasks and needs of children in this age group. As you create the learning environment, consider the children’s eagerness to try new things, their need for physical activity, their desire for the affection and attention of adults, and their inability to accept failure.

To ensure that learning activities are positive learning experiences, try to achieve these goals at each meeting:

- One parent (or older youth) present for every five children, so that it will be possible for each child to receive individualized attention.
- Activities don’t last too long. (And try to alternate quiet activities with those that require movement and active participation).
- Give children opportunities to use pencils, scissors, small utensils, and other tools to help them develop and control their small muscles.
- Active recreational activities also encourage muscles. Active recreational activities also encourage muscle development.
- Provide an atmosphere in which children feel comfortable asking questions, thinking critically and utilizing their sensory skills. Let them help identify and locate resources.
- Say something positive to each child at each meeting to bolster their self-confidence. Parents, other adults, and older adults, and older teens have a tremendous influence in helping youth feel good about who they are and what they can do.

Recognition for Children 5 to 8

The K-3rd Grade Youth Program promotes and encourages cooperative group learning. Both group and individual recognitions for achievements are recommended.

Recognition of achievements doesn’t have to be a grand event. However, it should occur very often — preferably at each group meeting or gathering. In recognizing the K-3rd grade youth on an individual basis, remember that youth at this age are developing skills and abilities at different levels and times.

The most successful form of recognition for children 5 to 8 is immediate. Try to give each child a positive response and reinforcement for the activities and social skills accomplished. Other forms of individual reward and encouragement which children 5 to 8 enjoy are memorabilia (caps, t-shirts, stickers, etc.), recognition in local newspaper and opportunities to share and explain projects to other groups.

If you decide to use ribbons for recognition, remember to use ribbons of the same color, and discourage competitiveness among the youth. Youth will quickly notice different colors and the meaning or significance of varying colors.

Group recognition is important for K-3rd Grade clubs. Group recognition encourages children to cooperate, and offer assistance to
one another. It also helps youth become interested in cooperating and sharing group success. Group recognition will help children realize that cooperation benefits them individually as well as collectively. Make sure that children understand why their group is being recognized, so behaviors will be reinforced.

Group recognition should be less frequent than the individual awards. Group dynamics and processes take longer to develop. Quarterly awards are appropriate, and children 5 to 8 respond well to trips, certificates, and memorabilia (caps, t-shirts, etc.).

**Evaluating Programs for Children 5 to 8**

Evaluations tell you how successful the club process and educational materials are in accomplishing their goals. They also will help you know if your team goals were accomplished, and if new goals need to be established.

Self-evaluation is the most meaningful type of evaluation for young children. It is important to ask the learners directly what they learned and then to listen attentively. This allows you to determine whether the intended concept or skill was learned, how the youth perceived their learning, and which misconceptions might need to be corrected. Other effective evaluations for children include worksheets and products that they complete during their club meetings and at home.

Periodically, throughout the year and at the end of the year, the effectiveness of the K-3rd grad youth cooperative group processes and curricula should be evaluated. After the evaluations are completed, the results can be used as a guide to help redirect the processes and the curricula, or a guide to continue using the same strategies. Other uses of the results include expanding the image of the program, gaining community support and sponsorship, and recruiting new members.

Contact your 4-H Youth Development Extension agent for copies of evaluation forms. The Cooperative Behavior Rating Scale is designed to be used as a pre- and post-test measure to identify cooperativeness demonstrated by club members and to identify how well the group is performing. The Curricula Critique Form can be used in determining the usefulness of the curricula based on the use of the experiential model, age-appropriateness, and subject matter content. The Parent Interaction Form is designed to report parent/guardian and child project interactions, and the amount of time spent with youth on their projects.

**Moving on to a Junior 4-H Club**

The K-3rd Grade Program introduces children to group dynamics, as well as cooperative and experimental learning. Children participating in this program will be very interested in continuing to participating in group events and activities in their communities. A junior 4-H club is the next step of adventure for an 8-year-old. The projects that children start at the Step I and Step II levels are available for them on the next level.

In the 4-H program, each age group (5 to 8, 9 to 11, 12 to 15, and 16 and over) has a set of specific developmental learning needs which are addressed through curricula, events and programs.

Discuss moving the children into a junior 4-H club with your county 4-H Youth Extension agent before the children turn nine years of age, to start preparing them for their next level of 4-H experiential activities, events, and programs.