



# Understanding Youth *Guide for Leaders*



## Focus On Leadership

Mississippi 4-H is designed to assist all participants in developing leadership, citizenship, and life skills that will enable them to become life-long learners and active citizens in their communities. Mississippi 4-H is an informal, practical, learn-by-doing educational program for participants ages 5 to 18, from rural and urban areas and from all racial, cultural, economic, and social backgrounds. 4-H is also fun!

You can be a more effective 4-H leader when you understand the characteristics of young people. You should know what to expect of the 4-H members in your club or group. Think about ways you and 4-H experiences can help them develop into responsible, productive adults.

Children develop physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually. All of these areas influence each other and together make up the whole developing child. How young people grow and develop at different ages is often referred to as “ages and stages.” But each child is unique and does not grow and develop the same exact way. However, the order of development is generally the same. For example, 5-year-olds do not have the physical, cognitive, and social/emotional ability to compete in a livestock contest, but 14-year-olds probably do. Sixteen-year-olds have different social needs than 10-year-olds. Having knowledge of the characteristics and implications help you work with 4-H’ers.

## Characteristics of Ages 5 and 6

### *Physical*

- Energetic.
- Learn to cut with scissors.

### *Social*

- Like to play with other children; are generally sociable. Cooperate.
- Usually obey rules.
- Enjoy the process; end product not important.

### *Emotional*

- Desire affection and adult attention.
- See situations from own point of view.
- Learn self-control in groups.
- Begin “selective hearing.”

### *Intellectual*

- Need clear and simple directions.
- Have 10- to 15-minute attention span (if really interested).
- Learn best by exploring “real” materials.

### *Implications/What You Can Do with Ages 5 and 6*

- Help the children work together on 4-H Cloverbud activities.
- Plan activities with materials that are hands-on.
- Provide instructions both visually and verbally.
- Keep activities short in length.
- Engage the children in cooperative-learning activities.

- Plan activities that include large motor skills (jumping, running) and that introduce fine motor skills (writing, cutting, and drawing).
- Encourage sharing and listening.
- Provide opportunities for adult-child interaction.
- Plan activities that are broken up by physical movement/exercise.
- Let the children know you care.

- Provide physical activities to meet their skill levels.
- Give clear descriptions about how to be involved in 4-H Cloverbuds.
- Help them develop friendships.
- Encourage them to collect things.

## **Characteristics of Ages 7 and 8**

### ***Physical***

- Usually grow slowly and steadily.
- Like repetitious activities, such as bouncing a ball or jumping rope.

### ***Social***

- Want to join clubs.
- Think about the future and other people.

### ***Emotional***

- Sensitive to personal criticism and get upset easily.
- Want to help with decisions.
- Fear school failures and peer rejection.
- Friends are important; family is still tops.
- Begin to empathize with others' feelings.

### ***Intellectual***

- Develop a sense of right and wrong.
- Assert individuality.
- Are very concerned about the rules.
- Love to collect things.

### ***Implications/What You Can Do with Ages 7 and 8***

- Provide encouragement in noncompetitive settings.
- Give them simple responsibilities and the option of choosing their activities.
- Select activities that stimulate their curiosity and creative abilities.
- Explore future career possibilities.
- Promote active involvement in 4-H Cloverbuds.
- Be sensitive to their needs and promote social activities with other children.

## **Characteristics of Ages 9 to 11**

### ***Physical***

- Experience steady increases in large muscle development, strength, balance, and coordination.
- Quite active with boundless energy.
- Sexes mature at differing rates. Girls typically mature faster than boys, and some may be entering puberty.
- Increasing in manual dexterity, small muscle coordination.

### ***Social***

- Generally see adults as authority.
- Follow rules out of respect for authority.
- Feel loyal to the club. Enjoy code language and passwords.
- Identify with same sex group and may prefer to be with members of the same sex.
- Prefer working in groups in cooperative activities.
- Expand and use reasoning skills to solve problems, negotiate, and compromise with peers.

### ***Emotional***

- View right behavior as "obeying" rules set by those in power.
- Accept parent/family beliefs.
- Admire and imitate older boys and girls.
- Developing decision-making skills.
- Taking some responsibility for own actions.
- Emphasize similarities between self and friend(s).
- Beginning to question parental authority.
- Look to adults for guidance and approval.
- Need involvement with a caring adult.
- Find comparisons with the success of others difficult and eroding of self-confidence.

### *Intellectual*

- Vary greatly in academic abilities, interests, and reasoning skills.
- Have increased attention span but have many interests that change rapidly.
- Are beginning to think logically and symbolically. Still prefer concrete ideas.
- Judge ideas in absolutes: right or wrong, fabulous or disgusting, and such. Do not tolerate much middle ground.
- Are learning to use good judgment.
- Want to use their skills to explore and investigate the world.
- Have interests in collections and hobbies.
- May express feelings through creative writing.

### *Implications/What You Can Do with Ages 9 to 11*

- Offer activities that involve a lot of physical movement.
- Avoid planning programs that require children to sit still for long periods of time.
- Avoid field trips that require long periods of time sitting in a car or bus.
- Incorporate craft projects in the program. They will be enjoyed now that small muscle structures are better developed.
- Involve youth in generating ideas and options about the activities they will participate in and the decisions the group needs to make.
- Offer a variety of short-term experiences that help them explore many interests.
- Provide active experiences in their world, such as nature walks and short trips to significant sites.
- Provide short periods of time to talk about their thoughts and reactions to activities to help them recognize what they have learned from their experiences.
- Make sure rules of participation are posted and understood by everyone in the group and that the rules are monitored and enforced fairly.
- Offer lots of opportunities to do things in groups, and provide feedback on successes in relationship skills.

- Help them form groups/clubs with common interests. Collecting ball cards, stamps, bugs, rocks, buttons, and such could be common ground.
- Incorporate uniforms, badges, and such that identify the group when appropriate.
- Ask older teens to take leadership roles in working with this age group in teaching, coaching, and other assistance roles.
- Make sure everyone in the group knows and understands the rules for participation.
- Monitor the rules fairly, holding all children equally accountable.
- Provide correction quietly, one-on-one, in a caring and consistent manner.
- Use curriculum materials designed to help participants explore their own uniqueness and accomplishments.
- Plan group activities that emphasize cooperation.
- Avoid comparing children to each other.
- Use comparison of past and present performance to promote growth.
- Plan many activities that involve 4-H'ers in same-sex groups.

## **Characteristics of Ages 12 to 14**

### *Physical*

- Exhibit a wide range of sexual maturity and growth patterns between genders and within gender groups.
- Experience rapid changes in physical appearance.
- Growth of hands and feet, nose and ears may be faster than arms and legs and face, causing concern for appearance and clumsiness.

### *Social*

- Interested in activities involving the opposite sex; learning to live with opposite sex.
- Looking more to peers than parents. Seek peer recognition.
- Seek acceptance and trust.
- Tend to regard sex in a depersonalized way.
- Search for adult role models; may belong to fan clubs.

- Tend to reject ready-made solutions from adults in favor of their own.
- Question authority and family values.
- Be patient with grooming behaviors that may seem excessive.
- Involve them in planning what the group will do.
- Provide opportunities to question ways of doing things in the program and to explore values and beliefs of the organization.

### ***Emotional***

- Compare themselves to others.
- Concerned about physical development and emerging sexuality.
- See themselves as always on center stage.
- Working on forming a sense of continuity between inner and outer self.
- Body changes can set up situations of great embarrassment.
- Concerned about social graces, grooming, and being liked by friends.
- Abandon view of parents as all powerful.
- Strive for independence, yet want and need parents' help.
- Need information for making decisions.
- Seek privacy from parents/adults.
- Want to be part of something important.
- Ask questions to encourage predicting and problem solving. "What if this doesn't work?" "What could happen if we did this?"
- Involve them in finding solutions to problems or issues that arise in the group.
- Offer more complex games or involve them in more complex plays in sports.
- Encourage teens to take part in teen councils and planning boards.
- Involve the group in setting rules for the group or the program.
- Involve the group in planning field trips away from home.
- Talk with teens about the public figures they admire.
- Provide opportunities for teens to interact and feel at ease with members of the opposite sex through planning groups, parties, fundraising activities, and such.
- Plan activities that do not compare one young person to another. Help teens compare their accomplishments to their own past performance and standards.
- Be careful not to use comments that could be interpreted as "put downs" or "in-the-face" behaviors.
- Give teens a chance to choose when and if they are "on stage."
- Avoid singling anyone out in front of others for either compliments or criticism.
- Provide opportunities to master skills.

### ***Intellectual***

- Find justice and equality to be important issues.
- Think abstractly and hypothetically.
- Developing skills in the use of logic. Understand cause and effect.
- Can solve problems that have more than one variable.
- Can imagine consequences.
- Can think about thinking.
- Ready for in-depth, long-term experiences.
- Have moved from fantasy to realistic focus on their life's goals.
- Challenge assumptions.
- Want to explore the world beyond their own community.
- Curious about the environment.

### ***Implications/What You Can Do with Ages 12 to 14***

- Listen to their fears and worries about their sexual development without judging or trivializing.
- Provide honest information for sexual questions and issues.
- Plan activities that do not emphasize physical ability.

### **Characteristics of Ages 15 to 18**

#### ***Physical***

- Concerned about body image.
- Exhibit smaller range in size and maturity among peers.
- Tend to have realistic views of limits to which body can be tested.

### *Social*

- Tend to romanticize sexuality but are moving toward a more realistic understanding.
- Search for intimacy.
- Test sexual attractiveness.
- Make commitments.
- Can commit to follow through with service.
- See adults as fallible.
- Desire respect.
- Apt to reject goals set by others.
- Renegotiate relationships.
- Want adult leadership roles.

### *Emotional*

- Desire respect.
- Beginning to accept and enjoy their own uniqueness but still seek status and approval of peer group.
- Look for confidence of others in their decisions.
- Develop their own set of values and beliefs.
- Take on multiple roles.
- Gain autonomy.
- Are thoughtful and reflective.
- Can see self from viewpoint of others.
- Take fewer risks.
- Can initiate and carry out their own tasks without the supervision of others.
- Search for career possibilities.
- Desire a role in determining what happens in their world.

### *Intellectual*

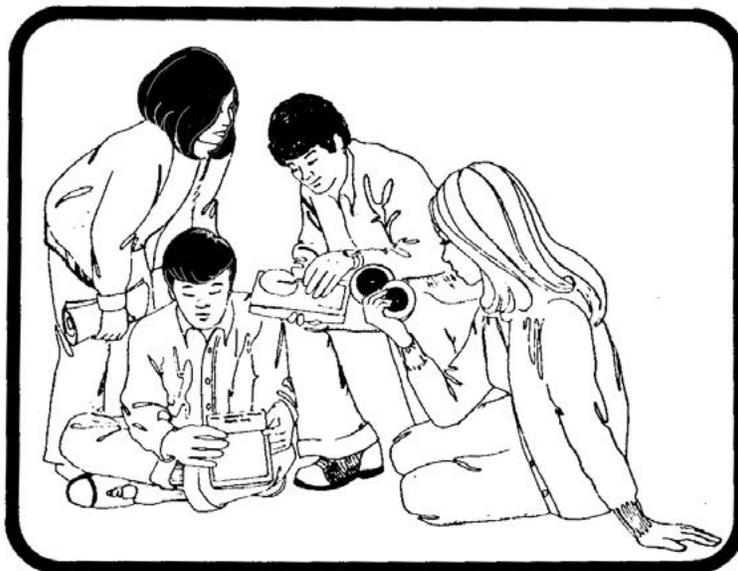
- Mastering abstract thinking. Can imagine impact of present behavior on the future.
- Enjoy demonstrating acquired knowledge.
- Can consider many perspectives of a given issue.
- Develop theories to explain how things happened.
- Create new possibilities from information.
- Lose patience with meaningless activity.

### *Implications/What You Can Do with Ages 15 to 18*

- Provide experiences that help young people enjoy their newly claimed bodies; activities that focus on health and fitness, nutrition, grooming, etiquette, hairstyles, exercise, and such.
- Offer advanced opportunities to perfect physical skills: canoeing, climbing, biking, yoga, martial arts, and dance.
- While older teens look like adults, they still need adult support.
- Plan some group time when they can discuss ideas and abstract concepts such as current political issues and current issues within the organization.
- Involve them in planning and carrying out group goals and activities.
- Involve them in advisory groups as full partners/ members.
- Offer activities that explore vocational or career possibilities. Help them find internships that may provide skills in specific career interests.
- Provide activities of their choice that support social interactions of the opposite sex—dances, parties, work groups.
- Provide opportunities to take on leadership roles—leading groups, mentoring younger people, speaking to community groups. Involve them as spokespersons for the program.
- Help them find meaningful ways to contribute their services to community service campaigns, political issues, ecological causes and such.
- Plan activities that allow teens to try different roles.
- Provide information and feedback that help them envision positive futures for themselves.
- Involve teens in planning and conducting their program.
- Provide respectful support and guidance.
- Focus interactions between teen members and adult leaders on adult-young person partnership relationships.
- Help teens identify the skills and accomplishments they have experienced while involved in the organization.

## Summary

The 4-H volunteer is an important person to the 4-H member. Your actions toward a member may affect how the member feels about herself/himself. Remember that each individual is unique. Accept each member as a person of worth. Be aware of the special concerns of the growing young person. Use the opportunities available through 4-H to help your members embrace the 4-H essential elements of belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence, allowing them to become contributing citizens in their community and state.



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