



4-H VOLUNTEER TRAINING SERIES

4-H CLOVERBUDS PROGRAM: 4-H FOR YOUNGER MEMBERS

The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension 4-H Youth Development Program uses a learn-by-doing approach to help youth gain the knowledge and skills that they need to be responsible, productive citizens. This mission is accomplished by creating safe and inclusive learning environments, involving caring adults, and using the expertise and resources of the University of Florida and the nationwide land-grant university system. Florida 4-H programs offered to children ages 5–7 are called 4-H Cloverbud programs and are a component of the Florida 4-H Youth Development Program. The goal of the Florida 4-H Cloverbud program is to offer age-appropriate, fun, and exploratory learning experiences for children in the 5–7 age group.



Figure 1. 4-H Cloverbud programs offer fun and age-appropriate learning experiences

Credits: Lisa Henson

Who Is a 4-H Cloverbud?

Membership in 4-H is open to all youth beginning at age 8. At the discretion of the State 4-H Program Leader, a 4-H program may choose to offer additional programming for children in kindergarten through

third grade (NIFA, 2008). In Florida 4-H, Cloverbud programs are available to children ages 5–7. The official age guidelines state that children may be considered a Cloverbud member based on their age as of September 1 of the current 4-H year (Florida 4-H, 2015).

The Importance of Development in Early Childhood

Human development consists of growth and development from birth to death. Therefore, early childhood experiences should not be overlooked (Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Research has shown that early childhood experiences do make a difference in the future life direction related to a child's learning, health, and well-being (Hertzman, Clinton, & Lynk, 2011). The social and emotional abilities in the early years of life consist of the following:

- Building close relationships with peers and adults
- Experiencing and expressing emotions in an acceptable manner
- Exploring and learning from the environment

Such abilities are building blocks for the future achievements and well-being of a child (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). In addition, interactions with influential adults—such as parents, caregivers, teachers, and club leaders—can impact a child's development by determining the type of environment that the child inhabits and experiences (Thomas, 2005).

Early childhood is a vital stage of life in which programs that lead to positive development are important.

There is significant evidence supporting the positive effects of early childhood development programs in increasing readiness to learn and preventing delay in mental development (Anderson et al., 2003). Therefore, involvement in a positive youth development program,

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such as the 4-H Cloverbud program, during early childhood has great benefit for the future outcome of children. Furthermore, 4-H adult volunteers and staff are charged with creating a setting that serves to promote active learning as a result of consistent and engaging interactions for children participating in 4-H Cloverbud programs.

The Purpose of Early Childhood Programs in 4-H

Considering the importance of early childhood development, 4-H provides programs for 5- to 7-year-olds that give children an opportunity to grow and discover the world around them. Children in this age group are classified as being in the early childhood stage of development, because they have distinct learning styles and needs as they grow. They share the following characteristics, which should be considered when working with this age group:

- Learn best when physically active
- Are self-centered and begin to experience empathy
- Begin to learn social skills like making new friends
- Are naturally curious and eager to try new things
- Have short attention spans
- React with sensitivity to criticism; don't fully understand failure (Tomek and Williams, 1999)

It is important to recognize the different characteristics and qualities of each developmental stage. Furthermore, programs and activities should be within the intellectual, social, and emotional capabilities of youth in the particular age group (Tomek & Williams, 1999). For these reasons, the Florida 4-H Cloverbud program is designed to best serve children during these formative years.

National 4-H Headquarters Philosophy

The philosophy presented by National 4-H Headquarters states that the purpose of the 4-H Cloverbud program is “to foster the development of life skills that are essential for the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical maturation of kindergarten through third graders by providing a unique educational opportunity” (NIFA, 2008).



Figure 2. Hands-on activities are important to engage Cloverbuds in learning

Credits: Lisa Henson

Objectives for Cloverbud Programs: Fun, Exploration, and Learning

Children in this age typically have short attention spans; therefore, the practices of fun, exploration, and learning help to manage behavior issues and to foster learning. Children at this age are also curious and want to try new things, so it is important to offer a variety of different activities. Program participants should be able to discover a lot of new ideas rather than sticking with one topic for an entire year. Finally, the most important component of the 4-H Cloverbud program is to make sure activities are fun and engaging. When working with this age group, remember that children enrolled in the 4-H Cloverbud program should have the opportunity to do the following:

- Develop positive attitudes about learning and investigating new ideas
- Experience new ideas through exploring various age-appropriate project areas in a group setting
- Learn basic skills that help children accept different people and ideas
- Gain basic knowledge in STEM, healthy living, and citizenship

- Form positive and ongoing relationships with caring adults



Figure 3. Children in the 4-H Cloverbud program can develop positive attitudes about learning and investigating new ideas

Credits: Billie Mallory

Best Practices and Limitations for Cloverbud Programs

In order to best meet the developmental needs identified in early childhood and to meet the objectives of this special program for Cloverbuds, it is important that 4-H faculty and volunteers implement the following best management practices for teaching and interacting with this age group.

Youth Adult Ratios

The UF/IFAS Extension 4-H Youth Development program recommends a supervision ratio of one adult for every six children in order to provide an optimal learning environment for this group (University of Florida, 2014). When providing some activities, such as day camps and field trips, a ratio of one adult to less than six children may be a more appropriate and safer practice.

Suggested Delivery and Teaching

4-H Cloverbud programs should be group learning experiences that are led primarily by an adult leader or volunteer. In addition, teen volunteers are an excellent way to lend support and assist children with tasks such as cutting paper, distributing materials, and giving specific

instructions. Having a positive adult mentor who shows a child that they care and who will invest in his or her life is crucial to implementing quality 4-H programs. Because children at this age are just beginning to build close relationships with others, it is important that adults remain engaged while children complete their activities. However, do not confuse this with adults completing the task for a child. The goal is for children to explore and try new things on their own with the support and encouragement of a caring adult.

Cooperative Learning Experiences

When working with the 4-H Cloverbud program, possible group learning experiences that you can offer are special day camps, separate clubs for 5- to 7-year-olds, and small groups within your community 4-H club that meet apart from the larger group. These programs should offer activity-focused instructions and exploratory learning. Rather than focusing on one single project, this is a time for children to discover and sample all the various projects that 4-H has to offer. Then, once they become older, they will have a better idea of what projects they would like to pursue on a long-term basis.

Experiential Learning

Children and youth learn best when they experience something and reflect on that experience. Children at this age are concrete thinkers, and they relate best to the present. For this reason, emphasize the “doing” part of an activity and keep reflection based in the present or short term. While you certainly want to reflect on the activity, any discussion on the application of principles learned should be very brief and not extend beyond the present. Questions you ask of children will begin with “what.” For example, a “doing” activity to teach students the parts of the USDA MyPlate (choosemyplate.gov) may be followed by a reflection with a few questions about different types of fruits and vegetables that could be added to their plate. A brief application would only extend to ways to add fruit to tomorrow’s breakfast. For more information on experiential learning, please refer to the *4-H Volunteer Training Series: Learning by Doing + a Little Bit More* (Levings, 2014).

Limitations

Remember to always encourage cooperation and not competition for those children enrolled in the 4-H Cloverbud program. Limitations for 5- to 7-year-olds include no elected leadership roles, no formal business meetings, and no entries into contests. Furthermore, Cloverbuds may not participate in a large animal, ATV, or shooting sports activity (NIFA, 2008). Sometimes it is a perception that Cloverbuds are physically able to handle a large animal, but it is important to remember that adults cannot predict what an animal will do and cannot control the actions of another child's animal. In addition, competition that includes being "elected" to a leadership position or that includes exhibiting an item to be judged or to signify the completion of a "project" is not appropriate for this age group. On the other hand, encourage opportunities for shared responsibility—such as leading the pledge, setting out snacks, or passing out supplies—and for the chance to showcase their work such as crafts and posters that were developed as part of a group learning activity.

Recognition of Cloverbuds in 4-H

According to the Florida 4-H Awards and Recognition program, it is appropriate to provide recognition for participation, progress toward goals, and cooperation for this age group. Children in the 5–7 age group should not engage in competitive experiences or be ranked on the standard of excellence for an activity or something they have created. They may not understand and may instead confuse the ranking and placing of an exhibit with their own merit and worth (*Volunteer Training Series: Florida 4-H Recognition Program*, 2014). Using recognition for participation in activities is a way to let 4-H members feel like they belong. Simple ways for recognizing participation include receiving a T-shirt for attending a day camp or receiving a green participation rosette for presenting a demonstration. Remember that this award is for participation and not for meeting a standard of competition. "Cloverbud members are not eligible to receive premium funds as a result of exhibition. They may receive participatory ribbons but should not receive competitive purple, blue, red, or white 4-H ribbons" (NIFA, 2008).

Furthermore, progress toward a simple goal is another way Cloverbuds can be recognized. Learning to set an age-appropriate goal such as riding a bike alone, trying a new food, and learning the parts of a chicken are all simple goals for this age group. As a volunteer working with children, remember to offer encouragement and be specific in praise; congratulate children when they achieve small steps as they strive for success. Remember: the small accomplishments that it takes to reach an overall goal should always be celebrated as being important.



Figure 4. Children in the 5–7 age group should be recognized for participation, progress toward goals, and cooperation
Credits: Deanna Black

It is important to teach children cooperation before introducing competition and individual learning. When children learn to work together in a cooperative learning environment, they gain the ability to appreciate the ideas and differences of others (see EDIS document 4H370, *Volunteer Training Series: Recognizing Young People* [Bender, Tesdall, & Levings, 2015]). Ways that you can recognize your Cloverbud group for cooperation include submitting group pictures to the local newspaper or 4-H newsletter, having a pizza party for completion of a group activity, and celebrating a group community service effort. Remember to recognize the whole group at times and not only the individual contributions.

How to Get Started

Volunteer leaders should contact their local county 4-H agent about implementing cooperative learning

opportunities in the Florida 4-H Cloverbud program. 4-H Cloverbud members will be enrolled in the 4-H Online enrollment system where they will choose an exploratory project.

Curriculum and Resources

For current curriculum and resources available to 4-H Cloverbud programs, please reference the Florida 4-H Curriculum Clearinghouse (florida4h.org/programs/Florida_4-H_Curriculum-Clearing-House.pdf). Other supported resources can be found in the Iowa 4-H Clover Kids Toolkit (Welch, Hoyer, Levings, & Tallman, 2011) at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/page/iowa-4-h-cloverkids-toolbox>.

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