

Making the Best 4-H Clubs Better

Intended Audience

- 4-H club members

Lesson Objectives

Club members will:

- Understand the importance of creating a welcoming environment for new members and families
- Establish member-mentor dynamic duos to encourage new members to become actively involved in the club

Time: 20 minutes

Equipment and supplies

- Pencils
- Resource:
 - “4-H DD’s (Dynamic Duos)”
- Handout:
 - “4-H Dynamic Duos Partner Profile Questionnaire”
- Small welcome gift for new members (pencil, candy, etc.)

Do ahead

- Review lesson
- Gather equipment and supplies
- Copy handout, one per member
- Assign pairs to work together

Members + Mentors = Retention

BACKGROUND

Look around at your next 4-H club meeting. Notice all of the new members and families in the room and prepare yourself. Research shows that more than half of these new members will not still be in the room a year from now! In fact, fewer than 50% of all first year 4-H members continue into a second year of 4-H. When asked, many of these youth say that they didn’t feel welcome, couldn’t understand what they were supposed to do, or didn’t know anyone at the meetings.

As advisors and experienced club members, we can create a welcoming environment in our club and help new members and families get and stay involved. Keeping our current members is called retention.

One retention strategy used successfully in some clubs around the country is matching new members with older, more experienced member mentors. These mentors look after their assigned partners, sitting next to them at meetings, contacting them if or when they miss a meeting, helping them understand how the meetings work, and helping them with their projects as needed. Knowing someone cares is often all it takes to get a member successfully through his/her first year and happily into a second one. Why not try matching new members with mentors in your club?

Prior to the meeting, be sure to review the “4-H DD’s (Dynamic Duos)” resource material. For the activity to be most effective, every member will need to be paired with someone else. *Plan ahead to create these dynamic duos in your club.*

WHAT TO DO

Activity: 4-H DD’s (Dynamic Duos)

Give the older, more experienced member of each pre-assigned pair the name of his/her partner. Ask each of these older members to stand and call their new partner to join them to complete their questionnaires together. Allow five minutes for



Sources

- Kustka, Linda. UWEX. "Creating a Welcoming Environment", <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/wi4hpublications/files/2015/10/Creating.pdf>
- Day, Trisha and Greg Lampe, UWEX. "Building Bridges – Reaching People Through Communication", pp 18-21. https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/wi4hpublications/files/2015/10/8_TeachResPg01_16.pdf

the older, more experienced member to interview his/her partner and complete the questionnaire, and then switch, giving the younger, less experienced member five minutes to interview his/her partner and complete the questionnaire.

Now, go around the room, asking each pair to stand and introduce each other, giving one interesting fact they discovered about their new partner during the interviews.

Ask members to keep the completed questionnaire with their 4-H paperwork, so they can easily stay in touch as needed between meetings. Ask mentors to give their partner a reminder call prior to the next meeting and ask the pairs to sit together at the next meeting if possible. Review the *Additional Ideas* on page 19 of the resource and encourage the pairs to give some of these a try, as well!

TALK IT OVER

Reflect:

- How did taking time to get to know another club member make you feel?
- Did this activity help create a warm and welcoming environment at the meeting?

Apply:

- Refer back to these pairs at the next meeting. Ask members who got a reminder phone call (or text) to raise their hands. Commend their mentors! Ask pairs seated together to raise their hands. Again, encourage all of the pairs to sit together at the next meeting.
- Create opportunities at upcoming meetings for the pairs to work together: assign pairs to bring refreshments, work on record books, lead a game or song, and so on.

Prepared by Carolyn L. Belczyk
Extension Educator
OSU Extension Adams County

Reviewed by Ohio Valley EERA
4-H Youth Development
Professionals
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