



Club Leader Suggestions for the First Year Member

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No one comes to 4-H meetings, at the first of the year, with more excitement and anticipation or leaves 4-H, after several months, more disappointed than a first year 4-H member. Studies show us that approximately 40% of 4-H members drop out during their 1st year in 4-H.

Why 4-H members drop out of 4-H...Kirk Astroth, director of Arizona 4-H youth development, reported in the *Fall 1985 Journal of Extension*...that 4-H members left due to one or more of the following factors:

1. Lack of understanding of the 4-H program, its goals, activities, events, and time commitment
2. Moved
3. Never felt welcome or part of the 4-H group
4. Conflicting time commitments
5. Project groups didn't meet after and/or frequently enough to satisfy children

The initial interest is present in first year members and their families, it is our challenge to cultivate that interest to ensure that they have positive experiences and remain in the 4-H program. Through efforts made by an entire club or 4-H group making the new members feel welcome, part of the group and important; first year members will have a rewarding experience.

What can we do to keep first year members interested? The listing below has some ideas to get your group started.

Special Assignments

New Family Coordinator

This leadership position might be both a county and club level position. This person along with the club leader, project coordinator, and activity coordinator would make up the club leadership team. The new family coordinator and a committee (if appropriate) can brainstorm lots of ideas for members and family participation.

Big Brother or Big Sister

Each new member should be assigned another member of the club as a big brother or big sister. This member should be instructed to visit with the new member after the club meeting to see if they had a good time and if they have any questions. They should also call the new member prior to the November meeting to make sure the new member remembered the meeting. Big brothers or sisters will also feel its important to be present if their little brother or sister is dependent on them (Hint: Second year members make excellent big brothers or sisters.)

Special Activities

Initiation Ceremony

Initiation ceremony for first year members--have the ceremony at the November meeting. Let the new members know that they should be able to recite the 4-H pledge. Use initiation ceremony in LG801 or develop a personalized ceremony. Have the club order a 4-H button, or 4-H member button for each new member. The evening refreshments could be a new member reception and should include parents and family members of the "New 4-H Member".

Special Activities for First Year Members

First year members can be involved quickly by asking them to: lead pledges, give project reports, assist with setting up the meeting room, bring and serve refreshments, assist the recreation leader with their activity and even assist with the meeting program.

Project Groups for First Year Members

Many members join because they want to "make something." New members will want to consider the "kick off" project. This project is designed to begin immediately after 4-H enrollment is completed in October and should be finished by Christmas. Always encourage project leaders to meet soon and get started while the enthusiasm is high.

Special Recognition

Recognition Night family celebration

Take time at this special event to recognize new families and members. Recognition can range from a simple introduction to a special gift to the family.

First Year Member (Rookie) Award

Announce in the fall a special award for the top first year member. Announce what criteria will be used for selection. (Attendance at meetings, participation in club or county activities, recruiting additional members, etc.

Your club can generate other ideas, just remember a well balanced club will provide appropriate activities for every level of 4-H membership. Have your club officers make this a priority for the club to increase membership and retention. The youth will have wonderful ideas to celebrate with new members and on how to get them involved.