

Maryland Policy Information for a Clover Program

Age

Youth who turn 5 before the start of the 4-H program year (January 1) may join a 4-H Clover Club.

Enrollment

Leaders will complete a 4-H member enrollment form for the 4-H Clovers. On the form the club name and number should be that of their 4-H club (e.g., Trail Blazers 4-H Clovers, Busy Bee 4-H Clovers). The only project listed on the form for these members should be 4-H Clovers. All other information will be completed in the normal procedure. The 4-H enrollment form is to be completed with all 4-H Clovers being reported as members of an established 4-H membership unit and listed in the Clover category. 4-H Clovers membership is designated by the project code assigned to the 4-H Clovers program. Forms can be obtained from the County Extension Office.

Curriculum

The 4-H Clovers curriculum is designed specifically to meet the needs of the 5- to 7-year-old youth. These curriculum materials include a variety of learning experiences and activities. Some relate to traditional 4-H programs and projects. Others involve topics that are important to the development of the 5- to 7-year-old youth. Curriculum materials are designed around the developmental criteria for 5- to 7-year-olds outlined in the developmental information section of this document. The curriculum also indicates appropriate means for recognizing the various accomplishments of 4-H Clovers. Maryland 4-H will be providing standard Clover curriculum for use across the state. "Clover" is the only project in which this age group enrolls and participates.

Participation in 4-H Activities

4-H Clovers may attend 4-H camp if it is a day camp. Clovers should not participate in activities with overnight outings.

Fair. One of the biggest questions about Clovers regards their participation in the county fair. If Clovers exhibit at the county fair, a separate division for Clovers should be developed. Again, all exhibitors should receive a participation ribbon and should not be competitively evaluated. Interview judging is encouraged. Junior leaders can be used to conduct the interviews. **Clover members do not participate in animal shows, fitting and showing contests, or other competitive events at the fair. Clovers may study animals as a part of their learning experience, but should only bring photos of the animal, a notebook, story, photo story or some other display of their learning experiences. No live animals are to be exhibited.**

Officers

The 4-H Clovers groups do not have elected officers like President, Vice President or Secretary. Clover groups should be informal and focused on fun and active learning-not on parliamentary procedure or business meetings run by officers.

Fundraising

Clovers should not participate in fund-raising activities.

Competition and Clovers

Children ages 5 to 7 need to be involved in activities and learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate. While these children are full of energy and have a willingness to learn, educational materials need to be designed for their specific abilities, needs and interests. In addition, activities and learning experiences should be geared to the an informal setting offered by 4-H. Research indicates that competition at this age is not developmentally appropriate. It is important that 5- to 7-year-olds are involved in activities where the risk of failure is minimized and the opportunity to experience success is maximized. Educational programs for 5- to 7-year-olds should be focused on cooperative learning. Participation and learning of the child should be the ultimate goal.

Youth under age eight are not permitted to participate in 4-H or 4-H sponsored peer competitive events or activities. Peer competition is defined as two or more individuals or groups working to achieve a mutually exclusive goal; when the goal is achieved by one, the other(s) fail to achieve the goal. A 4-H or 4-H sponsored event is one that uses 4-H in the name of the event and/or the 4-H name and emblem in promoting the event. Examples of competitive events include judging contests, exhibits, shows, and other performance activities. It is not the intention of this policy to prevent youth under age 8 from participating in informal games at 4-H gatherings or meetings (e.g., a family volleyball game at a 4-H picnic, a game of dodge ball at a 4-H meeting, etc.).

Policy Rationale: The mission of 4-H is to help youth acquire knowledge, develop life skills, and form attitudes that enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society. Positive self-esteem plays a major role in accomplishing this youth development mission. Younger children, who are forming a self-concept, look to others around them for positive reinforcement. Children at very young ages tend to think in concrete and absolute terms, and if they lose in a competitive event, they may see themselves as failures. Adults and older youth are able to separate themselves from the outcomes of competition. Young children have not yet reached this developmental stage.

Research indicates that children under age 8 are not developmentally ready to participate in structured peer competitive events. As noted, children of this age find it hard to lose, at least in part, because they have difficulty putting their losses into perspective. They need to explore many interests and develop competencies and skills in a supportive, cooperative environment. Cooperative learning experiences must be introduced before competitive ones. The National 5 to 8 Curriculum Task Force has recommended against channeling 5- to 8-year-olds into narrow project areas or vigorous competition. Also, the "National Survey of Programs for Pre-nine-year-olds in 4-H" found that 73% of those states who had programs for youth under age 8 discourage or do not allow competition in their pre-4-H program.

In addition, competition takes the emphasis away from the process and puts it on the end product. Young children are fascinated with the process of accomplishing a task. Placing importance on the result rather than the process is in direct conflict with what is important to children in this developmental stage. The absence of competition reduces the importance of the outcome and frees children to simply enjoy the experience of playing and learning.

“It is the policy of the Maryland Cooperative Extension that no person shall be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of race, color, sex, religion, disability, age or national origin.”