



4-H Independent Membership Guidelines

While 4-H encourages participation in club settings to promote friendships and interaction with other youth and adults, for some youth, this is not always possible. **Independent 4-H members** participate in planned learning outside of a club setting. Their work is self-directed with guidance and support of parents and mentors. Self-study, home study, mentoring or shadowing with an “expert,” and whole families learning together are examples of 4-H independent membership.

Families and independent members are welcome to participate as part of the 4-H experience; however, the IRS and National 4-H Policies prohibit 4-H families or independent members from inclusion under the 4-H General Exemption Number as a tax-exempt entity. The IRS and 4-H Policies also prohibit independent members from raising funds for their specific family groups or members.

Just as the **8 essential elements of positive youth development** provide the foundation for a quality 4-H Club experience, they are central to the 4-H independent membership experience as well. To ensure that young people choosing independent membership have a 4-H experience of the highest quality they are required to sign an agreement annually indicating their commitment to:

- Identify an adult mentor to guide and support them in their 4-H project work. The individual chosen, other than a parent, must complete the official Maryland Cooperative Extension Volunteer Screening Process. All mentors must agree to the roles and responsibilities outlined in the 4-H mentor position description and attend training. The mentor should be someone other than a parent or guardian.*
- Develop skills in leadership, citizenship, communications, personal life management and knowledge through project work.
 - Complete one or more community service learning projects during the year.
 - Demonstrate their learning by giving a presentation or demonstration before a group (nursing homes, a 4-H club, church groups, afterschool programs).
 - Reflect on their learning by recording goals and submitting a year-end report to their mentor, using effective record-keeping skills.
- Share with their designated mentor six or more times throughout the year progress on goals and celebrate accomplishments.
- Abide by all city/county, state and national 4-H policies and recognize the authority of Extension staff to establish and enforce rules and policies.
- Contribute to the larger 4-H program by participating in county and state fundraising efforts; volunteering to lead or assist with 4-H committees, programs and activities; reading and responding to extension office correspondence; and remaining informed and current on 4-H opportunities, procedures and guidelines.

* Youth development research indicates that youth need 1-3 caring adults other than their parents for healthy development (Community Programs to Promote Youth Development, National Research Council (2002 p. 94-96) lists a number of research studies to support this; The Search Institute <http://www.search-institute.org/assets/MiddleChildhood.html> and Reclaiming Youth at Risk, 2002).