

DEVELOPING SPORTSMANSHIP AND ETHICS THROUGH 4-H DOG PROJECTS

The old saying that “honesty is the best policy” may not be the behavior for an increasing number of teens and adults. Findings in several studies indicate that many are willing to lie, cheat or steal to get what they want in society. If left unchecked, poor sportsmanship and lack of ethics will have a major long-term negative impact on youth, families and society.

Because of this alarming trend, 4-H is taking a strong position on teaching ethics and better sportsmanship in 4-H related activities. As 4-H volunteers and members, we have an opportunity to help develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior about sportsmanship and ethics. Sportsmanship and ethics are a “learned by doing” principle. People do not naturally grow up to be morally excellent or exercise good judgment. They become so as the result of lifelong personal and community efforts, and by the role models they are used to following. The measure of one’s true character is by what we are willing to do when we are sure what we do will never be found out. How is your character or what role model are you living before the eyes of tender and observing youth? That is a question that all youth leaders and parents need to ask themselves while nurturing and working with youth. Growing up has never been easy. Neither has parenting or teaching. But the challenges today are immense in what message we are sending. Are they accidental or deliberate?

What 4-H Volunteers Can Do

Sportsmanship and ethics can be taught by example from responsible volunteers. As 4-H volunteers we must: 1) demonstrate sportsmanship ourselves, 2) explain why these principles are needed, 3) provide orientation and practice on sportsmanship-like behaviors, and 4) continue coaching, encouraging, correcting and teaching youth and their families skills needed for long-term success, happiness, and satisfaction.

Sportsmanship Expectations for Youth

Sportsmanship is conduct becoming to an individual involving fair, honest competition, courteous relations, and graceful acceptance of results. The development of sportsmanship is an important part of youth development. In order to become self-directing, productive, capable adults, today’s youth must develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and aspirations of sportsmanship.

It is important that youth be fair and generous competitors, good losers and graceful winners. All participants in 4-H programs are expected to demonstrate some of the following elements of sportsmanship before, during and after their participation.

- 1) **Conduct:** Demonstrate and maintain high standards of personal behavior and conduct which become you as an individual and as a representative of your family, your club, your community and the 4-H program.
- 2) **Fairness:** Be honest and just. Observe and follow the rules. Do not cheat.
- 3) **Honesty:** Be truthful, fair and straightforward in everything you say and do. Do not lie or deceive people.
- 4) **Courtesy:** Be well-mannered in your conduct. Show respect and consideration for others.
- 5) **Grace:** Show kindness, favor and compassion. Treat people, animals and things kindly. If you are a winner, be happy but do not gloat, brag, act conceited or downplay your accomplishments.

Parent Responsibilities

The biggest area to work on building character in ethics and sportsmanship is at home with parent responsibilities. As parents of youth, here is a list of some things that you can do to help build these important qualities with your children.

- 1) Do not engage in unethical behavior; be honest.
- 2) Get a grip on the adult ego.
- 3) Don't jump to conclusions.
- 4) During your 4-H member's dog project year, do not allow anyone other than your youth to show his/her project dog at any type of dog show, including agility, field trials, rally obedience, etc., as well as fun matches. For Ohio State Fair exhibition this rule applies on or after April 1 of the project year. At 4-H dog shows, leave the professional groomers and handlers out of the picture. No one except the youth and family should lay a hand on the project in preparation for the show.
- 5) Support and be present with your children at events and activities.
- 6) Gracefully accept the results.
- 7) Show courtesy and kindness.

In summary, sportsmanship and ethics are important principles to teach at all 4-H activities, events and in the home. Helping 4-H members and families develop better sportsmanship and honest behavior will help youth be more successful in life. The example we set as adults in being honest, gracefully accepting results of competition, showing courtesy and kindness will go a long way to help send the right messages for youth to pick up and model.