

The 4-H Cloverbud Program: *What's it all about?*

Cloverbuds - Very Special 4-H Members

Cloverbuds, the youngest participants in the 4-H Club Program, are enthusiastic, curious, creative, robust and resilient young people who are growing physically, cognitively, socially and emotionally through a period of rapid and often uneven development. The 4-H Cloverbud Program has been designed to meet the very special needs of these five to eight year olds.

Each child develops on his or her own timetable and may outpace age-mates in one aspect of development while lagging in others. Therefore, it is very important that organized activities be tailored to the developmental level of the particular children who participate so that all can experience success - the magic ingredient that allows them to blossom. For this reason the 4-H Cloverbud Program, while focusing on the general developmental needs of five to eight year olds, also provides a wide selection of activities that enables 4-H leaders to choose those that are most appropriate for their own cloverbud members.

In addition to making a judicious selection of activities 4-H leaders also foster youth development by creating positive learning environments that focus on the strengths of their members and help them to meet their four basic needs: *belonging*, *mastery*, *independence* and *generosity*.

The 4-H leader helps cloverbuds to experience a sense of *belonging* by showing interest in them and what they do, actively listening to them and encouraging them to build on their innate abilities.

The 4-H leader helps cloverbuds to experience of sense of *mastery* by offering opportunities to take on new challenges, learn new skills and recognize ways these newly acquired abilities can be applied across various situations. Leaders also enable mastery by modeling and explaining that failure and frustration is not a disgrace but a natural part of the learning process - "If at first you don't succeed try, try again."

The 4-H leader helps cloverbuds move toward *independence* by creating opportunities for leadership and self-discipline, and by helping them to recognize the connection between independence and responsibility.

The 4-H leader helps cloverbuds to extend their *generosity* through service to others and by helping them recognize that it is "through giving that we receive."



The Purpose of the 4-H Cloverbud Program

The overall purpose of the 4-H Cloverbud Program is to foster the development of life skills (described below) that are essential for the cognitive, social, emotional and physical maturation of five to eight year old children. Specifically, this program aims to provide participants with opportunities to:

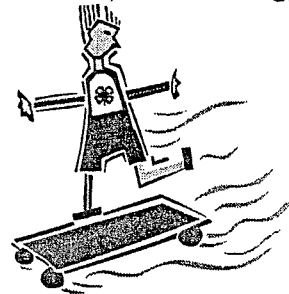
1. develop self understanding, social skills, decision-making skills, learning skills and physical skills;
2. gain knowledge in the sciences, literature, and the arts through the experiential (hands-on) learning process (see pages 12 through 14 for a more detailed explanation);
3. develop positive attitudes about learning;
4. develop on-going relationships with caring adults and older youth who serve as positive role models;
5. explore family and community relationships;
6. develop understanding of and appreciation for social and cultural diversity.

Life Skills for Cloverbuds

Life skills are abilities, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that must be learned for success and happiness. These skills are not learned all at once but are refined and reinforced throughout life. Even so, there are certain milestones that must be reached along the way before a child will be ready to meet the challenges presented in the next phase of development. For five to eight year olds, who will transition from middle to late childhood by the end of their 4-H Cloverbud years, it is particularly important to make major strides in the development of the five life skills described below:

1. **Self-understanding** - Each child is unique. Each has different interests, personality traits, skills, learning styles and temperaments. In order to expand and refine an understanding of "who I am," five to eight year olds need to try new things to test themselves, build their base of experiences and begin to master skills. A positive but realistic self-concept is the most important ingredient of emotional health. To foster its development, cloverbud leaders need to:
 - nurture creativity and curiosity;
 - provide positive and specific feedback rather than generalized praise;
 - provide correction quietly, one-on-one, in a caring and consistent manner;
 - help members identify their own successes;
 - help members to see and appreciate how they are alike and different from other people.
2. **Social interaction** - Between the ages of five and eight children increase their desire to be with other children. As they develop friendships with their peers they become less self-centered and their need to be connected to others in a group strengthens. Experiencing a warm feeling of belonging frees them to relate comfortably with others. To enhance this social development, leaders should:
 - organize small group activities through which cloverbuds can talk and work with one another;

- use dramatic play to help members understand how other people might feel or react;
 - provide opportunities for building communication skills, including listening skills;
 - help members learn how to cooperate, share and resolve conflicts;
 - take time to listen and visit casually with each young person.
3. **Decision-making** - The ability to make wise decisions and take positive action are key to the development of independence. Children need to know that they are capable of charting their own path and influencing others, but they also need to understand how their decisions affect themselves and others and be willing to accept responsibility for their actions. Appropriate leadership experiences help children learn the step-by-step processes of decision-making, recognize cause-and-effect relationships and develop a sense of responsibility. To initiate this learning process, cloverbud leaders should:
- create an environment in which it is safe to test decisions and make mistakes;
 - help children think about how things that are important to them influence the decisions they make;
 - give cloverbuds opportunities to lead simple tasks and then progress to more difficult ones;
 - encourage members to overcome obstacles on their own;
 - motivate youth to accept responsibility and praise them when they complete leadership tasks.
4. **Learning to learn** - We all learn in a variety of ways: through seeing and observing, manipulating materials and experimenting, listening and reading. Five to eight year olds are concrete thinkers. Ideally, they need real experiences on which to base their learning, but can expand their capacity to learn in other ways. Activities that involve the use of all five senses (or at least several of them) enhance learning. After working with the same group of children for a while leaders will be able to recognize their different learning styles and though guided reflection can help them to understand how they learn. When children are enabled to learn in their own way, learning becomes easy and is viewed as fun. This "learning is fun" attitude is the basis for life-long learning.
5. **Mastering physical skills** - Five to eight year olds are full of energy and need activities that are just that - **active!** Learning experiences that enable members to practice both small muscle (writing) and large muscle (ball catching) skills that can be completed successfully by beginners, will use up some of that energy while fostering physical development. When doing crafts, expect the work place to get messy and be aware that for this age group the process is more important than the product.

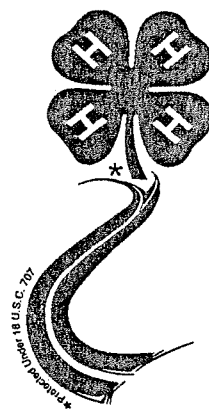


4-H Cloverbud Activities

County, state and national 4-H cloverbud activity guides are available for a wide array of activities that are categorized within eight broad program areas (See pages 30 through 32). The meeting plans included in these leader materials have been designed to foster the development of the life skills described above while teaching information and skills related to a particular program area. The activities are appropriate to the developmental level of this age group and they apply the 4-H “learning by doing” method. Most of the leader guides provide a selection of activities within an individual lesson so that leaders can tailor the meeting plan to the needs and interests of the members, the time available and the meeting place. The activities have also been “kid tested” - so, you can be sure they will work well. While you are welcome to incorporate your own ideas and use your own creativity, you are advised to rely on these pre-tested 4-H materials for the bulk of your club program.

Cloverbuds Now - 4-H’ers Forever!

The 4-H Cloverbud Program is a special part of Cooperative Extension’s 4-H Youth Development Program. Tailored to the developmental needs of five to eight year olds, it provides an exciting introduction to the 4-H club experience. Cloverbud leaders play a critical role in fostering the development of the youngest 4-H’ers as individuals and as 4-H members. When they move into the next phase of the 4-H Club Program they will be ready to take on the challenges of greater self-governance and longer-term project work. 4-H club opportunities will grow with them throughout their elementary and high school years. Many 4-H alumni become 4-H leaders as adults - once a 4-H’er, always a 4-H’er!



4-H Takes You Places

Cornell Cooperative Extension

☘ 4-H Youth Development