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Definition of a 4-H Primary Member

Primary members are youth between the ages of five and eight, enrolled in the 4-H program. Primary members are 5 years old by December 31st of the program year. Youth who turn 9 on or after January 1st must participate as a primary member until June 30th of the program year.

Why the 4-H Primary Member Program is Offered

Primary aged youth are impressionable and respond to exciting and creative activities. This is a critical stage in the development of the young child and an excellent time to enhance a child's learning experiences in self-perception.

Researchers estimate that children experience half of their learning before four years of age, another 30 percent before the age of eight, and only 20 percent during the remaining years of their education. Therefore, it is important to offer non-formal, exploratory programs focusing on the developmental needs of younger children.

Purpose of the 4-H Primary Member Program

The purpose of the 4-H Primary Member Program is to assist youth in becoming capable, competent, caring and contributing citizens.

The following practices guide the delivery of educational programs and activities for primary members. See [Primary 4-H Member Adult Volunteer Guide](#) for more information.

- Adult volunteers should provide open-ended activities that promote skills practice.
- Activities should focus on the process of doing things rather than the finished product.
- Activities should make use of participants' experience and encourage exploration, rather than written or verbal lessons.
- Participation for primary members should be limited to cooperative learning activities with no competition.

Approved Animal Projects for 4-H Primary Members

Approved primary member animal projects are dogs, rabbits, rats, cats, poultry, cavies, mice, embryology, bees, entomology, marine science, pygmy and Nigerian dwarf goats and therapeutic animal projects.





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Projects Not Available to 4-H Primary Members

The projects that not approved as appropriate for 4-H Primary member participation are shooting sports, large livestock projects and additional categories outlined in the [California 4-H Project List](#).

4-H Primary Member Fair and Show Participation

Fairs are open to primary members for exhibit only. The use of Danish and American systems of judging is not acceptable for use with primary members. Primary members should only receive recognition for their participation.

Primary members must exhibit in shows and fairs based on their age as of December 31st of the 4-H program year regardless of when a fair, show, or event is conducted during the calendar year.

Competition and Awards for 4-H Primary Members

Competitive events and activities are not appropriate for five- to eight-year-olds. Young children have a difficult time psychologically understanding winning and losing. When children lose, they may relate negative feelings to their self-worth and identity. Competition is almost always linked to external awards and approval. In competitive settings, children begin to define themselves extrinsically. Being defined as a winner or loser is a weak foundation for their developing self-concepts

- Primary members may not receive regular competitive ribbons purple, blue, red, or white 4-H ribbons.
- Primary members may be encouraged to complete the state approved [Primary Member 4-H Personal Development Report](#) with assistance from their adult volunteer, parents/guardians, or older members. This is the only record form for primary member use.
- Primary members cannot receive Star awards or participate in any other ranking systems.
- Primary members do not accumulate credits on the [Personal Development Report Form](#) that supports the star rank system.
- Primary members cannot receive premium or prize money.
- Primary members do receive a year stripe and pin for participation in a project. Project completion is not required.

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