



**Background:** This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) sheet was developed to aid 4-H YDP staff and adult volunteers in developing and providing incentives and recognition programs that are aligned with University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) 4-H YDP Policy, reflect current research on child development, and meet the needs of our youngest 4-H YDP members. As the characteristics and needs of children change as they develop, so does what is considered developmentally appropriate incentives and recognition. Proper use of incentives and recognition can help young children clarify their self-concept, improve self-esteem, establish self-control, and motivate them to achieve. However, inappropriate use of incentives and recognition can have the opposite effects.

4-H primary members are in a special membership category with regard to program delivery and policy. This reflects the unique learning characteristics and developmental needs of primary-aged youth. The purpose of offering this younger membership category is to give children the opportunity to learn more about the 4-H program and to prepare them for further project selection. *For these reasons, primary member 4-H programs are **NOT** intended to duplicate the 4-H member experiences designed for older youth, or to create a “mini-4-H” concept* (National 4-H Headquarters Fact Sheet [Kindergarten-3rd Grade Programs in 4-H](#)).

## 1. Who are 4-H primary members?

*They are 4-H members aged 5-to-8 years. They must be five (5) years old or in kindergarten by December 31<sup>st</sup> of the program year. Youth enrolling or turning nine (9) on or after January 1<sup>st</sup> must participate as a primary member until June 30<sup>th</sup>. Ages for primary participation vary from county to county – check your local UCCE 4-H YDP office to confirm what ages are allowed.*

## 2. Where can I find state policy on appropriate incentives and recognition for 4-H primary members?

*In the UCCE 4-H YDP Handbook, located at <http://www.ca4h.org/policy/> or your county UCCE 4-H YDP office, you will find policies outlining appropriate practice concerning the development and delivery of primary member programming. Chapter 5: Membership and Participation in the 4-H Youth Development Program outlines developmentally appropriate practices for working with primary members, including incentives and recognition. Chapter 7: Experiential Learning in the 4-H Youth Development Program 4-H primary member participation in fairs and shows is discussed in more detail.*

### **3. Can 4-H primary members participate in competitive activities?**

*No. 4-H primary members are not eligible for competition, including record books, other events, activities, and fairs (National 4-H Headquarters; UCCE 4-H YD Handbook, Chapter 5). 4-H primary members may not participate in any competitive showmanship classes, including classes also identified as “pee wee” showmanship” or “junior buckaroo” events (see UCCE 4-H YDP Handbook, Chapter 7).*

*Participation for 4-H primary members should be limited to cooperative learning activities. Cooperative learning is defined as learning to get along with peers in a cooperative rather than competitive manner. Over 750 research studies have been conducted in the past 11 decades on the benefits of cooperative learning for youth of all ages. This research shows that cooperative learning produces higher achievement, competence, reasoning strategies and critical thinking, creativity, social skills, caring, self-esteem, and healthier psychological adjustment than competitive or individualistic learning (Fetsch & Yang, 2002; Johnson, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, & Skon, 1981).*

*Competitive activities require motor skills, reflexes, and strength that are not fully developed in primary-aged members. In addition, young children have a difficult time psychologically understanding the concept of winning and losing. They are sensitive to criticism and are still developing the ability to manage their emotions which results in not being able to accept failure well. When young children lose, they may relate negative feelings to their self-worth and identity. 4-H primary members need opportunities to practice skills, discover talents, and learn about fairness in a non-judgmental environment – working alongside their peers (National 4-H Headquarters Fact Sheet; NAEYC Position Statement; Scheer, 1997).*

### **4. What is considered competition?**

*Competition is a formal process for evaluating a member’s 4-H work, such as a checklist, point system, star ranking, Danish or American System of judging, or other scoring rubric. The evaluation results in an award placing (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> etc) or conferment of other reward that distinguishes one youth’s performance from another or against a standard.*

### **5. Is the Danish system of judging acceptable for use with primary members?**

*No. The Danish System of judging evaluates the finished product against the standards developed for that class or contest. Many youth may receive the same award but the activity is still competitive because members’ work is evaluated against a standard and some sort of placing is being awarded (e.g., blue ribbon).*

**6. Can I give any feedback to primary members about their 4-H work?**

*Yes. All youth should be given positive feedback on what they did well and given suggestions on how to improve their work, but their work cannot be evaluated.*

**7. Is a Star Rank Program appropriate for 4-H primary members?**

*No. Star rank reports and awards are NOT acceptable for primary members. Checklists, point systems, and other methods commonly used in the star rank program are not appropriate for primary members.*

**8. Are participation awards appropriate for 4-H primary members?**

*Yes. All 4-H primary members should receive recognition for participating. An award is appropriate if all 4-H primary members participating in the event or activity receive the same award and their 4-H work is not judged or evaluated. Some examples include seals, ribbons, and certificates. This type of recognition is developmentally appropriate for primary-aged members and should help them develop a sense of self-esteem and pride over accomplishments. Remember, however, primary members will benefit the most from positive feedback and interactions with caring adults.*

**9. Can I award primary members with seals?**

*Yes. However, 4-H primary members cannot receive different levels/colors seals if they denote placing or meanings. Seals may only be given as participation awards.*

**10. Can I recognize primary members at the time of “graduating” to the next age level?**

*Yes, as long as primary members receive the same recognition. Some options include certificates, ribbons, and/or pins (UCCE 4-H YDP Handbook, Chapter 5).*

**11. Are participation pins appropriate for primary members?**

*Yes. Primary members receive a stripe and pin for each year completed (UCCE 4-H YDP Handbook, Chapter 5).*

**12. Can primary members participate in 4-H fundraising activities?**

*Yes. This is a cooperative activity where each 4-H member works together contributing to the success of the group. However, primary members should be assigned responsibilities that are developmentally appropriate for their age.*

**13. When our club or project has fundraisers we provide incentives such as gift certificates to those who sell the most tickets, ads, items, etc. Is this acceptable for 4-H primary members?**

*No. While they can partake in fundraising this type of incentive program is not acceptable for 4-H primary members as only one or a few people can achieve that incentive. Consider providing all 4-H primary members with an incentive to be granted regardless of how much they sell, money they raise, etc. Remember our goal with primary members is not to reward performance but participation and learning. Monetary or material rewards are not the only means to motivate and recognize youth for their efforts and accomplishments. Recognizing the hard work and success of each member who helped the club or project raise money for the benefit of all, especially in front of parents, peers, and other adults, can also be an incentive and powerful motivator.*

*It is important to nurture the development of intrinsic motivation especially in our youngest members. Research shows that reliance on extrinsic motivators can erode intrinsic motivation – leading one to become motivated to succeed to receive rewards rather than for the self-fulfillment and further personal development from such accomplishments (Kohn, 1993). The expectation of personal satisfaction from helping to raise funds for a club or project is an incentive as well.*

**14. What other types of incentives and recognition can I use with 4-H primary members?**

*A specific verbal praise; smile, nodding, a pat on the shoulder; writing a note to a parent, or other significant person, about the child's progress or accomplishment; saying "thank you"; providing opportunities for a member to make a decision; providing opportunities for the child to share a skill or achievement; enthusiastic encouragement; and the like (see [Primary 4-H Member Leader's Guide](#)).*

**15. How can I integrate primary members into events or activities where older members compete (e.g., record book judging, fashion revue, presentation day)?**

*4-H primary members may show/exhibit their project or work in noncompetitive events or activities in categories specifically created for them and receive recognition for their participation. However, remember the focus of primary age participation is exploration. Many 4-H events and activities may not be appropriate for primary members as they were designed for the enjoyment, learning, and success of older youth. Primary members will thrive when the experiences are specifically designed for their needs and development. Consider developing specific events for primary members such as an Explore It! Field Day or other events with many open-ended activities that peak their interest.*

**16. Can proficiency programs be used with 4-H primary members?**

*No. Proficiency programs are NOT appropriate for 4-H primary members (4-H Primary Member Leader's Guide). The progression through levels and conferment of medals or pins for such accomplishments contradict best practices when working with primary-aged youth. Because of their short attention span and difficulties in completing tasks and planning, primary-aged youth benefit most from a variety of short-term exploratory project experiences that focus on developing a specific skill or concept utilized in completing the activity (Scheer, 1997). Primary members should not be engaged in a long-term planned course of study in a specific project (subject) area (National 4-H Headquarters; UCCE 4-H YDP Handbook, Chapter 5). In addition, proficiency programs use checklists to evaluate performance or completion of a level which is not appropriate for primary-aged youth.*

**17. Can 4-H primary members be officers?**

*Elections are a form of competition and, therefore, are not appropriate for 4-H primary members. Additionally, traditional officer positions such as President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and Sergeant of Arms are not developmentally appropriate roles for primary members. 4-H primary-aged members have a short attention and memory span and difficulties in completing tasks, making decisions, taking and understanding another person's point of view, being realistic, and thinking logically (Scheer, 1997); therefore, traditional officer positions are not appropriate for their age and abilities. Some units/clubs opt to create special (officer or chair) positions for 4-H primary members that are not filled by an election process and are developmentally appropriate. Some of these roles are greeter, collector, helper, and timekeeper (see [Primary 4-H Member Leader's Guide](#)).*

**18. Why do other organizations allow 5-to-8 year olds to compete (like Boy/Girl Scouts)?**

*The 4-H YDP is part of the UC, the National Land Grant University System, and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The 4-H YDP is unique because of these connections which base all programming on research-based practices designed to provide high quality experiences resulting in positive youth development. A criterion of the CA 4-H YDP is that it is consistent with research on youth development, education, and other appropriate fields. Other youth development organizations are not tied with UC and are not held by the same standards to align policies and practices with current research.*

**19. Can 4-H primary members complete record books?**

*No. 4-H primary members do not complete a standard 4-H record book. 4-H primary members may be encouraged to complete the state approved [Primary Member 4-H](#)*

# Primary Members Frequently Asked Questions

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[Personal Development Report \(PDR\)](#) with assistance from their adult volunteer, parents/guardians, or older 4-H members. This is the only record form for 4-H primary member use. Primary members do not accumulate credits on the PDR that support the star rank system. (UCCE 4-H YDP Handbook, Chapter 5).

The Primary Member PDR is not meant to be a “Mini PDR”. A key difference in the PDR designed for primary members is that it does not incorporate or support star ranks or any other type of point system or checklist. The Primary Member PDR emphasizes the project experience (e.g., my favorite project, why I like being in 4-H). The Primary Member PDR also allows for reflection through drawing in addition to writing. Primary members do not accumulate credits on the PDR that support the star rank system.

## **20. What other forms of reflection are developmentally appropriate for 4-H primary members?**

Scrap booking is an excellent way to document the 4-H experience. Also, 4-H primary members will enjoy making a collage of pictures related to their project, club, friends, or other memorable 4-H experiences during the program year.

### **References and Resources:**

- Fetsch, R. J., & Yang, R. K. (2002). The effect of competitive and cooperative learning preferences on children's self-perceptions: A comparison of 4-H and non-4-H members. *Journal of Extension*, 40(3), 1-7. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2002june/a5.php>
- Johnson, D. W. (2003). Social interdependence: Interrelationships among theory, research, and practice. *American Psychologist*, 58, 934-945.
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- Junge, S. K., & Conklin-Ginop, E. 4-H primary member leader's guide. Cooperative Extension, DANR, University of California. [Primary 4-H Member Leader's Guide](#)
- Kohn, A. (1993). *Punishment by rewards: The trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A's, praise, and other bribes*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- National 4-H Headquarters fact sheet: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup> grade programs in 4-H. Available at: <http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/library/fs-cloverbuds-02-08.pdf>

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) position statement: Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education programs serving children from birth through age 8. (2009). 1-32. Available at: <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/PSDAP.pdf>

Scheer, S. D. (1997). Programming parameters for 5-to-8-year-old children in 4-H. Journal of Extension, 35(4), 1-7. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1997august/a2.php>

University of California Cooperative Extension 4-H California Youth Development Program Policy Handbook, 2009. Available at: <http://www.ca4h.org/policy/>

**4-H Cloverbud Program\***, Ohio State University Extension. Available for purchase at: <http://estore.osu-extension.org/client/4hbulk.cfm>. For additional 4-H Cloverbud Program Resources see: <http://www.ohio4h.org/youth/cloverbud/index.html>

**Bread and Little Hands\***. University of California Cooperative Extension – North Region.

**YES! Youth Experiences in Science\***. UCCE Agriculture and Natural Resources Publication. Order online at: <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/4HYouthDevelopment/3404A.aspx>

\*check if your county 4-H YDP office has these resources