

DO YOUR OWN THING

A Guide for Youth Leaders
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
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DO YOUR OWN THING--A GUIDE FOR YOUTH LEADERS

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A self-determined project is one that allows a 4-H'er to select, plan, develop, and evaluate his own project. He can select an already existing project and expand it, or he can select an entirely new subject. Under your guidance, he will decide on objectives or goals he wants to attain, methods of carrying out his project, and ways of evaluating and reporting his project. Remember that young people often are more motivated to carry out self-chosen projects than those suggested by others. Most young people, however, want adult suggestions and guidance, so your willingness to serve as a project leader is important. Your job is to guide, not control. Learn to be patient and understand your 4-H member and what he is thinking and attempting to do.

As you help 4-H'ers develop self-determined projects, it will be up to you to ask questions and help them evaluate their projects. These responsibilities are similar to traditional 4-H projects, but there are a few things you need to remember:

- * There are no spelled out requirements for this project. Each member determines which topic and which area he wants to undertake and complete. He needs to determine this project on the basis of specific needs, interests, and programs.
- * There is no specific record for this project. You will need to encourage and help the 4-H member evaluate his or her accomplishments. If a member writes out an evaluation, it can be inserted into his 4-H record book. His evaluation should enumerate the various activities and resources he used and state how the project helped him improve as an individual. By determining how he has improved, a member can determine where to go in the future, and possibly whether or not he should pursue this project in more detail.
- * There is no definite plan or procedure because each member has different needs, skills, knowledge, and interests. Therefore, it is important for each member to do his own planning. Some of the considerations that you can point out to him are:
 - * His age.
 - * What kind and number of school activities he participates in.
 - * Local resource persons and materials he might use.
 - * His ability to work on his own.
 - * His ability to carry through on a project.
 - * His ability to evaluate his project.
 - * His ability to communicate in written reports.

Members want and need a leader who will help them:

- * Determine their objectives or goals (what they want to accomplish).
- * Develop the project.
- * Locate resource information.
- * Help them plan program activities.
- * Evaluate results and assist with re-planning.
- * Assist with project write-ups.

You are the one to get things started, but the young person must actually make the plans and carry them out. Your effectiveness will be largely determined by your ability to provide the initiative and guidance your 4-H'ers need. They can become self-directive if:

- * They recognize the responsibility for developing a self-determined project.
- * You provide a permissive atmosphere; that is, you allow them to use their own ideas but ask questions at the right times to keep them on the track.
- * They are shown that others respect their ability to plan, carry out, and evaluate their own project.

To help 4-H'ers determine how they think, feel, and act, some of the following suggestions may help you. Have your 4-H'ers ask themselves what they hope to gain, and then find out some of their goals and ideas. Thinking includes considering the situation and how it will affect a member's project. Remember that knowledge, understanding ideas, and information come under the category of thinking. Feeling is looking inside to find out what his knowledge means to him personally. Appreciation, values, and beliefs come under feeling. Acting is carrying out and making decisions or finding satisfying ways of doing things. Skills and behavior come under acting. As a leader, you must be concerned about how you can best help your 4-H'er learn new and better ways of thinking and feeling about himself and about the project he has decided to pursue. To do this, you must understand an individual's reasons for acting the way he does. Basic learning principles suggest that each of us must accept ourselves in relation to new and different ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

As a leader in a self-determined project, you probably will want to develop some of your own objectives. These might be:

- * To help the 4-H member become a more competent and mature person.
- * To help him increase his self-direction, particularly in carrying out this and other projects.

- * To help him plan and evaluate his project.
- * To develop better communication between yourself and your club members.
- * To help 4-H'ers gain ability in sharing information with others through written evaluations and/or written or oral reports.

Evaluation is a distinct part of the self-determined project. As you watch and listen to your 4-H'ers, you will be able to determine what is happening to each as an individual. You might ask yourself these questions:

- * Where was he when he started the project?
- * Did he plan meaningful activities?
- * Was he given responsibilities that resulted in personal growth and development?
- * Did he carry out his responsibilities because they seemed important to him and to his project?
- * Have significant changes occurred in his way of thinking, feeling, or acting?
- * How can information he gained from this project be used in further planning?
- * Were his project objectives and goals met to best advantage?

Remember that a young person is more interested and motivated by self-chosen experiences than by those handed down by others. Self-chosen experiences also may develop individual self-confidence, which is very important, since boys and girls are more secure when they can use their unique abilities in developing their potentiality. Self-determined projects give young people a chance to develop self-confidence.

Remember that young people need many things to make them feel that they are worthwhile human beings and have something to offer themselves and others. Some of these needs are:

- * Reassurance that they are normal physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially, but that they do not need to be exactly like others. They need help in recognizing that they can think and work as individuals.
- * Opportunity to develop emotional independence from adults. They need to realize that they have their own feelings and the right and responsibility to express themselves.
- * Help in solving problems concerning family relationships. Youth need to understand their parents. The values of this generation may be differently interpreted than those of their parents' generation. As a leader, you can help young people understand this "generation gap."

- * Help in establishing their roles as adults, particularly in the areas of earning a living and establishing a home and family. Young people also need help in making career or occupational choices. Self-determined projects may be a good way of supplementing what they have learned about this area in school.
- * Satisfactory relationships with other young people of both sexes. Young people need to communicate with others of their own age.
- * Help in understanding and learning how to control the physical world whenever possible.
- * Knowledge about opportunities in this country. Young people need to experience success both directly and vicariously. Adults need to help young people look at both failure and success in positive ways. Young people get plenty of failure in real life but don't always have the proper preparation for it. Compliments on a job well done help express your approval and faith in youth. We need to provide alternate patterns for success.
- * Help in developing positive attitudes in attaining a degree of socially responsible and acceptable behavior. Unkempt or sloppy dress may be an indication that a young person wants adult comment or guidance.
- * Help in working out a consistent personal philosophy of life.
- * Help in developing appreciation for the beautiful, or nature, and for the simple things in life.
- * Opportunities for wholesome fun and relaxation. Some 4-H'ers will have fun exploring and learning about a self-chosen project.

Emotional Maturity

Young people need and often want adults to help them develop their emotional maturity. According to Karl Menninger at the Menninger Foundation, emotional maturity includes:

- * Finding greater satisfaction in giving than in receiving.
- * Having the capacity to perform satisfying tasks and to develop permanent loyalties to people, receiving as well as giving satisfaction in such relationships.
- * Being creative in daily life as well as in leisure time activities.
- * Contributing to the improvement of one's family, job, and community.
- * Having the ability to learn and profit from making mistakes.

- * Being relatively free from fear, anxieties, and tensions.
- * Being capable of riding over rough spots in life and going on to a destination.

These aspects of emotional maturity can be developed through 4-H and youth development programs. Self-determined projects may be a key to helping young people, especially teenagers and youth, develop their emotional maturity. Very closely related to emotional maturity are the values or goals of young people. Try asking some of your 4-H'ers what they really want most in life. You may find that they don't know. Our culture provides such an enormous range of choices that many people are uncertain about what they want to do or become.

You may find that young people are not willing to change their ideas; that they find it easier to accept familiar practices. But if done correctly, helping someone change his mind can be pleasant. Remember that venturing into untried ways of doing things takes courage, involves risk, and often requires extra effort. You'll find that these things are true in the self-determined project. Remember, however, that constant change is part of living; that some changes are made quickly while others are often resisted; that some people welcome change while others shun it. Change is an active process, not a passive reaction, as we often consider it. Making changes involves weighing values, clarifying personal beliefs, and often sacrificing activities that are less important.

Remember that an individual learns more than one thing at a time. While gaining information, you are building attitudes and acquiring patterns of behavior that will help you to help 4-H'ers develop to the best of their capacity. It is a challenge and an exciting responsibility that you have assumed. It is imperative that you understand 4-H'ers' basic needs and attitudes and that you help plan for each a program that will help meet their particular needs. Your 4-H'ers will want guidance, approval, help, ideas, rules to follow, constructive criticism, and possibly sympathy.

Self-Evaluation for 4-H Leaders

Check Yourself

How do you measure up to the many challenges of working with 4-H'ers? Here is a checklist you might want to use or adapt to help rate your effectiveness in working with 4-H'ers in a self-determined project. You may find it helpful to include your comments or reactions.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Could use help</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1. Do I really enjoy working with a 4-H'er and helping him or her learn?	_____	_____	_____	
2. What problems do my 4-H'ers face and how can I help them?	_____	_____	_____	
3. Have I studied and reflected on the need for educational programs through 4-H project work?	_____	_____	_____	
4. Am I willing to change my ideas on project work and help guide a member through a self-determined project?	_____	_____	_____	
5. Am I aware of individual differences among my 4-H'ers and how they affect my relationships with each one?	_____	_____	_____	
6. Do I recognize these differences when making suggestions to each 4-H member?	_____	_____	_____	
7. Do I help each member understand how he is a unique individual and how he can grow?	_____	_____	_____	
8. Do I have a system for helping a 4-H'er make a continuous evaluation of his growth?	_____	_____	_____	
9. Do I continuously evaluate my own growth and what I learn through helping 4-H members?	_____	_____	_____	
10. Do I devote ample time to the preparation and leadership I must give to a 4-H'er in a self-determined project?	_____	_____	_____	
11. Have I helped my 4-H'ers develop realistic goals and activities in carrying out their self-determined projects?	_____	_____	_____	

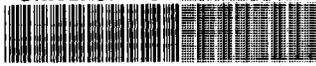
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Could use help</u>	<u>Comments</u>
12. Have I encouraged my 4-H'ers to seek out information through resource people, libraries, business and professional people, news media?	_____	_____	_____	
13. Have I encouraged my 4-H'ers to share their projects with their parents?	_____	_____	_____	
14. Have I shared my observations of a member's progress with his parents?	_____	_____	_____	
15. Have I suggested ways a parent can help his youngster in his project?	_____	_____	_____	
16. Have I expressed appreciation to the parents and/or other resource people who have made my job easier?	_____	_____	_____	

How To Help A Young Person With Self-Determined Projects

In evaluating a self-determined project, you can help a young person determine his own progress. Questions you might ask him include:

- * How and why did you happen to choose this project?
- * Have you informed your parents about this project and kept them up-to-date on the progress you've made?
- * Did you have help in setting your goals? If so, from whom?
- * How far did you get in accomplishing your goals?
- * What local resources did you turn to for suggestions?
- * What books or other publications have you read related to your project?
- * Did you write to any resource people for help? If so, what help did they give you?
- * How has this project helped you personally?
- * How did you use your time and energy? Was it to your best advantage?
- * Have you shared with others what you have learned? How?
- * Did you make any changes in your original plans? Why? How?
- * What plans do you have for next year?
- * Will you continue with this same project or will you try another self-determined project?

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