



## How Can You Increase 4-H Teen Participation?

The captains of your 4-H team are middle school and high school teens. In addition to 4-H, these members are juggling jobs, more demanding academic schedules, dates, and extra-curricular activities including sports, music, and drama. Do not find yourself fighting the problem of 4-H teen drop out. Be proactive in maintaining and recruiting teens and conducting club activities that meet their unique development needs.

**Encourage your captains to lead on and off your field.**

## What can you do to help teens become 4-H Graduates?

No coach wants a player to quit! Coaches want their players to succeed and that means preparing them to move on to the next level of play. Your tenured players, 4-H teens, are they ready to graduate from your club program as competent, caring contributing and capable citizens?

You can help your members become 4-H graduates by meeting these seven developmental teen needs:

- 1. Balance of Physical & Emotional Activity**  
Your teens have tremendous energy, but also enjoy “hanging out” with their friends. Recognize the physical differences (strength, size and flexibility) in your teens when planning activities. Select activities that allow members to participate safely and mutually succeed.
- 2. Success**  
Teens strive to develop abilities and accomplishments on the road to success in a chosen interest area. Teens are very self-consciousness, so rewards mean everything and embarrassment and failure are devastating. Provide opportunities for achievable success in your 4-H club activities. Ask yourself, can everyone succeed in his or her own way?
- 3. Self-Expression**  
Teens want opportunities to explore the world around them and to reflect upon those new experiences. They are not just observers, but want to be active participants in the community. They need time to cultivate friendships, share secrets, thoughts and feelings. Offer club programs that help explore a variety of ideas, skills, activities, careers and games to facilitate this self-expression.

4. **Creativity**  
Not all teens are artistic or musical nor are they all athletic and scholarly. All teens are looking for ways to show their uniqueness. Each chooses a different way depending upon their interests, skills, abilities and knowledge. Help teens find their “shining light” in their ability to create through growing or raising, inventing or designing.
5. **Positive Peer Relationships**  
Peers offer needed friendship and a support network, both positive and negative. Family members help shape values and give affection. You can help teens understand the possibilities of becoming an adult by sharing your own experience, views, values and feelings. You can help guide teens development of positive peer relationships.
6. **Rules and Consequences**  
It can't happen to me! How many times have you heard a teen make this statement. Clear rules and expectant consequences provide security and discourage experimentation to find the rules. Teens may and probably will test your club rules, but they want and expect consistent enforcement of the rules.
7. **Meaningful Membership**  
Design 4-H club programs with your teens not for them. Teens want to be responsible for the club. You can help teens develop important leadership and decision-making skills and a strong commitment to the 4-H program by letting them plan and implement the club program. Committed 4-H members will become 4-H Graduates not 4-H Dropouts.

Resource: Used with permission.

*Ohio 4-H Clubs Advisors Handbook - Club Members - Teen Needs*

<http://advisorshandbook.ohio4h.org/clubmembers/teenneeds.html>