Informational Paper

The Role of Adults in 4-H Youth Development Projects

Barbara Barker
Professor

Department of Youth Development
University of Wisconsin - Extension
Waushara County

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In response to concerns about an excess amount of adult involvement in 4-H youth development projects, an educational program based on the work of Jeff Goodwin, et al., encouraged multiple animal project groups in Waushara County to discuss what factors would determine an appropriate level of adult involvement in a 4-H member’s project. The groups discussed positive youth development principles in response to questions about the impact of varying levels of involvement on the learning experience for the youth member. These levels ranged from an adult doing the work to youth and adults working together at varying levels to no adult involvement. Common themes in the discussions included age, project experience and safety as factors that affect the level of adult involvement in a 4-H member’s project. As young people mature, adults should adjust their level of involvement to allow the youth to independently develop life and project skills with appropriate guidance and support to foster positive youth development.
**Situation Statement:**
A number of comments and concerns came forward in regards to the appropriate level of adult involvement in 4-H member projects in 2006. Comments were heard at meetings of Waushara County 4-H animal project groups and shared on fair comment sheets submitted by 4-H clubs. To address these concerns, research was conducted on expectations established by others about the appropriate role adults have in youth animal projects and on educational strategies used to address this issue. The Wisconsin 4-H Horse Association had recently discussed this issue. In response to their discussion, their president included the following excerpt in a letter to the association about the issue:

> “First of all, it is not our intention to discourage anyone that has an interest in helping our youth. It is in fact because of parents, leaders, trainers, and yes even professional trainers, that make the youth a better and much safer rider, exhibitor, and indeed a better, more informed, more educated person. While we do realize and encourage the contributions that trainers, both professional and amateur, do indeed add to the education and experience of the 4H youth horse program and the exhibitor, we also must reiterate the very basis of 4H and emphasize that these are in fact the exhibitor’s projects and are therefore the exhibitor’s responsibility. There is a point at which the youth must assume their responsibilities as a 4H exhibitor and display, by themselves, the talents that they have learned. We would hope that parents and leaders, fellow 4Hers, and trainers be there to encourage and yes, assist when needed, but that “assistance” has to end at the gate.”

Jeff Goodwin, a Cooperative Extension professional in Texas, Idaho and Colorado, has done extensive work in the areas of animal welfare and livestock show ethics. Goodwin et al.’s (2002) literature review confirmed that a positive relationship exists between parental involvement and school success. He stated that literature on excessive parental involvement
normally looks at youth sporting events. He referred to work done by sports psychologist Jon Hellstedt who stated that there is a fine line between encouraging a child to be achievement oriented and applying excess pressure to succeed. Goodwin indicated limited research exists about excessive involvement of adults in youth livestock shows but “anecdotal evidence abounds.”

Goodwin et al. developed an educational program where youth and adults worked side by side in a “Clip-Master/Pull the Plug” program to illustrate the unfairness when a youth who does their own work is directly across the aisle from an adult or professional fitter preparing an animal for a youth exhibitor. The audience included youth exhibitors, parents, youth development professionals and livestock industry professionals, including professional fitters. In response to the demonstration, the audience was asked to identify which of six levels of adult involvement would be appropriate “at home” and “at a show.” These levels form a continuum starting with the adult doing all the work in preparing the animal prior to the show, followed by three progressive levels of adults gradually decreasing their involvement in the youth’s project to the final level being the youth doing the work independent of an adult.

In evaluating the application of Goodwin et al.’s educational program to Waushara County, it was determined the replication of the demonstration of unfair behavior would not be practical. The author also wanted to ensure the discussion focused on the intended educational opportunity a 4-H project provides rather than the competitive nature of showing animals. A discussion tool based on Goodwin et al.’s six levels of adult involvement in youth project work was created and utilized by the author to discuss the issue of excess adult involvement in 4-H Youth Development Projects among stakeholders in the 4-H program (Appendix A).
Objective:
Youth and adult participants discuss and come to consensus about what factors guide adults in determining the appropriate level of adult involvement when helping 4-H members complete their 4-H youth development projects. The ultimate outcome would be a reduction in the amount of adult involvement in 4-H youth development projects to a more appropriate level based on the factors discussed. The effectiveness of the presentations and discussions will be evaluated through observation and an evaluation of comments made annually in regards to adult involvement in youth projects during the county fair.

Methods:
The educational program developed to discuss the level of adult involvement in 4-H youth development projects started with why this is an issue in Waushara County 4-H and a brief overview of the literature. An overview of the continuum of the six (6) levels of adult involvement followed (Appendix B). Participants were then divided into six groups. Each group was given one of the levels of involvement to discuss (Appendix A). The questions discussed included the potential positive and negative outcomes of the level of adult involvement at the given level, who is learning at the given level and when the level of involvement, if ever, might be appropriate. Depending on the time available, each group may have discussed more than one (1) level. After discussion by small groups, the recorded discussion points were shared and added to by those who did not discuss that level. Key points were recorded for all to see. These points were further discussed and resulted in a listing of factors to consider when determining the appropriate level of adult involvement in 4-H youth development projects.

The discussion tool was used at meetings of 4-H horse and livestock project group meetings and educational programs in Waushara County (2007-2009), as well as a breakout session at the Wisconsin 4-H Horse Association annual conference (2008), a Department of Youth
Development Day of Learning (2009) and a breakout session at the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA) annual conference (2010) (Appendix C). Approximately ninety (90) youth in grades 3-13 in livestock and horse projects and sixty (60) adults (parents, project leaders, and county fair superintendents) were involved in Waushara County. Articles in the county 4-H newsletter reinforced the discussions and reached youth and adults not involved in the animal projects (Appendix D).

Results/Evidence:

The following “factors to consider” when determining the level of involvement of adults in 4-H youth development projects are a compilation of the points summarized from the different discussions. These points may appear to be common knowledge to a youth development professional; however, the discussion allowed the participants to discuss and apply many of the youth development principles practiced by Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development professionals.

- The stage of development of the child and how long they have been involved in the project determines what level adults are involved at when working with youth members. This consideration will help to ensure a safe environment exists and youth develop confidence in their abilities through observing, practicing and receiving feedback.
- The development of life skills such as confidence, responsibility, time management, decision making and problem solving are dependent upon adults providing opportunities for youth to practice and develop the skills needed to properly and safely care for, train and show their animals.
- The opportunity for the child to develop a relationship with the animal they are showing allows the child to better manage and show the animal.
• The teaching approach used with a youth project member should consider the individual’s learning style.

• Beginning in about grade 7, if a youth has been involved in the animal project for multiple years, they are ready to move to level 3 (adult does some tasks to instruct) or 4 (youth and adult share responsibility for youth project). In the horse project, this might be the level of maturity when the member chooses to work with a horse that has less training or experience and they may return to a level with more adult involvement in order to further their abilities to help reinforce the training the horse has received.

• The involvement of adults and professionals in providing educational opportunities for youth will assist the child in learning best practices and may reduce their level of frustration and chance of making mistakes.

• The opportunity for everyone to learn together is important. 4-H is a family organization. 4-H projects can provide families an opportunity for all to grow in knowledge and skills that they can benefit from.

• Positive and constructive feedback is important at all levels of development.

In response to the ultimate outcome of a more appropriate level of adult involvement in 4-H Youth Development projects, there have been no written comments about adults doing the work of the exhibitors on the club fair comment sheets since these discussions started. The 4-H Horse Association developed a policy that only youth exhibitors can ride horses during the fair. This has changed the level of adult involvement in the Horse project to a more appropriate level.

In a follow up discussion with the Junior Livestock committee, I asked one of the evaluation questions Goodwin used. The question, “Is there too much adult involvement at our fair?” was followed by several moments of silence. A 4-H Leader/FFA advisor in attendance indicated we do not have an issue in comparison to other fairs. A parent said they were not overly concerned
at this time but historically had been frustrated when professional trainers/fitters were at the fair. They agreed to a periodic discussion and evaluation of the level of adult involvement at the request of the 4-H Youth Development Agent. The differing level of response between these two groups has created some conflict because of the differing expectations they have established.

In Waushara County, the discussions have primarily focused on families and leaders involved in animal projects as that is where the concerns arose. The extension of this discussion to 4-H clubs could be the next step for inclusion of more 4-H families in this change in culture. This will be considered during discussion of the next 4-H Leaders Association strategic plan.

**Implications:**

- A continuum allows both young people and adults to see how the level of adult involvement can change as a young person matures and develops.

  As 4-H Youth Development professionals, it is obvious to us that as our youth members develop, the need for adult involvement should decrease. Several examples can be cited in Waushara County 4-H clubs and projects where adults have not adjusted their level of involvement as the youth members have matured. Participants in the sessions commented that the visual of progressively changing levels of adult involvement will remain with them as a means of implementing and teaching about changing the level of adult involvement as youth members mature.

- Discussions about the roles of adults in youth development opportunities need to be ongoing.

  4-H has a continually changing membership of both youth members and adult volunteers. As new families and adults become involved, we have found this to be excellent opportunity to discuss the role of parents and leaders in helping members
complete their project work and participate in 4-H clubs. We have also found that
discussion every two to three years among project groups helps to remind everyone of
the purpose of 4-H being youth development.

• Young people need the opportunity to voice their desire to master their skills and to be independent.
  During the discussion held as part of the Market Animal Quality Assurance program the youth expressed concern that adults typically are more involved than they need to be in the members’ projects. They defined the grade and experience level at which they felt confident about moving onto a more independent level with consideration for factors such as project experience and safety.

• All stakeholders must support changing the culture at a public competitive event so young people can showcase what they have learned.
  Stakeholders involved in the discussions in Waushara County were 4-H/FFA members, parents, project leaders and county fair superintendents. The engagement of representatives of the stakeholders resulted in varying levels of ownership of the action that could be taken to address the issue. The 4-H Horse Project achieved the greatest application of the information with the development of policies and continued reflection of how they can achieve the youth development purpose of 4-H.

• Discussion about the appropriate level of involvement in adults in 4-H youth development projects increases the understanding that youth development is one of the intended outcomes of 4-H.
  Conversations during the Junior Livestock Committee meeting had not focused on the youth development aspect of 4-H projects until this discussion was brought to their
meetings and included in the Market Animal Quality Assurance (MAQA) program. The comments during the discussions showed application of youth development principles in regards to human development, learning theories and safety/risk management practices that had not been previously discussed by this entity in the past fifteen or more years. Discussions with other groups in Waushara County and volunteer leaders in the Wisconsin 4-H Horse Association were successful in the identification of youth development principles to adults working with youth in 4-H projects. Fellow professionals agreed discussions such as this would be of great benefit to the clientele they work with. They also recognized the ongoing need for these discussions due the nature of continually changing group of clientele.
**Literature Cited**


Absolutely no adult involvement allowed.

What are the positive outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

What are the negative outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

Who is learning at this level of adult involvement?

When, if ever, might this level of involvement be appropriate in a youth project?
Adult involvement is only to offer advice & information.

What are the positive outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

What are the negative outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

Who is learning at this level of adult involvement?

When, if ever, might this level of involvement be appropriate in a youth project?
Adult involvement is for instructional purposes only.

What are the positive outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

What are the negative outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

Who is learning at this level of adult involvement?

When, if ever, might this level of involvement be appropriate in a youth project?
Youth & adult share responsibility for youth project.

What are the positive outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

What are negative outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

Who is learning at this level of adult involvement?

When, if ever, might this level of involvement be appropriate in a youth project?
Adult assumes responsibility for majority of the project.

What are the positive outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

What are the negative outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

Who is learning at this level of adult involvement?

When, if ever, might this level of involvement be appropriate in a youth project?
Adult does all of project tasks.

What are the positive outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

What are the negative outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?

Who is learning at this level of adult involvement?

When, if ever, might this level of involvement be appropriate in a youth project?
Appendix B: Continuum of Levels of Adult Involvement in 4-H Youth Development Projects

What is the Appropriate Level of Adult Involvement?

1. Adult not involved.
2. Adult only offers advice and information.
3. Adult does some tasks to instruct.
4. Adult and youth share tasks evenly.
5. Adult does majority of project tasks.
6. Adult does all of project tasks.

Adapted from Bernie O'Rourke, UWEX Youth Livestock Specialist.
The Role of Adults in 4-H Youth Development Projects

Barb Barker
Professor
Department of Youth Development
UW-Extension
Waushara County
Waushara County Incidents

- Fair related
  - Animal care and show preparation
  - Showing junior exhibitor’s animals
  - Warming up a horse for junior exhibitor
  - Coaching “from the rail”

- Is this an issue in your county?
A Wisconsin Perspective

Dale Bauer, President of Wisconsin 4-H Horse Association
Eau Claire County 4-H Volunteer Leader

- “...because of parents, leaders, ...and yes even professional trainers, make youth...indeed a better, more informed, more educated person.”

- “...reiterate the very basis of 4-H and emphasize that these are in fact the exhibitor’s projects and are therefore the exhibitor’s responsibility...”

- “...youth must assume their responsibilities as a 4-H exhibitor and display, by themselves, the talents that they have learned. We would hope that parents and leaders, fellow 4-Hers, and trainers be there to encourage and yes, assist when needed...”
The literature...

- Goodwin, Murphy & Wieser (2002)

- Relationship between parent/adult involvement and youth “success”
  - Positive relationship - school achievement
  - Negative relationship - youth sporting events
  - Livestock competitions – “anecdotal evidence abounds” in regards to excess involvement
Clip Master – Pull the Plug

Purpose of the Program
- Youth enforce “restriction of assistance” instead of Extension/Agriculture Education Professionals
- “Pull the Plug” buttons

Program Design
- Clipping Contest and Educational Program

Research questions
- Perceptions of adult involvement
- Perceptions of appropriate adult roles
Clip Master - Pull the Plug

- 394 participants
  - 58% adult
    - Parent
    - Other – industry representative, buyer, relative
    - Livestock Breeder
    - Extension Agent
    - Agriculture Instructor
    - Professional Fitter
  
  - 42% youth
    - age 8-13
    - age 14-19
Study Results – Perception of Excessive Involvement

- 44% witnessed excessive involvement often or very often at youth livestock show
- 94.4% need to address excessive adult involvement
- Before program: 65% no action
- After program: 95.9% might or would take action
What is the Appropriate Level of Adult Involvement?

1. Absolutely no adult involvement allowed
2. Adults involvement only to offer advice and information
3. Clipping & grooming by adult for instruction purposes only
4. Youth and adults share grooming tasks evenly
5. Adults doing a majority of clipping and grooming
6. Professional fitter hired to do all the clipping & grooming.

Adapted from Bernie O'Rourke, UWEX Youth Livestock Specialist

14 years old, 3 years experience
At home & At Show
Study Results - Appropriate Levels

- Mean scores
  - 2.95 for at home
    - Clipping and grooming by an adult for instructional purposes only
  - 2.38 for at a livestock show
    - Adult involvement only to offer advice and information

- Wisconsin MAQA Program
  - Levels 3 & 4
The Conclusions

- Excessive adult involvement is common.

- Education is needed with emphasis on youth assuming control.

- Education increased willingness of youth and adults to take action.

- Advice and encouragement acceptable; direct assistance not acceptable.
For one of the six levels, answer the following questions:

- What are the positive outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?
- What are the negative outcomes, if any, of this level of adult involvement in a youth project?
- Who is learning at this level of adult involvement?
- When, if ever, might this level of involvement be appropriate when working with a youth on a 4-H project?
What is the Appropriate Level of Adult Involvement?

1. Adult not involved.
2. Adult only offers advice and information
3. Adult does some tasks to instruct
4. Adult and youth share tasks evenly
5. Adult does majority of project tasks
6. Adult does all of project tasks.

Adapted from Bernie O’Rourke, UWEX Youth Livestock Specialist

a. 4-H project
b. Service learning project
c. Group meetings
Absolutely no adult involvement allowed.
Adult involvement is only to offer advice and information.
Adult involvement is for instructional purposes only.
Youth and adult share responsibility for youth project.
Adult assumes responsibility for majority of the project.
Adult does all of project tasks.
Discussion Summary Points

- Developmental abilities of the child and the level of project experience help determine level of adult involvement.

- At about grade 7 members has been involved in an animal project for multiple years are ready to move to level 3 or 4.

- The development of life skills such as confidence, responsibility, time management, decision making and problem solving are dependent upon adults providing opportunities for youth to practice and develop these skills.
Discussion Summary Points

- The involvement of adults and professionals helps children to learn best practices which can result in increased self confidence.

- The opportunity for children and adults to learn together is important.

- When dealing with animal projects, ensuring safety of the child is paramount.

- The presence of positive and constructive feedback from adults is important at all times.
Implications

- A continuum allows both young people and adults to see how the level of adult involvement can change as the young person matures and develops.

- Discussions about the roles of adults in youth development opportunities need to be ongoing. Young people need the opportunity to voice their desire to master their skills and to be independent.
Implications

- All stakeholders must support changing the culture at a public competitive event so young people can showcase what they have learned.

- Discussion about the appropriate roles of both young people and adults in a teaching/mentoring relationship or a partnership ensures youth development is one of the outcomes.
The Role of Adults in 4-H Youth Development Projects

Questions, comments...
This spring a discussion started about “what level adults should be involved in members 4-H projects?” It also was part of the Market Animal Quality Assurance program. Without 4-H project leaders and parents, 4-H members would not develop the skills and abilities they have through their 4-H projects. We fully support the involvement of adults in a teaching and helping role but ask you to think about what level of “doing” is occurring when adults work with 4-H members. The level of involvement is determined by the age of the child, their physical ability and what skills they have already learned.

Look at the level above and you will see six numbers that represent potential levels that adults can be involved in members projects.

1. Absolutely no adult involvement. When members are older and experienced in the project, there may be little need for adult involvement. Adults can always provide encouragement, positive reinforcement and constructive criticism.

2. Adults only offer advice and information. Members who have been in the project for a number of years still may need to or want to ask for help as they make decisions based on what they have done in the past and challenge themselves to do more things. At any stage in your life, you seek the advice and information of others as you do something new or improve what you are doing.

3. Adults do some of the tasks for instructional purposes. Having someone helping you learn something new or improve your ability to do so is beneficial is creating a better project. Learning a more efficient and effective way of doing something by using advice from someone who has done that same thing a number of times is beneficial.

4. Youth and adults equally share project tasks. When 4-H members are newer to the project and developing their skills, it is beneficial for adults to help members learn new information and skills.

5. Adults do most of the project tasks with some youth involvement. If the project requires the adult to do most of the work, ask yourself if the project is too complex for the member. An adult may be able to do the project better, but if the youth is not having the opportunity to learn something new, the member is not growing.

6. Adults do all the project tasks with no youth involvement. Who is learning? The adult—which in some cases 4-H project leaders and parents are learning something for the first time at the same time the member is. Professionals or those with lots of experience can be very helpful in demonstrating how to do something and coaching a youth member but doing the work for youth members takes away the learning opportunity.

So what is an appropriate level? Overall we look at Levels 3 & 4 as the desired levels of adult involvement in 4-H projects. Long term members hopefully will reach level 2.