At-Home Tool Belt: Guiding Youth through Modified 4-H Events

A guide for parents when talking to their youth about changes to 2020 SD 4-H Year

Introduction:

The 2020 4-H year looks different than other years, and navigating conversations about this year with youth can be difficult. As we move into modification of state 4-H events, parents and guardians may be seeking guidance on ways to present these modifications to their children. This document is meant to help with those conversations and help parents, guardians, and adult volunteers understand their role in creating a positive experience for youth, even if that experience is different from past years.

As the adults in the lives of youth, we set the precedent for how youth react and respond to news of change. If an adult remains calm, understanding, and respectful during interactions with 4-H professionals, youth are far more likely to do the same. This tone will better equip youth with acceptance and gratitude that some 4-H opportunities still exist and not everything is cancelled. This year simply looks different.

In 4-H Spirit,

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Parents, guardians, caregivers, and adult volunteers set the tone for how youth accept the necessary changes to 4-H events. By setting a positive tone of opportunity instead of limitations, adults have the ability to model behavior for the youth in their lives. A positive tone creates a better environment for Positive Youth Development and promotes an overall successful educational experience.

**What is Positive Youth Development (PYD)?**
According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, Positive Youth Development is an intentional, prosocial approach that is productive and constructive; as well as recognizes, utilizes and enhances young people’s strengths. Positive Youth Development promotes positive outcomes for young people by fostering positive experiences, relationships, and environments.

The Mission of South Dakota 4-H is to enable youth to engage in partnerships with caring adults, positive learning environments, develop their fullest potential, and learn life skills. The South Dakota 4-H Youth Development program’s experiential, collaborative, and competitive environments and experiences are rooted in PYD. Programs are facilitated by adults, creating opportunities focused on youth experience and growth.

**Parent Role in PYD:**
The adults in the lives of our 4-H members will make or break this 4-H year in how they present participation to youth. Youth naturally model adult behaviors, and when adults present changes to 4-H events and programming as positive growth opportunities, youth will be more likely to accept these changes and have a good experience.

**Gratitude:**
The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines grateful as, “appreciative of benefits received or affording pleasure or contentment.” Recognizing and appreciating all the positive things in our lives can help to increase satisfaction and decrease discontent with our own lives. This guide includes conversation starters aimed at promoting gratitude among youth.

**Using this Tool:**
The guide is broken into three 4-H age categories—Beginners (Aged 8-10), Juniors (Aged 11-13), and Seniors (Aged 14-18)—which mirror youth developmental milestone categories. It contains prompts for talking to youth about their feelings regarding modifications to fairs/achievement days and can be adjusted to any piece of the 4-H program. Review these questions and statements to help frame conversations with your youth. These prompts are provided as a starting point; every child and family is unique, so feel free to adapt any talking points to meet your needs.
General conversation framing and things to remember:

- In many cases, SD4-H activities are not cancelled; they are just happening in different ways.
- Even if a competition is canceled, opportunities still exist to learn and grow. If we think about the 4-H Youth Development program as a cake, local events/shows/contests are the frosting and state events are the sprinkles on top. The main piece, or cake, is the learning and experience done through caring for animals, practicing a speech in front of the mirror, making smart consumer decisions, and so much more.
- In 4-H, safety is very important and adults had to make choices not just based on one community, but many communities and the public safety of everyone. For the safety of you, your friends, and family (like grandma and grandpa) this year looks different. This is why 4-H activities follow robust safety guidelines.
- This is no one’s fault. No one asked for the virus to occur. Bad circumstances happen and learning to deal with unexpected happenings is a difficult, but essential element of development.
- Acknowledge and validate any feelings youth are experiencing. Big emotions are okay.

Conversation Starters for Beginners:

- What has it been like not being around your friends and some of your family?
- How did you feel when you heard that fair/achievement days might look different or be cancelled this year?
- How do you think your friends are feeling?
- What were you looking forward to at fair/achievement days?
- Tell me a little about what 4-H has been like already this year?
- Other kids your age don’t get to go to any fairs this year, what are you most looking forward to doing at the fair, even with the changes?
- What is your favorite project?
- What are some of your favorite things about 4-H?
- What is something that you worked really hard on that you want to show your friends? (Lead this in to a conversation about how that can still happen)
- What questions do you have about changes to the fair/achievement days?

Conversation Starters for Juniors:

- What has social distancing been like for you?
- How did you first react when you heard about changes to your fair/achievement days or it getting cancelled?
- How do you think others might be feeling right now? Anyone in particular you are wondering about?
- What would you say to support a friend who is really upset about a fair/achievement day being cancelled or modified?
- What hopes did you have for fair/achievement days this year?
- What is your favorite project?
- What are some of your favorite things about 4-H? Why is it your favorite?
Youth in other states don’t get to go to any fairs this year, what are you most looking forward to doing at the fair, even with the changes?
What is something that you worked really hard on that you want to show your friends? (Lead this in to a conversation about how that can still happen)
What questions do you have about changes to the fair/achievement days?

Conversation Starters for Seniors:
What has social distancing been like for you?
How did you first react when you heard about changes to your fair/achievement days or it getting cancelled?
How do you think others might be feeling right now? Anyone in particular you are wondering about?
What hopes and goals did you have for fair/achievement days?
Explain to me what is your favorite 4-H project, and why it is your favorite.
Why are fairs/achievement days important to you?
What are some of your favorite memories/achievements from fairs and 4-H events?
Knowing that other youth have no opportunity to showcase projects in 4-H, what are you most grateful or appreciative of that you still get to do this year?
What blessings have you experienced through the changes to 4-H this year?
What have you learned from the changes to 4-H activities this year that could help you in the future?
What questions do you have about changes to the fair/achievement days?

Additional Resources:
University of Minnesota Extension, “Helping youth to cope with fair cancellations” https://extension.umn.edu/fairs-events-and-training/helping-youth-cope-fair-cancellations