

4-H Membership Age Change Frequently Asked Questions

1. *What were you thinking? We as county Extension Educators did not have any input into this decision!*

Actually, over time there has been a lot of input into this decision. Several years ago when the Cloverbud curriculum was first brought to Pennsylvania, it was the only age appropriate materials available for 5 to 8 year olds. At that time, after much discussion, YPCC determined that since this was the beginning of available programming for this age group, these individuals would not be considered 4-H members. The quality of programming was not developed to address the needs of this group. It was also determined that the discussion would be held again as things changed.

Over time, many changes have taken place. More curricula are being developed for this age group. More educators are designing programs for this age group. More children in this age group are being reached by quality Extension programming but can be counted only as participants not members.

In the meantime, discussions were occurring around age as a barrier to recruiting new members. Educators were sharing that they often lost entire families in the 4-H program because 5-8 year olds were not considered members. Families were joining Scouts, sports leagues, and a variety of other activities and were too busy to become involved in 4-H by the time children were 8 by the January 1 deadline. In addition, after-school program enrollment has increased by over 300% in the last 3-4 years. This is a prime age group for the after-school audience. Sixty-six out of 67 counties currently offer quality programming to 5-7 year olds.

Other youth organizations and educational entities are talking about K-12 education and outreach. The 4-H youth development program needs to be using the same language. Nationally, we are also expected to report on 4-H program work beginning at age 5. Based on all the information at hand, it no longer made sense to have the 5-8 years olds excluded from being reported as members of the program when quality program criteria of the various delivery modes were being met. The barrier to reporting appropriately was removed. This age group may still be reported as program participants rather than members. It is up to the extension educator to make the decision on final reporting of youth.

2. *Did you make this decision so you could collect more cost recovery fees?*

Actually, this was not a topic of discussion when the decision was made. Remember though, that educational materials fees are only collected in certain situations and not all of them will be appropriate for this age group. All the 4-H members listed under the 4-H club delivery mode would pay the educational materials fee unless financially unable to do so. Since this formal club structure in most cases would not be an age appropriate method of delivery for groups in the 5-8 age range, most educators will report very few numbers in that category. If they do, then yes, they will pay the fee. I anticipate that most children in this age category will be reported under the special interest delivery mode. There is no fee currently associated with that category. Some groups may be reached through school enrichment and school-aged child care. For

school enrichment, there is a \$20.00 classroom fee. For after-school groups who use 4-H curriculum, the curriculum may be purchased through a grant or other funding source, or the group may pay the \$20.00 group enrollment fee similar to school enrichment. In these last two categories, there was never a limitation that the classroom or curriculum fee would be charged only for groups age 8 and above. If you have been working with these groups in the past, they should have already been paying the fee, if appropriate.

3. *I wish you had given us a year's notice so we could have better planned for this change.*

So far, there has been no distribution of information concerning this age change beyond the Cooperative Extension family unless educators themselves have shared this information with volunteers and community members. Marketing materials will not be updated until the supply in the mailroom has been distributed. Based on past usage numbers reordering marketing materials will not occur until sometime this summer, so in actuality the general public will not receive marketing materials about the age change until it is time to enroll in the next program year. In addition, educators have developed their plans of work for the year. In some cases, educators who have included the 5-8 year olds in their plans of work will now have the opportunity to report their efforts in membership in the Youth Development Enrollment Program. For others, the timing of this change provides them with the time to develop networks and consider programming that they want to implement for next year. There will be no major news releases out of the State 4-H Office. As always, local programming is overseen by the county.

4. *Do I have to take 5-8 year olds to camp?*

Remember, as with all 4-H programming, we involve youth in age appropriate activities. For example, youth must be 13 in order to attend 4-H State Achievement Days. Youth must be 15 in order to attend 4-H Capital Days. They must be 16 to apply for 4-H State Council. Following the guidelines we have worked under for many years, 5-8 year olds would only go to residential camps if the program was age appropriate for that group. Think about the program being offered in any situation before deciding if 5-8 year olds will participate. Quality of programming is an important part of all we are doing, and we should not make decisions to compromise that quality. This means that 5-7 year olds will not be working in level 1 of project books unless they are specially designed for this age group. One of the key pillars of the 4-H Youth Development Program is belonging, the development of an environment where children feel safe and have the opportunity to develop a relationship with a caring adult. We do not throw away the basics of the program as we begin to expand.

5. *What are the fair requirements for 5-8 year olds?*

There should be no fair requirements for 5-8 year olds. It is not age appropriate for children of this age to be competing. If you had categories in the past where this age group received participation ribbons or if you would like to add those categories, that is acceptable. This age group should not be receiving competitive ribbons.

Remember, any categories added must be based on age appropriate curriculum. For this summer, the only state level curriculum fitting in this category is Cloverbuds. If you have already had that as a participation category in your Fair book, you have no changes to make.

6. *Are there project materials other than Cloverbuds that could be used with 5-7 year olds?*

Some of the 4-H CCS materials that we currently purchase could be used with this age group. Examples include Aerospace Adventures (K-12), A Palette of Fun (K-6), Step Up to Leadership (K-12, the mentor guide has K-2 activities), Computer Power (K-12), and Bicycle Adventures (K-6). In addition, the following two items were recommended for purchase for the 2007 program year: Exploring the Treasures of 4-H (2-4) and Latino Cultural Arts (K-8). Penn State has also identified materials appropriate for this age group: Character Counts (2-6), Meet the Plants (2-4), Wild Over Work (K-6), and Tree Tops (2-5).

7. *When can we anticipate the release of the updated version of the Youth Development Enrollment Program?*

The program will be released as soon as it is completed. In the meantime, children ages 5-7 may be entered as members. Ignore the alert that pops up reminding you that members must be 8 as of January 1 of the current year. The alerts will disappear once the program is updated.

8. *Will the cost of our volunteer liability insurance change as a result of our program expansion to this younger audience?*

No. Since the volunteer liability insurance covers all extension volunteers, it was already covering work with children younger than age 8.

9. *What is the impact of lowering 4-H membership age on the PDA Fair Fund grants?*

Management of the 4-H Youth Development Program is done by Penn State Cooperative Extension not by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. Funding will continue to be based on the total number of 4-H members reported in each county's annual report. Funding availability is determined by PDA on a year-to-year basis.

10. *Will there be a mechanism for setting state policy regarding age appropriateness for curriculum and activities?*

As noted in the answer to question 4, there are already many activities that have an appropriate age attached to them. The state office will continue to attach ages to those activities that are planned on the state level. Since county and regional activities are planned in county offices and in regional groups, there will not be a state-wide policy concerning age for these activities. The events and activities vary too much by region and may, in some cases, be specifically designed for younger age groups. The professionals involved in planning these activities will use their knowledge of youth development to determine appropriate age. The current guidelines to membership will be expanded to include the following:

Cloverbuds	- ages 5-7
Introductory	- ages 8-10
Primary	- ages 11-12
Intermediate	- ages 13-15
Advanced	- ages 16-18.

11. *How will the age level be handled in state level produced publicity?*
 All materials produced on the state level are general in nature due to the variety of programming occurring in the counties. The official ages for the 4-H program will be listed as 5-18. Since marketing materials are normally designed to attract new audiences not inform current audiences, confusion of 5-8 year olds having to be in traditional 4-H clubs should not be an issue. That being said, it is important that we also have the conversation with parents of current 4-H members that younger siblings do not automatically attend 4-H club meetings. Programming needs to be age appropriate and therefore, parents will need support formation of Cloverbud groups.

12. *How can we help our club leaders embrace this change when they are already complaining that parents drop their kids off at club meetings as if they were a babysitting service?*
 There is a VIP Fact Sheet on parent involvement in 4-H club. Fact Sheet 21, *Dear Parent*, provides some general information to parents, provides a list of what parents can do, and has a check list for parents to complete indicating how they are willing to help. Encourage volunteers to use this material and modify to fit their needs.

13. *How will administrators be communicating the county-based decision making prerogative regarding programming for 5, 6 and 7 year olds?*
 When phone calls, letters, or emails are received by extension administration concerning 4-H programming decisions made in the county, the individuals are referred back to the county extension office.