

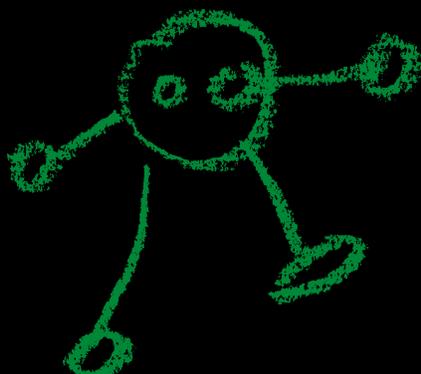
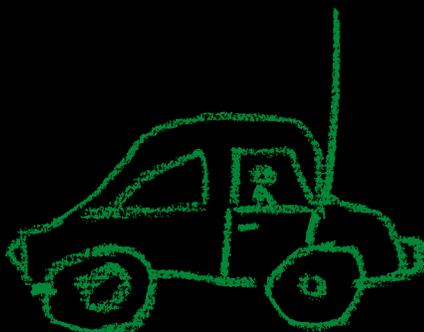
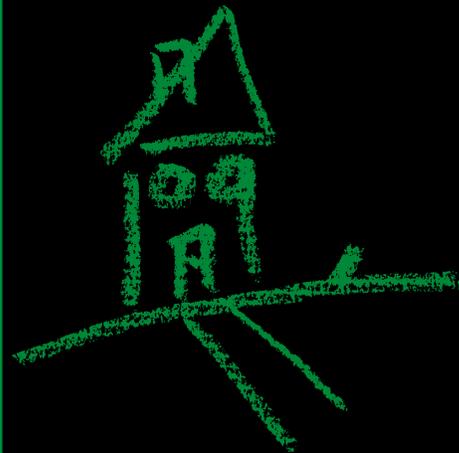
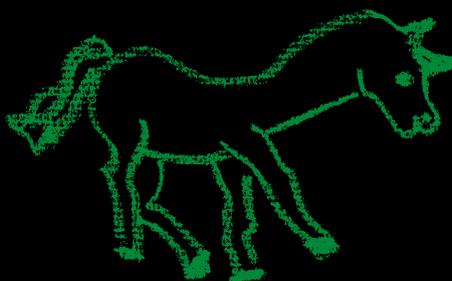
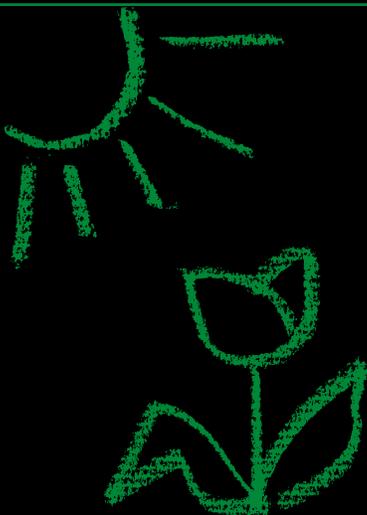
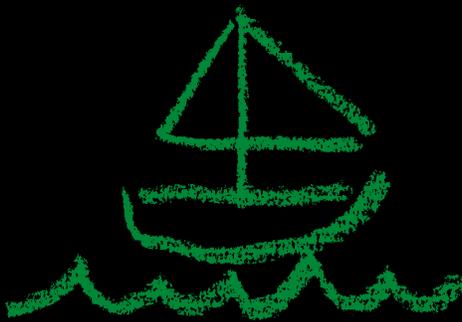
# AGES AND STAGES

Child and Adolescent Development



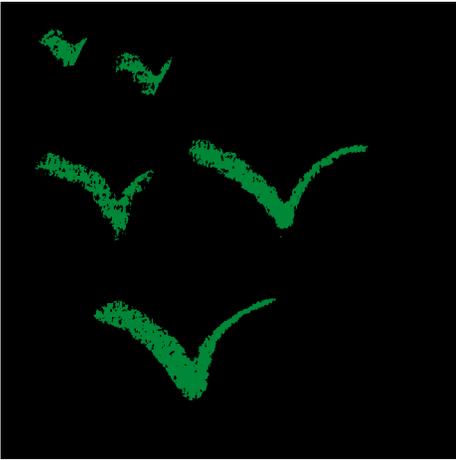
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A Guide for  
4-H Leaders



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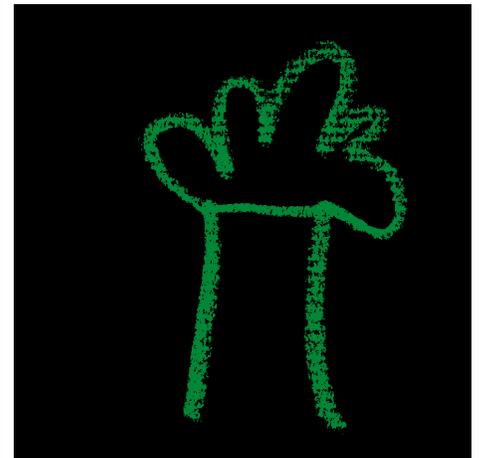
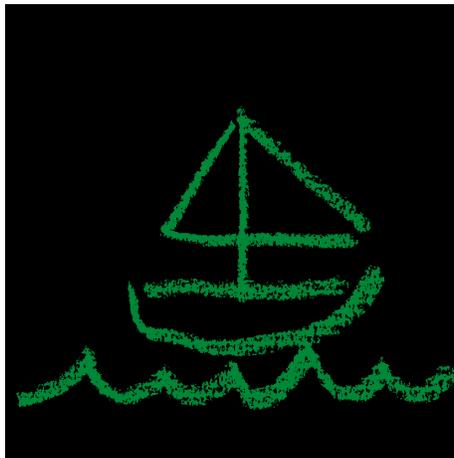
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# INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to help you gain insight into the needs and interests of your 4-H club members. The guide discusses characteristics common to youngsters at each developmental level and suggests ways to help them gain skills. With the aid of this information, you can help 4-H'ers have challenging experiences that will contribute to their growth and development.

Keep in mind that no two individuals develop at the same pace and that transitions are gradual over time. A 4-H'er may seem very responsible and mature at one meeting, then noisy and bored at the next.



# EARLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

## *Ages 5 to 8*

Children ages 5 to 8 are not 4-H members, but they may be participating in Cooperative Extension related youth programs.

### **Physical Growth**

Early-elementary-age children are at a period of slow, steady growth. They have left behind the rapid changes of the infant-preschooler. The adolescent growth spurt is far away.

Five- to 8-year-olds are busy learning how to use their bodies by mastering physical skills. These include everything from small muscle skills like printing with a pencil to large muscle skills like catching a fly ball. Because these skills are not yet polished, craft projects often end up messy, with crooked nails and too much glue. Activities need to be just that—active. Provide opportunities to practice skills, but use projects that beginners can complete successfully.

### **Growth in Thinking**

Early-elementary-age children are moving out of what psychologist Erik Erikson has called a “stage of initiative” and into the “stage of industry.” A child at this stage is more interested in the process than in the resulting product; the child is more inclined to continue working on a project than to complete it. (This is just as well, because young children’s limited physical ability means that finished products will not be perfect.) Eventually, finishing a project will become as important as beginning it. But don’t count on that just yet.

Thinking is concrete at this time. If these children have never seen it, heard it, felt it, tasted it, or smelled it, they have a hard time thinking of it. They also enjoy activities and materials that are real and tangible. Rather than simply giving instructions verbally, you should demonstrate the activity. Doing is important for both children and leader.

Another thinking skill that early elementary children are developing is learning to sort things into categories. This skill makes collecting things so important and so much fun at this age. Collecting-type activities can be good for both group meetings and individual projects at this point.

### **Social Growth**

School-age activities take children away from home and parents, some for the first time, and put them in environments where they face new responsibilities and demands. As children move away from depending on their parents, they need to transfer that dependence to another adult, so the leader may become a central figure to the child.

Children are just learning how to be friends and may have several “best friends” at a time. Boys and girls sometimes enjoy playing together at this age, although by the end of this period a separation of the sexes occurs during most play. Fights often happen but seldom have lasting effects.

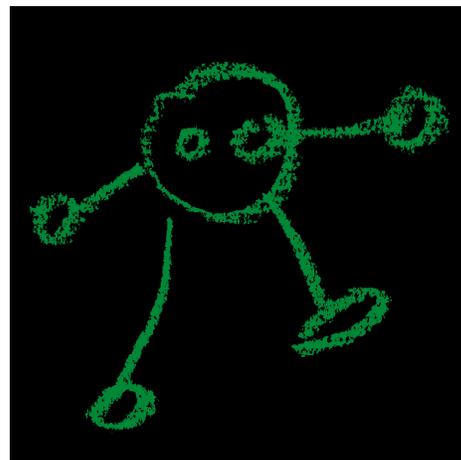
The opinion of peers is becoming important. Often, 5- to 8-year-olds care more about being successful when their peers are watching than when just Mom or Dad are around. Small group activities are effective, but children still need an adult to share approval.

### **Emotional Growth**

Early-elementary-age children are wrapped up in themselves. Their thinking capacity does not yet allow them to imagine clearly what other people think and feel. “Dramatic play” or making believe they are someone else is the way children at this age begin to build that ability. Five- to 8-year-olds need and seek the approval of adults, because they are not yet confident enough to set their own standards.

Children at this stage like to play games. Rules and rituals become fascinating, but the children are not yet ready to accept losing. This is why success needs to be emphasized, even if it is small. Cooperative games in which every child wins can be especially enjoyable at this age. Try to establish some measure of success in every experience to ease blows to young egos.

When an activity fails, you can help children by interpreting the reasons behind the failures. Learning to cope with problems is a skill you can encourage in 4-H members. The usual 4-H practice of awarding competitive ribbons should be minimized or avoided here. Competition with others is inappropriate for 5- to 8-year-olds.



# MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN

## Ages 9 to 12

### Physical Growth

Physical growth at this stage is still rather slow for most children, but they are anything but still and quiet. Puberty may be starting in some girls who mature very early.

Activities for middle-school-age children should encourage physical involvement. These children like the movement in ball games and swimming. Hands-on involvement with objects can be very helpful. These children like field trips to science museums or parks, but only if they are not expected to stay confined to one area or to do one thing for a long time. They also need opportunities to share their thoughts and reactions.

Children at this stage are still fairly concrete thinkers. Speakers and demonstrators get more attention if they bring things that can be seen and handled. Projects that involve making or doing something are of interest to middle-school-age children.

### Growth in Thinking

Children at this stage are beginning to think logically and symbolically. They still think in terms of concrete objects and can better handle ideas if related to something they can do or experience with their senses. They are moving toward abstract thinking. As they begin to deal with ideas, they think of things as black or white. Something is either right or wrong, fabulous or disgusting, fun or boring. There is very little middle ground.

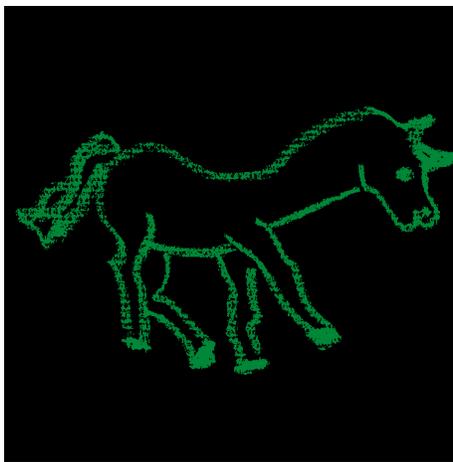
These children still look to adults for approval. They follow rules primarily out of respect for an adult. Individual evaluation by an adult is preferable to group competition where only one can be the best. Middle-school-age children want to know how much they have improved and what they should do to be better next time. Children at this age often are surprised at what they can accomplish, especially with encouragement from an adult.

### Social Growth

Joining a club is popular with this age group. In fact, the period from 6 to 12 years has been called "the gang age." Children are beginning to identify with peers, although they still look to an adult for guidance. They like to be in an organized group with others like themselves.

Although 9- to 12-year-olds still have difficulty understanding another person's thinking, they are beginning to discover the benefits of making other people happy. Primarily, they are developing an "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine" philosophy. By the end of this age range, they begin to realize additional benefits of pleasing others apart from immediate self-reward. During most of this period, however, the satisfaction of completing a project comes more from pleasing a leader or parents than from the value or importance of the activity itself.

Toward the end of this age range, children are ready to move ahead with the task of taking responsibility for



their own actions. Although the teaching of responsibility is a long process that should begin in infancy, some very concrete steps may be taken at this point. Club meetings offer the opportunity for members to have a voice in determining their own activities. Decision-making skills are developed as the adult leader moves away from dictating directions to giving reassurance and support.

For many activities, children of this age divide themselves into sex-segregated groups. Project interests may separate into traditional male-female areas. This distinction is not as prevalent as it was at younger ages, however. At the same time these children are thinking in black and white terms about male-female issues, they also are developing an increased independence of thought and action that may allow them to try new things.

### Emotional Growth

Middle-school-age children have a strong need to feel accepted and worthwhile. School becomes increasingly difficult and demanding for these children. Other pressures are added, too. Successes, even small ones, should continue to be emphasized. Failures should be minimized. (Individuals learn better and try harder if they believe in themselves and think they can succeed!)

Comparison with others is difficult for children at this age. It tends to shake self-confidence. In addition, it can cause problems in dealing with peers at a time when they are trying to understand and build friendships. Instead of comparing children with each other, build positive self-concepts by comparing present to past performance for the individual. Project judgments that allow each article to be rated on its own merit, rather than in competition with others, are preferable. If all successful projects can earn blue ribbons, the children are more encouraged than if projects must compete for only a few available placings.

## YOUNG TEENAGERS

### *Ages 13 to 15*

Young teens have some experience in 4-H and are ready to become junior leaders, but they also may be tempted to drop out of the organization. This is a time of great developmental variety among peers.

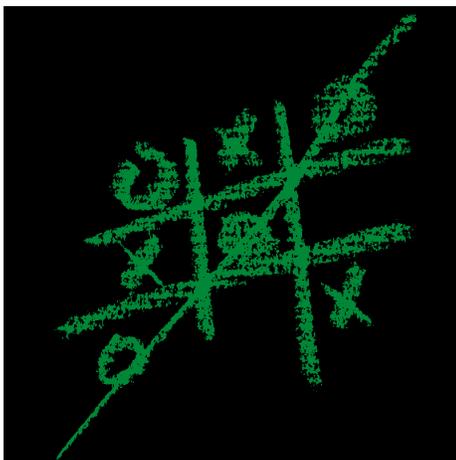
### **Physical Growth**

Last year's little girls may be this year's young women. Some boys of 13 may still be the size of an 11-year-old, while other boys of the same age may have grown 6 inches. The growth spurt that marks the beginning of adolescence may occur across a wide range of ages, with girls maturing before boys.

Rapid changes in physical appearance may make teens uncomfortable. They are uneasy with their changing bodies. Hands and feet grow first, creating a problem with clumsiness. Acne, voice changes, and unpredictable menstrual cycles can create embarrassment. At the same time, late-developing teens may be uneasy about the lack of changes. Even when physical development is slow, however, social growth, changes in thinking, and emotional development are occurring.

### **Growth in Thinking**

Young teens enjoy mental as well as physical activities. They move from concrete to more abstract thinking during this time. They still tend to



think in all-or-nothing terms, however. If a subject is of interest, it will be intensely explored. Ready-made solutions from adults may be rejected in favor of finding solutions on one's own. Adults who can provide supervision without interference can have a great influence on these youth. If an adult leader is respected, his or her opinion will be highly valued by young teens.

Small groups provide an opportunity for young teens to test ideas. They can be very self-conscious, so a smaller group is less intimidating. Small clubs with many positions for developing leadership are ideal for this age group.

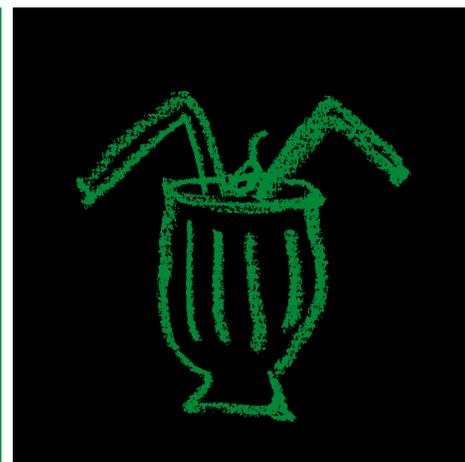
As early teens start to deal with abstract ideas and values, justice and equality become important issues for them. Project judging now may be viewed in terms of what is fair, as well as a reflection of the individual's self-worth.

### **Social Growth**

As they move away from depending on their parents toward eventual independence, early teens enjoy participating in activities away from home. While teens still seek the counsel of parents and other adults, they also seek the support of peers. Young teens are comfortable away from their parents and are beginning to develop mature friendship skills. Parents may need help in understanding that this is a healthy sign of growing maturity, not a rejection of past or future family activities.

Groups and clubs provide an opportunity for early teens to experience social acceptance. Rather than the adult recognition sought earlier, young teens now seek peer recognition. Providing members with the opportunity to learn being at ease with members of the opposite sex is an important function of group social activities.

For most activities, boys still cluster with boys and girls with girls, but they are beginning to be very interested in what the other group is doing. Opportunities are needed for boys and girls to mix without feeling uncomfortable. This seems to work best if teens plan the activities themselves and if the boys are slightly older than the girls (because girls often mature earlier).



### **Emotional Growth**

As puberty approaches, young people's emotions begin the roller coaster ride that often characterizes them throughout adolescence. Changes in hormones contribute to these mood swings, as do changes in thinking. Young teens are beginning to test values. Spending time with adults who are accepting and willing to talk about values and morals has a lasting effect on young people.

The early teen years seem to present a real challenge to a young person's sense of self. So many changes are occurring—everything from entering a new school to developing a new and unfamiliar body—that young people hardly know who they are. This is a time for adults to help with self-knowledge and self-discovering activities. Teens need to be assured that some uneasiness about one's self is normal during this time period.

It still is important to avoid comparing young people with each other. Instead, compare the young person's present performance with his or her past accomplishments. Be especially careful at this age not to embarrass the young person.

Teens feel the need to be part of something important. An activity that provides good things for others and demonstrates the teen's growing sense of responsibility is ideal. Junior leader organizations often are popular with

## MIDDLE TEENS

### *Ages 16 to 18*

The middle-teen years can be a peak time for leadership experiences in school and nonschool groups, clubs, and activities. However, school, more defined interests, jobs, and social activities compete for teens' time and energy. They may drop out of groups in which they'd been active earlier so that they can try out new interests.

### **Physical Growth**

By this time, teens are more comfortable with their adult appearance. They fit their bodies, so they are less awkward. Some late-maturing boys, however, experience growth spurts well into their teens. Gone is the early teen, who was adjusting to the seemingly ever-changing size and shape of the adolescent body.

Teens 16 to 18 know their own abilities and talents. Many perfect athletic talent during intense hours of training and competition. New skills, such as driving a car, serve to move teens further away from the family and into the community as independent people.

### **Growth in Thinking**

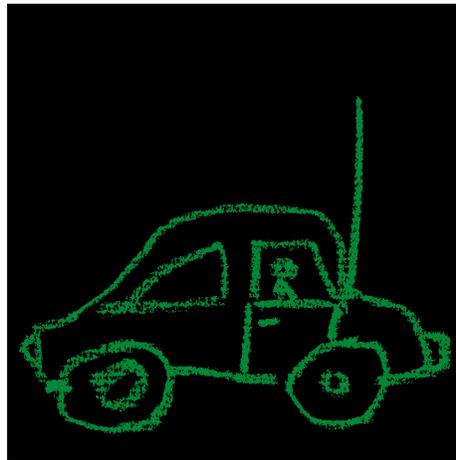
Adolescents are beginning to think about the future and to make realistic plans. Because they are mastering abstract thinking, they can imagine things that never were in a way that challenges—and sometimes threatens—many adults. They still have difficulty understanding compromise, however, and may label as "hypocrisy" adult efforts to cope with the inconsistencies of life.

As middle teens think about the future, tomorrow's vocational goal influences today's activities. The middle teen years are a time of exploration and preparation for future careers. Teens set goals based on feelings of personal need and priorities. Any goals set by others are apt to be rejected. College visits, part-time jobs, field trips to factories and businesses, and conversations with

college students and adults working in a wide variety of fields can assist teens in making education and career decisions.

The middle years of adolescence are a time when teens can initiate and carry out their own tasks without supervision. Advanced projects requiring research and creativity give teens the opportunity to demonstrate to themselves and others how much they have learned and how much they can accomplish on their own.

As leader, you can be especially



helpful to teens of this age by arranging new experiences in their areas of interest. Information about trips and other projects associated with 4-H and reserved for older members can be made available. To be successful in these activities, members need a leader to guide them through the qualification requirements while allowing plenty of input from the teens themselves. As teens prepare for jobs, advanced schooling, and scholarship opportunities, a leader who knows the members well is a valuable

resource for references.

### **Social Growth**

At this stage adolescents would be capable of understanding much of what other people feel—if they were not so wrapped up in themselves. Relationship skills are usually well developed, however, and friendships formed at this stage are often sincere, close, and long-lasting. Recreation continues to move away from the family and also away from the large group. Dating increases. Among most teens, group dates gradually give way to double dates and couples-only dates. Acceptance by members of the opposite sex is increasingly important.

Other activities, such as sports and clubs, are still important. Teens want to belong to the group but also want to be recognized as unique individuals within that group. Teens' individually set priorities will determine how active they remain in past organizations. Leader-member relations should now change from that of director-follower to that of advisor-independent worker. Adults need to understand the many changes occurring in teens' lives. Consistent treatment from adults is important even though teens act like adults one day and children the next.

### **Emotional Growth**

Two important emotional goals of the middle-teen years are independence and identity, although neither is completely achieved during this period. Factors in these goals include achieving a satisfactory adjustment of sexuality and defining career goals. Middle teens are learning to cooperate with others on an adult level. Time is precious. If programs are filled with "busy work" or meaningless activities, teens soon lose patience and interest.

The task of learning to interact with members of the opposite sex may preoccupy teens. Unsettled emotions may cause them to be stormy or withdrawn at times. In general, though, teens pride themselves on their growing ability to be responsible in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of peers and adults.

# OLDER TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

## *Ages 19+*

Older teens and young adults are moving on to college, jobs, marriage, and other adult responsibilities associated with the adult role.

### **Physical Growth**

Growth for almost all young adults has tapered off. Late teens are no longer as preoccupied with body image and bodily changes. In most ways they have adult bodies, although they may not be prepared entirely for adulthood.

### **Growth in Thinking**

Future plans are important for teens making the transition to adult life. Goals they set for the future influence which activities they will continue.

Late teens can determine their own schedules. Only general directions are needed when they are assigned familiar tasks.

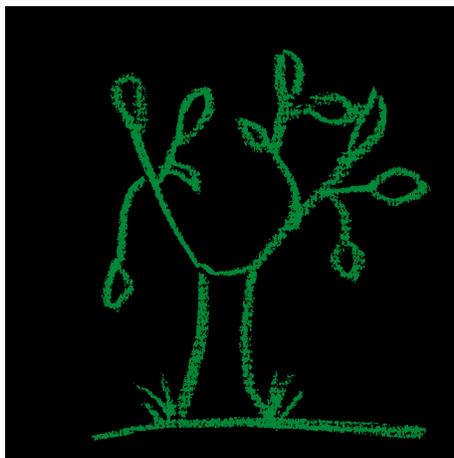
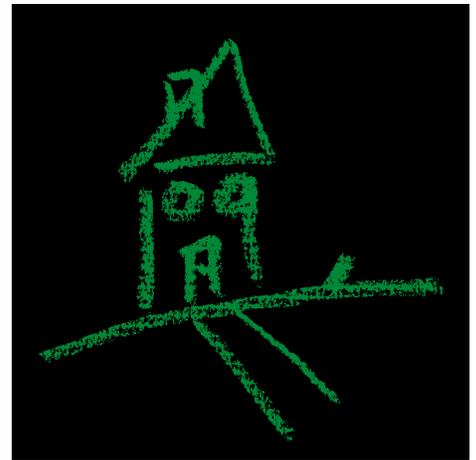
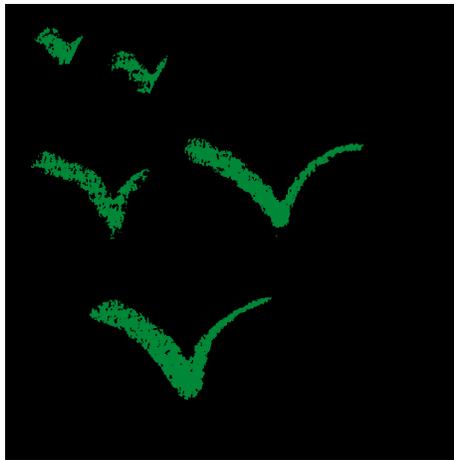
### **Social Growth**

Close relationships develop as young people become preoccupied with their need for intimacy. Some marry at this age. Part-time jobs or advanced schooling may fill the need for social relationships that were filled in the past by club activities.

As teens make and carry out serious decisions, they still need the support and guidance of adults. The final decisions are made by the teens, of course, but leaders can act as resource persons. They can stimulate teens' thinking. Leaders no longer can control a member's activities.

### **Emotional Growth**

The trappings of 4-H clubs, such as meetings, rituals, and uniforms, have lost their appeal for late teens. This is a time many teens enjoy looking back on their achievements as 10-year members of 4-H, often receiving special recognition for their leadership. Late teens feel they have reached the stage of full maturity and expect to be treated as such.





Adapted by Anne L. Heinsohn, associate professor of extension education, from *Ages and Stages of Child and Youth Development: A Guide for 4-H Leaders*, North Central Regional Extension Publication No. 292, by Jeanne Karns and Judith A. Meyers-Wells, Purdue University.

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