# 4-H Youth Development – The Club System

The 4-H club is the core structure where hands-on learning and teaching take place. An organized group of at least four youth, from at least three different families, meet a minimum of six times per year with adult volunteers and/or 4-H staff. With appropriate guidance from volunteers, club members elect their own officers, decide on programs and plan activities.

It's entirely up to 4-H members what their 4-H club does! 4-H clubs usually focus on one or more topics of the members' choice. They conduct project-related activities, for example, a gardening club may have a year-round garden or a technology club may work on web design at meetings. 4-H clubs also do lots of community service both in their project area and where they are needed.

The purpose of 4-H is to promote positive youth development. If club members and volunteers plan a wide variety of learning activities together, everyone has the chance to grow through experiential learning, developing individual skills and abilities, and participating in community service projects. A summary of 4-H

club policies is located in Appendix B.

The 4-H program year runs October 1 through the following September. Membership in Maine 4-H is open to all youth ages 8-19 (age as of January 1), regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, disability, or public assistance. Children ages 5-8 can participate with selected age-appropriate activities through the Cloverbud program.

## Cloverbud Program – Ages 5-8

The primary goal of the Cloverbud program is to promote children's healthy development—mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally. The Cloverbud program provides an excellent opportunity for children to reach his or her highest potential because early life experiences, even subtle ones, affect future development.

The Cloverbud program is developmentally-age appropriate, therefore it is:

* fun and positive
* leader-directed
* activity-based
* noncompetitive
* success-oriented
* group-centered

The Cloverbud program allows for and encourages creativity and play. The goals of Cloverbud programs are for children to develop:

* self-understanding (self-esteem)
* social interaction skills (getting along with others)
* decision-making skills
* learning skills (learning how to learn)
* mastering physical skills

Additional information is available online [www.ohio4h.org/4-h-youth/cloverbuds](http://www.ohio4h.org/4-h-youth/cloverbuds) and [nifa.usda.gov/resource/4-h-club-design-factsheets](http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/4-h-club-design-factsheets).

**Cloverbud FAQ’s**

**What is the difference between a Cloverbud and other 4-H members?**

Children in this age group have developmental and learning characteristics that are different from older members. If you have spent time with kids that are 5-8 years old, you have seen that their attention span is shorter, they are physically smaller and they may handle competitive events in a different way than older, more experienced youth.

In Maine, Cloverbuds participate in 4-H activities but are limited to non-competitive activities and cannot exhibit larger animals in any fairs or events.

**What if a Cloverbud wants to take a specific project like cooking or dogs?**

When 5-8 year old members enroll, their project area (on the back of the enrollment sheet) should always be listed as 60074 “Introduction to 4-H Projects.” Programs for Cloverbuds should consist of introductory level (“sampler”) activities that build skills in a variety of 4-H project areas.

A Cloverbud activity focuses on developing a skill or concept related to a short-term experience. 4-H project work, a long-term planned course of study in one subject area, is designed for 4-H members ages nine and older. The skills Cloverbuds learn from their activities will prepare them for project work later.

**Do Cloverbuds keep records?**

Cloverbuds should have the opportunity to be introduced to simple record keeping skills using an age-appropriate method such as the Maine 4-H Cloverbuds Activity Record.

**Can a Cloverbud work with animals?**

The national 4-H policy states that for safety and developmental reasons, children ages 5-8 may not have animal projects. Cloverbuds may not show any animals competitively in 4-H classes at Maine fairs or other 4-H events.

Recognizing that engaging this age group in activities with animals builds long-term interest in working with animals, carefully structured, well-supervised, age-appropriate activities with animals are encouraged. See Section C.3.3 in the 4-H Policies and Guidelines for complete details. ([umaine.edu/4h/volunteers/resources/policies-procedure-and-guidelines](http://umaine.edu/4h/volunteers/resources/policies-procedure-and-guidelines/))

**Can Cloverbuds show at 4-H fair events?**

While Cloverbuds may not participate as competitive exhibitors in any 4-H events, they are encouraged to participate in fairs and other county events in other ways. Your local Extension office can provide more details.