

# Leader Guide

Welcome to the University of Minnesota Extension Service 4-H Cloverbud Program. This program is an informal education program designed specifically for children in grades K-3. Children of this age are a distinct audience for 4-H, with learning characteristics and developmental needs that are different from older children and youth. They are not “mini-4-H members.” Their needs and interests require that activities and events be designed especially for them.

The Cloverbud Program appeals to these children’s natural curiosity, enthusiasm for learning, and high energy level. It provides opportunity for exploration and active learning in a noncompetitive environment. By offering a wide variety of activities and experience, children are encouraged to explore and think about the world around them. The children (and you too) will find the program stimulating and fun.

The “Cloverbud” name has a rich history within Minnesota 4-H. More than ten years ago it was adopted by Minnesota to represent the positive experiences we want for this age group. Before that, 4-H included this age group in its educational activities as “Discovery” or other local brands. The name refers to the activities we develop for children in grades K-3. It stands as a sign of adventure and excitement as these children seek new knowledge, learn new skills, and develop new interests.

## The Philosophy

The Cloverbud Program is a part of the Center for 4-H Youth Development state-wide program and reflects the Center’s mission to foster positive child development. It recognizes the unique needs of this age group.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the University of Minnesota Extension Service 4-H Cloverbud Program is to support the positive development of children as they explore their world, discover the possibilities, build self-esteem, and practice the basic social skills which will be the basis for a future when they will become competent, caring, contributing citizens. To support this, the Cloverbud Program demonstrates the following characteristics:

- Reflects a child-centered approach
- Is noncompetitive
- Encourages family and community involvement
- Values diversity and is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate
- Is accessible to all children

### Goals

Children in grades K-3 who participate in the 4-H Cloverbud Program will accomplish the following goals:

- Develop a positive self-concept
- Develop competencies in life skills for self-understanding, social interaction, decision making, learning to learn, and mastering physical skills



- Gain knowledge in sciences, literature, and the arts through the experiential learning process
- Develop positive attitudes about learning
- Develop ongoing relationships with caring adults and older youth who serve as positive role models
- Explore family and community relationships
- Develop an understanding and appreciation for social and cultural diversity

Cloverbuds offers K-3 children a chance to be involved in 4-H in a variety of settings. Educational materials available to support the program can be used for both short-term and long-term programming. Delivery of the Cloverbud Program may occur through sponsorship by organized clubs, day camps, school-age care programs, special interest programs, community and home schools, or individual study.

In all settings, the determining factors in designing the learning experiences are the members' interests, abilities, and needs. The focus of the 4-H Cloverbuds is the positive growth of the children, not the activities or projects used as vehicles to foster that growth and development.

## **Policies and Guidelines**

The commitment of 4-H to experiential education (hands-on learning), supporting the development of life skills, and fostering citizenship is key to all of the work we do with children and youth. Policies that affect different age groups and setting will vary. Based on the needs, interests, and developmental tasks of children in grades K-3, the following policies and guidelines have been established.

### **• Who May Participate:**

Cloverbuds is designed specifically for children in grades K-3, and all in those grades are welcome to participate. When children reach the 4th grade, 4-H project work becomes available to them. Some children in grade 3 may be ready for project work. They may be accepted into the community club program if the local county policy allows and both the parent and organizational leader of the club approve. Refer to the basic requirements for a risk management program below for additional information.

### **• Competition:**

Competitive activities are developmentally inappropriate for children of this age range, and thus Cloverbuds emphasizes cooperative rather than competitive experiences. Children are encouraged to develop social skills through cooperative experiences with their peers. They also are allowed the freedom of not having undue emphasis placed on the product of their efforts. This is a time to experiment with new skills and experiences, not to strive for perfection.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, children in this age group have only begun to deal with failure or being less than the best. Therefore, it is not appropriate for K-3 children to participate in competitive situations. However, it is very appropriate for a child to participate in noncompetitive 4-H activities and to be recognized for their participation.

### **• Children as Leaders:**

Children in grades K-3 are not normally ready for positional leadership. Electing officers can cause some children to feel left out. These children need a strong sense of belonging.

In keeping with good parenting practices for this age group, children should be encouraged to explore possibilities and to make choices (as a group) between two or three options. Children can be encouraged to accept specific responsibilities for the group (taking turns bringing refreshments, calling other children to invite them to the activities, etc.), but adult leaders need to be ready to accept greater responsibility for the organization of the experiences than they would for older children and youth. The adult is still the center of the child's experience.

• **Team Leadership:**

It is strongly recommended that there always be at least two adult leaders, unrelated to each other, with a group of K-3 children. This is a personal safety precaution for both the children and the adults. A ratio of one responsible person to every six children is recommended.

### **Minimum Requirements for a Risk Management Plan in 4-H Cloverbud Activities**

**All activities involve an element of risk. As a professional, you will need to appropriately manage that risk for the safety of youth and the good of the program, up to and including not permitting Cloverbuds to participate in shows.**

**A** Assess the risk, which is presented by the activity, the environment, the developmental skills, and stages of the children involved and the experience of those presenting and supervising the activity.

**B** A parent/responsible person\* will be with the Cloverbud at all times when in **the presence of an animal or when using equipment** that is potentially dangerous. Scissors, saws, knives, needles, rockets, kitchen appliances, etc. are examples. Cloverbuds should not operate power driven equipment as a part of activities (sewing machines, power drills, small engines, clippers, etc.). Cloverbuds will wear appropriate safety helmets when riding horses or bicycles.

**C** The ratio of adults/responsible persons to children will be adjusted relative to the risk of the activity. At times one to one supervision may be required.

**D** When animals and Cloverbuds are together at 4-H activities, such as fairs and shows, an adult/responsible person\* will be in control of the animal (control means to handle and/or lead the animal). A local assessment may lead counties to be more restrictive than indicated here.

**E** An emergency plan will be developed and shared with all adults present. The plan will identify the location of phones, basic first aid supplies, phone numbers and addresses for hospitals, as well as parent contact information if not present.

**F** The Extension educator or designee is positioned to intervene when safety becomes a concern.

\*A "responsible person" is defined as adult leaders, teen leaders, parents or other adults who may appropriately assist with the group.

# Developmental Characteristics of Children in Grades K-3

Children in grades K-3 develop and learn in ways that differ from those of younger children and from older youth and adults. Understanding the developmental and learning characteristics of K-3 children provides a foundation for developing effective programs.

The remainder of this section presents an overview of the developmental and learning characteristics of children in grades K-3. Remember that these are generalizations and that children develop at varying rates. For example, a physically advanced child may be slow to develop language. Such uneven development also is evident when comparing children within a group. Just think of the different heights you find among 6-year-olds! Development and learning are complex processes not yet thoroughly understood. Generalizations can serve as guideposts for planning activities, choosing materials, etc., but in the end, getting to know the children is the best way to plan.

## Physical Development

*Major task: Refine gross (large) and fine motor skills*

- Gross motor skills are largely mastered. Children continue to practice these skills and use them to release energy (running, jumping, skipping, etc.).
- Fine motor skills are developing. More practice is needed to refine these skills and achieve control (cutting with scissors, using a pencil, manipulating small objects, etc.).
- Children need to have frequent opportunities for physical activity. For these youngsters, sitting still is more demanding than being physically active.

## Social Development

*Major task: Develop social competence*

- Having friends becomes increasingly important. While parents remain the primary influence in a child's life, friendship with peers outside the family begins to develop.
- Friendships often change for younger children, but friendships are more stable by age eight.
- Preference for friends moves from mixed gender to same-gender children.
- Children increasingly enjoy working in pairs or small groups. Group work fosters social development as children learn how to interact.

## Emotional Development

*Major task: Develop a positive self-concept*

- Perceptions of self are forming. Children need opportunities to experience success and receive positive feedback from adults and peers.
- Pleasing adults is important. Children seek adult praise and support.
- Self-control is developing. Children need positive adult guidance to help them learn self-control.
- Children are self-critical and sensitive to criticism from others. Accepting failure is very difficult.
- Children are becoming more knowledgeable about their own feelings and those of others. Emotional ups and downs occur, but usually don't last long.

## **Cognitive Development**

*Major task: Acquire the ability to think about and solve problems mentally*

- Thinking ability remains tied to experiences in the real world. Children construct knowledge from physical experience, social interaction, and reflection.
- The ability to see things from another's perspective is developing.
- Verbal skills become more sophisticated. As children become able to understand others' perspectives, their ability to communicate is greatly expanded.
- Reasoning becomes more logical.
- Great gains are made in the ability to read, write, and use numbers.

## **Learning Characteristics**

*Major task: Make sense of the world and master the skills necessary to function successfully*

- Children have an innate curiosity about the world around them. Their interest motivates them to explore and learn about it.
- They enjoy intellectual challenges. Riddles, word games, and lots of conversation allow them to show off new thinking skills.
- Learning is tied to concrete experiences. Children need to manipulate objects and interact with adults and peers in a meaningful context.
- Children learn best when their physical needs are met.
- The learning process usually is more important than the product of learning. Finishing a project is often irrelevant. However, as children approach 8 years of age, having a product to show for their efforts begins to take on significance.
- Attention spans tend to be short. Interest is maintained anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes.
- Unstructured play is important. It permits children to explore, test, experiment, imagine, and create in a nonthreatening environment.

# **Creating Positive Learning Environments**

The Cloverbud Program is a child-centered program. That means the interests and needs of the children drive the program.

Thus, knowledge of the developmental and learning characteristics of K-3 children has direct implications for the way we design activities. In general, positive learning environments are created for children when programs:

**Provide** one responsible person for every six children. (Some activities require a higher adult-child ratio, sometimes one to one.) Because of variations in developmental stages, it is important to have a high adult-child ratio in learning situations so that each child receives the individualized attention needed to be successful. A parent or older youth may help to provide appropriate support.

**Involve** the children in selecting and planning activities. Children who help select the learning activities are more likely to maintain interest and to integrate new skills and knowledge with what they already know. Leaders should help children select from identified options.

**Change** activities often according to the needs of the children. Keep children interested and involved by offering a variety of learning activities, with variation in the pace and range of experiences. Keep youth actively "doing things." Have children use all their senses.

Alternate “sit-down” and “moving” activities. Avoid talking to the group for longer than 5-10 minutes at a time.

**Encourage** children to talk and work with each other. Children learn best when they are engaged in activities that allow them to practice, demonstrate, explain, and apply their learning. Working with peers offers opportunities for these activities and helps foster the ability to interact and work cooperatively.

**Include** adults who are positive behavior models. As children enlarge their circle to include the greater community, adults outside the home have increasing influence in their lives, introducing new information, new skills, and new points of view. Adults also have significant influence in helping children feel good about who they are and what they can do. It is important that 4-H Cloverbud leaders understand the importance of their role, and represent positive models of the behavior we wish children to develop.

**Promote** cooperation rather than competition. It is inappropriate for children in grades K-3 to participate in contests where they’re judged. Developmentally, K-3 children need experiences that foster cooperative effort, emphasize the learning process over a product, and reinforce a positive concept of self. Competition undermines each of these needs. It is appropriate to recognize children’s efforts and to display their work. It is also appropriate to give caring and personal feedback.

**Use** positive guidance and discipline. Children in early childhood are learning self-control, and they need the positive guidance of adults to do so. To become socially competent, children must be taught skills for appropriate social behaviors, such as taking turns, dividing and sharing resources, and working cooperatively. Use misbehavior as a teaching opportunity to show children how to apply appropriate skills.

**Provide** individualized learning as well as learning in small groups. Learning activities should include a variety of experiences to accommodate the children’s varied ages, stages, interests, and needs. Parallel activities may be used to allow children at different stages to participate in a way that suits their developmental needs.

## **Family Involvement**

The world of the young child revolves around his or her family even as he or she seeks greater involvement with peers and other adults. The interest and involvement of family members in 4-H Cloverbuds is an important support for the program.

Family members should be encouraged to participate in the program in any way they can. Invite them to help with field trips or special projects, share leadership of the group, or simply take time to talk with their child about activities.

Scheduling activities that are family-focused is another way to encourage family involvement. If you make families aware of their importance to 4-H Cloverbuds, they are more likely to participate.

## Children with Special Needs

Children with special needs are found in every community. Despite their special needs, these children are more like other children than they are different. They have the same basic needs for friendship, participation, and recognition that other children have. Involving these children in the 4-H Cloverbud Program provides valuable learning opportunities for all involved.

The children with special needs benefit from interaction with their peers, and the other children learn to understand the nature of disabilities and to see the child rather than the disability first. Likewise, you, as a leader, will learn new information and develop new skills as a result of working with children with special needs.

The 4-H program historically has included youth with special needs and 4-H Cloverbud leaders are encouraged to continue the tradition. By working closely with parents, you can make the necessary accommodations to ensure a successful experience for all members.

## Guidance and Discipline

All children misbehave from time to time. It is a natural consequence of growing, exploring, and testing. Your response to inappropriate behavior will depend on the specifics of the situation, the personality of the youngster, and your own personality and skills.

There is no one best way to respond to all situations. However, a good strategy is to prevent misbehavior from occurring in the first place. You can avoid many problem situations simply by making sure an activity is developmentally appropriate. To help prevent problem behaviors, follow these guidelines:

- Greet children individually each time you meet
- Develop positive relationships with the children
- Plan ahead so that activities are well organized
- Keep children actively and constructively involved
- Convey clear and consistent expectations for behaviors

When inappropriate behavior does occur, it becomes your responsibility to teach appropriate behavior. Here are six guidelines for dealing with misbehavior:

- Identify the cause of the behavior
- Formulate a response strategy (for instance, redirect a child's efforts, change partners, or provide individual assistance)
- Consistently enforce rules and consequences
- Maintain self-control
- Avoid power struggles
- If misbehavior persists, involve parents to help solve the problem

Remember, your goal is to help children develop self-control. You can do this by modeling appropriate behaviors, by helping them learn needed skills, and by providing opportunities to practice those skills.

## Planning Events and Activities

Cloverbuds will involve children in a variety of settings. Whatever the delivery mode, here are some suggestions for planning an activity:

**Plan** ahead to insure that activities are well organized.

**Maintain** a ratio of one adult/older youth for every four to six children.

**Limit** meeting times to 1 to 1½ hours using a variety of activities from 10 to 15 minutes in length.

**Welcome** each child personally to the activity.

**Consider** using songs or games to open and close the session.

**Tell** the children at the beginning of the meeting what activities have been planned. Before shifting from one activity to another, give the children 5 minutes notice of the impending change.

**Keep** snacks simple and nutritious.

**Plan** activities that have a limited number of steps and can be finished in a single meeting.

**Maintain** flexibility. Outcomes are not always what you expect. Be prepared for children finishing early or losing interest and for any “minor disasters” that may occur.

**Take** a few minutes after each meeting to reflect on what worked well and what didn't. Use this information to help ensure success in future meetings.

## Planning Your Own Lessons

Leaders are encouraged to use the curriculum materials provided for the Cloverbud Program. These materials have been developed specifically for children in grades K-3. 4-H materials developed for older youth (grades 4 and above) are not appropriate for younger children because they do not meet their developmental needs.

On occasion, you may feel the need to create your own lesson. When designing a lesson, it is recommended that you include the components established by the National 5-8 Curriculum Task Force. These guidelines will help ensure that your lesson is meaningful and focused, and that you are prepared to carry it through.

**Lesson Title** - This should reflect the concept or major activity of the lesson.

**Objective** - State what you want to accomplish.

**Time Required** - Estimate the amount of time the lesson will require.

**Suggested Group Size** - Identify how many children will be involved and how many leaders/older youth will be required to supervise the lesson.

**Materials Needed** - List all materials and equipment needed for the lesson.

**Background Information** - Think about and list information you and/or the children must have before beginning the lesson.

**Additional Resources** - Identify resources in the community that could contribute information and experiences to the lesson. Field trips, community members with special skills, and the public library are a few possibilities.

**Preparing the Learner** - Plan one or more introductory activities to provide the children with needed background information.

**Learning Activity** - Plan the lesson as a series of logically sequenced steps and write out each step. Try to visualize the steps as you plan them, and think about how the children may respond. Most lessons, or a series of related lessons, will incorporate the following five steps:

1. the “doing” activity,
2. a time for children to “share” their reactions or observations,
3. discussion of what happened during the activity,
4. a chance to think about how the activity has meaning for their daily life, and
5. discussion of how they might use their new knowledge in the future.

**Evaluation** - Decide beforehand how you will determine whether or not you have achieved the objective of the lesson. Possible ways to evaluate the success are observation of children’s behaviors during the activity (and any products they create) and asking the children questions about the lesson.

**Follow-up** - Think about ways the children might extend their learning by engaging in related activities that provide additional information or a chance to practice new skills. Plan such activities for future meetings or provide parents with suggestions for following up on the lesson.

**Positive Reinforcement** - Provide each child with recognition for effort or accomplishment during the lesson time. Positive reinforcement may be a positive comment from the leader or from other children, an opportunity for the child to talk with others about his or her own work, or a sticker or certificate.

## **Your Role as a Volunteer Leader**

As a volunteer leader, you have accepted a role of great responsibility. Children will look to you to help them affirm their own competence and worth. They also will look to you for guidance on how they should behave and for assistance in developing self-control. Your caring, enthusiasm, and support will make a difference in the life of each child.

Be sure to reinforce children for their successes, support and encourage them when they are less than successful, present a welcoming attitude, and allow yourself to share their joy and wonder.

In addition to direct involvement with 4-H Cloverbud children, volunteer leaders also have responsibility to communicate regularly with families, explaining the program and encouraging their involvement. Look for opportunities to attend training and workshops offered in your community to help improve skills in working with children and in managing activities.

# Cloverbud Resources

## Curriculum Materials

### Leader Materials

4H-MI-5560 - Cloverbuds, a 4-H Discovery Program for Six to Eight Year Olds

### Member Materials

4H-MI-5562 - Cloverbuds, a 4-H Discovery Program, Program Record

4H-MI-5561 - Cloverbuds, a 4-H Discovery Program, Activity Sheets for Six to Eight Year Olds

4H-MI-5563 - Cloverbuds, a 4-H Discovery Program, Participation Summary

### Other Material

The following material is for grades K-3

4H-BU-6863 - Seed, Stalks and Science: Agricultural Awareness

4H-BU-6864 - Food, Family and Fun: Consumer Science

4H-BU-6865 - Harvests, Husks & Harmony:

Communication and Expressive Arts

4H-BU-6866 - Gifts of Gold in Song (Audio Tape)

4H-BU-6867 - Gift of Gold in Motion (Video Tape)

4H-BU-6868 - Crazy About Corn (CD-ROM)

4H-MI-7138 - Corn is Maize

4H-BU-6350 - Exploring Farm Animals

4H-BU-6842 - Aerospace 1 Pre-Flight

4H-BU-7169 - Get Real! Get Active! Activity Guide

4H-BU-7170 - Get Active Video

4H-BU-7139 - Child Development 1 Kids on the Grow!

4H-BU-6870 - Theatre Arts 1

4H-BU-6880 - Wild Over Work Helper's Guide

## Community Supports

The greater community provides a rich resource base from which you may draw. Often citizens with special skills or interests are eager to share their knowledge with children, if invited to do so. Field trips bring added relevancy to topics you are exploring with the group.

There are also opportunities available that allow children to participate in and contribute to their community. These community service activities give children a chance to connect with their communities and take pride in their accomplishments.

## Conclusion

A successful Cloverbud program is the result of teamwork. Team members include volunteer leaders, older youth who serve as assistants, 4-H members and families, and the 4-H Extension staff. Team members' cooperative efforts create experiences that help children gain knowledge, develop skills, and form attitudes that contribute to a successful childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

**Thank you for joining the Cloverbud team.  
You have many exciting and  
rewarding experiences ahead of you.  
Have Fun!**

Material adapted from Hobbs, B.B. (July 1995). *4-H Adventures Leader Guide*  
Oregon State University Extension Service

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# 4-H Cloverbud Volunteer Job Description

## **Job Title**

4-H Cloverbud Program Leader (when affiliated with a club that enrolls children and youth 4th grade and up)

## **Purpose**

To guide and support Cloverbud members (grades K-3) by providing learning opportunities.

## **Success Criteria**

Cloverbud members participate in activities that are explorative, cooperative, and fun in their approach to learning.

## **Responsibilities**

- Provide interesting learning opportunities and activities for K-3 graders. Give immediate, positive feedback in response to their involvement in the activity.
- Learn about developmental needs of K-3 graders and apply that information to the choice and delivery of learning opportunities.
- Share the responsibilities among club families.
- Assist with enrollment.
- Work with organizational and other leaders to coordinate Cloverbud activities with other club activities.

## **Time Required and Target Dates**

- 1 - 1½ hour activity meetings, held in conjunction with traditional club meetings or as separate meetings.
- 3 - 4 hours of preparation time per session.

## **Resources Available**

- Cloverbud Program - Curriculum Materials - University of Minnesota Extension Service 4-H
- Selected project area curriculum

## **Training Opportunities**

- County, cluster, and state

## **Report to**

- 4-H organizational leader and county Extension educator

**For questions, contact your local county Extension educator.**



CENTER FOR 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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Adapted from Illinois *4-H Cloverbuds: a guide for staff*  
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