



A Parent's Guide to

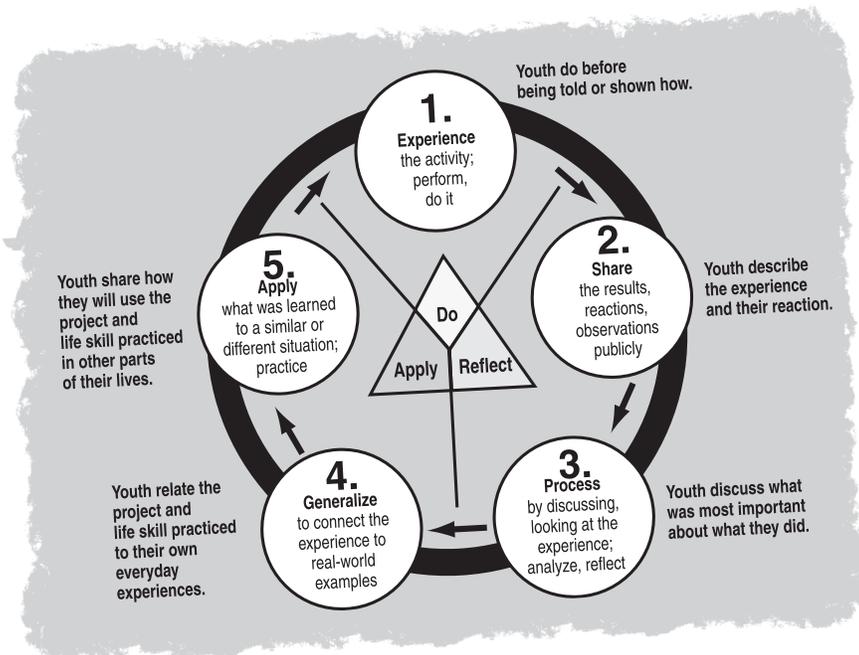
Public Speaking

**Helping your child
plan, prepare and practice
speeches and demonstrations**

*Plan Prepare Practice
Prepare Practice Pla Pr
Practice Plan Ppare Pr*

Experiential Learning Model

"Experiential learning" is what distinguishes 4-H Youth Development Education from many formal education methods. It involves providing opportunities for youth to practice what they are learning by sharing the experience, reflecting on its importance, connecting it to real life examples, and applying the knowledge that results to other situations.



The information and ideas in this manual have been designed with this model in mind. Your aim is to guide and support youth throughout the process. The following questions relate to the experiential learning model:

Key Questions

Examples of **sharing** questions:
(What happened?)

- What kinds of things have you been doing to organize your speech and get ready to deliver it?
- What is the hardest part about planning your speech?
- What is something you really enjoy about putting a speech together?

Examples of **processing** questions:
(What's important?)

- Why do you think it's important to take the time to be well prepared?
- What is something you want to work especially hard to remember to do when you give your speech?
- What is something important to keep in mind about being evaluated or judged?

Examples of **generalizing** questions:
(So what?)

- What do you think are the best things about your speech?
- Why is it important to be able to have confidence in yourself?
- What are some things you would like to do to improve as a public speaker?

Examples of **application** questions:
(Now what?)

- How have you used your public speaking skills in other places besides contests and speaking events?
- Describe a situation where it's been helpful to know how to plan a speech and speak in public.
- What kinds of things might you be able to do in the future with your public speaking skills?



A Parent's Guide to **Public Speaking**

A note to adults:

T*his manual, which is a part of the 4-H Youth Development Building Bridges: Reaching People Through Communication program, has been designed specifically for parents and other adults who want to guide youth through the process of planning, practicing and presenting a speech or demonstration. It can be used by adults to reinforce and support what youth are learning as they work through the information in A 4-H Public Speakers Handbook.*

Communication as a Primary Life Skill

This project focuses on the life skill of communication with a particular emphasis on helping youth acquire confidence in their abilities to speak in public.

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A Parent's Guide to Public Speaking

As a parent, there is a great deal you can do to help your child make the most of public speaking opportunities. Just remember the 4 "P's" so you can help your child succeed: Plan, Prepare, Practice and Provide support so your son or daughter can develop the confidence and skills needed to be a good speaker.

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Plan

Parents often hear their kids protest, “I can’t think of anything to give a speech about!” Instead of telling a child what you think would make a fantastic topic for a speech, try a different approach. Help your son or daughter explore the following four types of speeches he or she might want to give.

It could be a speech to *inform, explain, demonstrate or teach.*

- What’s something you can do particularly well that other people might like to know how to do, too?
- Think of your favorite hobby or recreational activity. Why do you enjoy it and what kinds of things are most interesting about it?
- Think about something you learned at school or in 4-H that you never knew before. How might you go about sharing that information with other people?
- What are some other things you would like to be able to teach or explain to an audience?

Read **more about it!**

For more information about selecting a topic for a speech, check out page 2 in the 4-H *Public Speaker’s Handbook*.

It could be a speech to *persuade or convince.*

- Think of something you think is important. How can you encourage other people to become more aware of what needs to be done about it?
- What is something in our society or world that ought to be changed? How can you encourage people to do their part?
- Think of something you believe very strongly is either right or wrong. How can you get other people to agree with you?
- What is something else you would like to persuade or convince other people to do or think?



Plan

It could be a speech to *inspire* or bring about an *emotional response*.

- Think of someone you admire a great deal because of something courageous (or inspiring or unselfish) he or she has done. What can other people learn from his or her example?
- Do you know anyone who has had to deal with a difficult obstacle in his or her life? What did that person do to overcome the hardships he or she endured? How did other people help?
- What can people do to make this world a better place?
- What is a value or principle that guides your own life (love, kindness towards others, courage, etc.)? Why is this so important?

It could be a speech to *entertain*.

- Imagine looking 50 years into the future. What might be the same and what might be different?
- Think of someone (alive or dead, real or make-believe) you would like to visit? What would it be like to spend time with that person? What would you like to say to or ask that person? How do you think he or she would respond?
- Have you had an interesting experience recently that other people might enjoy hearing about? (Perhaps it was a trip or vacation, or maybe you had visitors from another country.) What made that experience unique? What lessons did you learn?
- Instead of telling jokes, can you think of other things you could talk about to entertain people?

Keys to success

The topic your child selects has a lot to do with how well he or she will do preparing and delivering the speech. One sure way to turn the experience into a nightmare is for your child to choose a topic that's not appropriate.

- Be realistic about the time it will take to research the topic and prepare any necessary posters, charts or visuals. Unless there will be plenty of time for following through with a complicated idea, it would be better to choose something a bit less time consuming.
- Will your child have access to the information and supplies he or she will need to develop the speech?
- Is your child going to be comfortable with the topic—or is it something that he or she might not really want to talk about? Will the audience want to hear a speech on that subject?
- Will you be able to help your child when needed?

Prepare

Even speakers who appear to be talking naturally and spontaneously have usually given a great deal of thought to what they were going to say ahead of time. That's why they're able to stand up to speak feeling confident and in control. Here's how you can help.

Hint:

Resist the urge to write the speech for your child.

Once you've helped your child select the topic and begin organizing the speech, it's time to stand back for a while and give him or her a chance to put together a first draft. Remember—the speech will be much more effective if your child speaks in his or her own words rather than yours.

Focus on what to say about the topic.

Ask your child to list two or three important ideas about the topic he or she has chosen. (It's only necessary to tell people what's most important about the topic rather than trying to cover everything.)

Help pick out a method of delivery.

A *speech* can be read from a prepared text, a set of brief notes, or presented from memory.

A *demonstration* shows how to do something or explains the steps in a process. It might also include visual aids to help illustrate the process being discussed.

An *illustrated talk* includes the use of props or visual aids to make it easier for the audience to keep track of the information being presented.

Help your child organize what to say.

Think about how long the speech needs to be. Some speakers recommend using 15% of that time on the introduction; 80% on the body of the speech; and 5% on the conclusion.

Ask your child to mention a few things he or she already knows about the topic in order to start making some plans for how to organize the speech. Help him or her decide whether additional information is needed and if so where to find it. (The library? The Internet? A teacher or other expert?)

Prepare

Read **more about it!**

For more information about planning and organizing a speech, check out pages 4–9 in the 4-H Public Speaker's Handbook.

Practicing a speech will help your child develop confidence and poise. You can help by providing constructive feedback. Just remember—being supportive depends both on what you say and how you say it. Here's how to help your son or daughter succeed:

- Remind your child that good posture, a pleasant and confident expression and a neat, well-groomed appearance are important.
- Since eye contact is a must, encourage your child to look at the audience and not to be afraid to smile!
- Vocal expression, gestures, facial expressions and posture reflect your son or daughter's personal style. He or she will make the best impression by acting as natural as possible rather than by using phony or overly dramatic gestures and expressions.
- Encourage your child to speak naturally—as if he or she were having a conversation with the audience. There's no need to shout, but on the other hand it's frustrating not being able to understand someone who's speaking too softly.
- Tell your child to stand still and avoid shifting from side to side. It's okay to move around while speaking, but make sure to move deliberately—rather than roaming from place to place.
- Remind your child not to stuff his or her hands into pockets or clasp them together in front or in back. Try to hold them naturally at the side or rest them on top of the podium or lectern.
- Tell your child not to worry too much about making mistakes. Even experienced speakers slip up, stumble on a word or even forget what they intended to say.

Read **more about it!**

For more information about practicing a speech, check out page 15 in the *4-H Public Speaker's Handbook*.

Hint:
Keep in mind your role isn't to criticize but rather to review and provide constructive advice. The form on the next page can help you point out the progress your child is making each time you listen to the speech.

Practice

Parent's Feedback Form

| What was said? | Could be improved | Good | Excellent | Comments |
|--|-------------------|------|-----------|----------|
| Did the introduction capture my attention? | | | | |
| Was the main idea of the speech discussed? | | | | |
| Was the speech well organized? | | | | |
| Did the conclusion sum up the main idea? | | | | |

| How was it said? | Could be improved | Good | Excellent | Comments |
|--|-------------------|------|-----------|----------|
| Eye contact and facial expression | | | | |
| Gestures and body language | | | | |
| Did speaker seem relaxed, confident? | | | | |
| Did speaker use correct pronunciation? | | | | |
| Did speaker use correct grammar? | | | | |
| Was speaker easy to understand? | | | | |
| Did speaker handle mistakes? | | | | |

| Overall rating | Could be improved | Good | Excellent | Comments |
|--|-------------------|------|-----------|----------|
| Comments and suggestions for improvement | | | | |

Anyone who has ever had to speak in public knows that it can be scary. Some of that tension can actually help maintain focus and alertness, but too much of it can be a problem. Experienced speakers have learned to have confidence in their abilities. Parents are in a good position to help their children develop this valuable asset.

Point out what your child is doing right.

People who feel relaxed and confident about themselves often do better when they stand up to speak. While it's only natural for parents to notice their children's shortcomings, it's a good idea to get in the habit of recognizing the positive as well.

- When listening to your child practice, be sure to comment on specific things you like about the speech instead of dwelling only on what needs improvement. (*"You really did a great job of introducing your topic."*)
- Mention something about your child's appearance and speech delivery that others are bound to notice (*"Your smile is so warm and friendly, and your gestures look very natural."*)
- Mention the progress you've noticed and what a difference it has made. (*"I've noticed how you've really worked on improving your eye contact and it's really looking good!"*)

Be constructive when you must be critical.

When you must point out mistakes and shortcomings, do so in a positive manner. Instead of concentrating on what needs improvement, add a couple of encouraging comments as well. The "sandwich" approach is a good way to do this. Here's how it works:

- Begin with a positive observation. *"I really like how you introduced the first main point of your speech."*
- Make a suggestion about what needs to be improved. *"I think you could use another example to support that particular point."*
- Then add another positive comment. *"It's great the way you've introduced and developed the rest of the speech!"*

Provide support

Hint:

Remember that it takes courage to give a speech. Positive and constructive support from family and friends has a lot to do with whether a child will feel good about the experience.

Youth who are constantly corrected, criticized, or blamed for their mistakes may have a harder time developing confidence.

Provide support

Handling Stress

Encourage your child to find his or her own way of handling stress and tension.

Let your child know that even the most experienced speakers get nervous before walking out on the stage to speak. What's important is finding a way to handle those feelings. That's why it's a good idea to make sure your son or daughter has learned some healthy stress reduction and relaxation techniques ahead of time. Here's a good opportunity for you to share some of the things you do personally when you're feeling nervous and uptight.

Read more about it!

For more information about relaxation techniques that can calm jittery nerves, check out page 16 in the 4-H *Public Speaker's Handbook*.

Hint:

It's important for youth to develop healthy attitudes about competition. Their lives will be filled with situations where what they do will be judged and measured in comparison with what other people do. Competition can be an exciting and stimulating experience. When handled constructively it can motivate youth to work hard and put forth their very best effort.

To memorize or not to memorize?

Many people feel it makes a speech sound "canned" or "mechanical" to recite it from memory. It can also be stressful for a child to have to worry about what will happen if he or she should forget something. So there is definitely good reason for discouraging word-for-word memorization on the grounds that it puts tremendous pressure on a child.

One option is to practice the speech as it's been written until your child is completely familiar with it. Then use note cards to jot down words and phrases that can be used as reminders.

A healthy approach to competition.

If your child will be participating in a competitive event, most likely his or her speech will be evaluated in terms of content and delivery. It's a chance to receive constructive feedback from judges and evaluators who are themselves experienced speakers.

- Help your child take a positive approach to constructive criticism. Look for a way to use evaluation feedback to improve his or her performance the next time.
- If you or your child disagree with the way the judge rated the speech, keep in mind that people react to things differently and their likes and dislikes aren't the same.
- Instead of putting all the emphasis on what the judge says, encourage your child to self-evaluate his or her speeches.

Some children leave public speaking competitions feeling foolish and embarrassed because of low scores. Perceptive parents use these opportunities to remind children there's always something to be gained by trying one's best. Wise people know there's much to be learned from "failures" because they provide opportunities to improve and to grow.

Keep winning in perspective:

Sometimes competition gets out of hand. The “winning is everything” attitude can cause excessive stress for children if they believe a parent’s love and approval is at stake. Further, every parent has seen instances where other parents have pushed their children to win at all costs—in spite of what’s good for the child and sometimes at the expense of what’s ethical. Such conduct undermines the spirit of competition and severely interferes with what the child stands to gain from the experience.

The value of competition depends on the things youth are learning about themselves. Here are some pointers for parents:

- Acknowledge the goals your child has set for him or herself. Let your son or daughter know that regardless of the outcome, you’re proud of him or her for making the decision to be a competitor.
- Make sure your child knows that while you are hoping he or she will do well in the competition, you will still feel the same way about him or her regardless of the judge’s decision.
- Help your child develop a healthy approach to winning or losing by stressing the importance of doing one’s best even if it ends up not being the best.

Hint:

When all is said and done, it’s not what the judge says that matters. Rather, the effort your child has put into the speech, as well as the progress he or she has made as a result of the experience, are what really make the most difference.



*Other books
in this series
include:*

4-H Public Speaker's Handbook:

A Youth's Guide to Preparing and Presenting Speeches and Demonstrations

It's All in the Family:

*Source Book of Communication Activities, Projects and Other Things
to Do Together*

**Communication Activities for 4-H Clubs and
Other Youth Groups**

Crazy about Books:

Having Fun with a Reading Circle

Voices from the Past:

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