

idea corner

Youth and the Law

State and federal laws affecting youth are changing dramatically . . . creating a need to educate youth about the law. I developed a workshop on "Youth and the Law" for the 4-H Summer School and Oregon State University. Based on that experience, I offer the following ideas and suggest that 4-H leaders consider developing similar programs.

First, the initial problem a leader is likely to encounter is his/her own anxiety about law. But the anxiety is unnecessary. Many basic legal concepts and procedures can be grasped and communicated by people not trained in the law.

Second, the program should be a team effort. Along with the 4-H leader, others to involve are: (a) the district attorney, (b) a local police officer, and (c) a private attorney whose practice has included at least some work with juveniles. The local bar association will be helpful in identifying such an attorney.

Third, states vary in the specific provisions of laws and in the procedures for handling cases. Therefore, it's most useful to limit the scope of any presentations to the state in which the class is offered.

Fourth, the specific content of any class will vary depending on the interests of the 4-H leader and legal advisors. But based on my experience, I suggest that the class cover at least the following concepts: juvenile courts, legal procedures, status offense, age of majority, emancipation, contract, tort, crime, felony, and misdemeanor.

Fifth, visits to places such as police offices, courtrooms (especially when a trial is in session), the office of the district attorney, or private attorneys promote interest. Simulations of trials may also prove to be a useful device in teaching some of the concepts about legal procedures. Case studies (role playing them is especially effective) that describe contacts between the law and young people can stimulate participants to explore their feelings about the law. Prepare a test of legal knowledge. The 4-Her can answer the way he/she thinks the law is, the way he/she thinks others

might answer, and the way the law should be. Have the group compare their answers.

There are organizations with greater legal expertise, but few organizations rival 4-H in reaching diversified groups of young people. Therefore, 4-H should look closely at the opportunity to develop a program about the law for youth. A critical need for such programs exists.

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