

Volunteer & Parent Resource



Sparks! What are they & where do you find them?

By: Julie Kreikemeier, Nebraska Extension

Sparks! Not the dangerous kind, but the kind that ignite the fire within our youth! Peter Benson defines Sparks as “hidden flames in your kids that light their proverbial fire, get them excited, tap into their true passions” (2008). These sparks are what motivate our youth to participate in their many activities, events, and ways they spend their time. Sparks are the things youth love to do and get naturally excited about doing.

Youth typically experience three types of sparks. They are something they are good at—a talent or skill, something they care strongly about and a quality they know is special. Youth can sometimes recognize the sparks within themselves and will describe them as things they ‘love’ to do or activities that excite them. When youth can recognize their own sparks, they may need help igniting them! As adults, we face the challenge of recognizing sparks in youth and setting them ablaze. Once you recognize sparks in youth, it is important to encourage those sparks to grow and develop. Development of sparks can bridge the gap between the activities youth are doing now to potential careers and their future. Parents and guardians are integral in the development of sparks in youth, but they are not the only important guides for youth. Any adult or role model in a youth’s life can become a “spark champion” (Benson, 2008). Spark champions are those who will support and encourage youth on their spark journey, but are not directly in contact with the youth every day.

As 4-H volunteers and leaders, you are a spark champion in the lives of your 4-Hers. You can help identify and develop the sparks within your members. This can be done through helping them identify their sparks, encouraging members to express it, model or teach it, provide safe spaces and opportunities for 4-H members to communicate their sparks to others and help them eliminate obstacles that might be in their way. 4-H encourages the development of new skills and allows youth to explore new areas, all of which can already be untapped sparks or become new sparks for youth to discover. As a 4-H volunteer, you are among your 4-H members’ group of spark champions that encourage and provide spaces for them to grow! You have the flame to ignite the sparks of our youth!

Benson, P. L. (2008). Sparks: How parents can help ignite the hidden strengths of teenagers. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.





Tips & Tricks to Engage Youth at the Start of 4-H Meetings

By Melissa Nordboe

Did you know you only have 30 seconds or less to gain youth's attention and motivate them to listen? When it comes to starting a meeting or event and getting rolling, these precious seconds play a critical part. Today, I am going to share with you some simple "attention grabbers" to get youth excited and ready to focus on whatever you are planning.

Now, before we get started, think about the audience you are engaging. Is it Clover Kids, elementary youth, teenagers, or all of the above? This will help you to determine the proper approach to take to making youth take part in your event/4-H meeting, etc.

The first way to grab youth's attention is with **music**. Music is one of the most fun and effective ways to get youth involved or to get them to stop what they're doing. You can add variety to your music depending on the age level. For example, for the youngest youth, use finger plays like the Itsy-Bitsy Spider. The cool thing about this is that if youth are singing, they aren't talking. You can also relate the song to your meeting agenda or event theme.

The second way to engage youth is by **using chants or hand gestures**. Anytime you can include some kind of physical movement, the better youth will listen. One suggestion is to clap out a rhythm for the youth to repeat back. Or use a chant that utilizes motion. For example, Drop It, Zip It, Lock It followed by claps. When you say drop it, youth have to drop whatever is in their hands, when you say zip it, that means to stop talking, and when you say lock it, that means all eyes are focused on the speaker. Younger youth will normally chant with you, which is awesome, too! You can always change up the words and motions if you find that this "attention grabber" works for you!

The third way and my personal favorite way to grab youth's attention is by **using the "throw & tell ball"**. This is a technique I love to utilize in my classrooms for school enrichment as a "starter". This ball has questions on it and when thrown to a youth, they have to answer the question that their index finger lands on. Some of the questions are, "What do you do when you feel bored?", "Where's your favorite place to go on a hike?", "What is one thing you are grateful for?", and etc. There are so many cool questions to ask and this is very easy to utilize for all ages and can be adapted as needed. This is a great tool to help kids focus. In this game, everyone wins!

Finally, try not to think of "attention grabbers" as an annoyance. Think of them as a tool to be creative and have some fun within your 4-H club or event. Who doesn't like to start a meeting or event off with fun?



Governor's Ag Excellence Award



The purpose of the Nebraska 4-H Foundation's Governor's Ag Excellence Awards, sponsored by the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA), is to recognize 4-H clubs for the work of the individuals in the club and the community service work of the entire club. Recognition is in the form of \$500 checks issued to the club's treasury to be used as described in the award application completed by the club. Applications are due by **March 1, 2021** and are available at <https://www.ne4hfoundation.org/governors-ag-excellence-award/>