



Creating Belonging on a Virtual Meeting

Belonging is an essential element to the 4-H experience. But how can we create a sense of belonging with our youth when we are meeting online? This guide will share some tips to help youth feel safe and connected on a virtual meeting.

Starting the meeting

When youth join the virtual meeting, have a welcoming message displayed. As an alternative, you can have a riddle or puzzle for them to solve while they wait. Give out the answer sometime after all participants have joined.

Say hello to each person as they join the meeting.

Ask youth to create a name plate or name tag they can wear. They can do this at the beginning while waiting for others to join, or create them beforehand.

Say the Pledge of Allegiance and 4-H Pledge just like you would at an in-person meeting.

Have youth share something that made them smile in the last few days or something they are grateful for.

Have an activity or icebreaker for youth to engage in together. You can send out an activity beforehand for them to complete and then share during the meeting, or you can take a few moments in the meeting to do it together. See the “Tower Power Activity” for an idea. Other activity ideas include:

- The origami cube challenge: https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/Images/Origami%20Cube_tcm25-531804.pdf
- Have youth design their own dream farm (<https://extension.unh.edu/resource/design-and-model-your-dream-farm-4-h-activity>) or STEaMpunk Challenge (<https://extension.unh.edu/blog/4-h-steampunk-chain-reaction-video-challenge>) and then share their designs
- Find other great activities from National 4-H: <https://4-h.org/about/inspire-kids-to-do/> and NH 4-H Virtual Community Center: <https://extension.unh.edu/resource/nh-4-h-virtual-community-center>

Tower Power Activity

- Have everyone get 25 3x5 index cards
- In under 5 minutes, build the tallest tower you can and balance a teaspoon in under 5 minutes
- Notecards can be manipulated in any way (folded, rolled) but not cut
- Designate time to run the challenge during the meeting

Full activity: https://www.eie.org/sites/default/files/resource/file/tower_power_2012_11-08_kas.pdf



Establish group norms

Establishing group norms or agreements is important for any group and can be created for online meetings as well. Example norms are below; allow the youth to come up with others:

- try to be in a quiet space where you won't be interrupted
- use headphones if there are people in the background
- mute your mic when you are not talking to the virtual group
- use the “raise your hand” feature (if available) when you want to talk
- limit distractions around you so that you can stay focused
- keep chats focused on topics being talked about

During the meeting

Be patient and understanding of current events and stressors that youth are experiencing. You may not be able to complete all the club or project business that you want; agendas should be reasonable to complete during an online meeting.

Encouraging participation will take extra time. It can be hard to jump into the conversations in a virtual meeting, and sometimes people struggle with their microphones. Make sure to build in time for some transitions and online challenges. Encourage youth to share their ideas and to listen to one another. Using [Robert's Rules](#) (or a process like it) can be helpful when making sure everyone is on board with an idea or plan of action. Check out Parliamentary Procedures [here](#).

Allow youth to host the meeting and/or have other leadership roles. For example, a youth can be assigned as the “greeter” as everyone joins the call, and another youth can lead activities. Just as youth have leadership opportunities for in-person meetings, make sure they have these opportunities virtually.

Incorporate games and activities to keep youth engaged.

Continue that sense of belonging even when the virtual meeting is over. Create a buddy system for youth to check-in on one another in between meetings.

The first meeting

During your first virtual meeting with your club or project, focus on connection. You may not have time at every meeting for youth to share something that made them smile or to engage in an activity. During your first virtual meeting, these techniques can help a group come together. Consider spending the first meeting with time for sharing, establishing group norms, engaging in an activity or icebreaker, and asking youth to share how they are feeling (allowing them to share any anxiety or stress). Also use the first meeting as an opportunity to go over features of whatever platform you are using for your meeting (e.g., Zoom, Google Meetup).

Have questions? Contact Kendra Lewis at Kendra.Lewis@unh.edu and/or your local 4-H Program Manager.