

Healthy Body, Healthy Mind

FOR LEADERS



Being physically active can help support overall wellbeing and the development of healthy emotions. If you read the Taking Care of Yourself tip sheet in 4-H Canada's Mental Health Resource, you may remember that by participating in physical activity and encouraging your 4-H members to do the same, you are promoting healthy bodies and minds!

Why is physical activity so good for our mental health?

When you're active, your brain releases "feel-good" chemicals like dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins. Physical activity also helps lower levels of cortisol in the body – also known as the "stress hormone".¹ Check out the Handy Definitions to Know section in the Activity Guide for definitions of these chemicals.

Getting active really goes a long way in reducing stress and improving overall happiness. It can help us all unwind more easily, and breathe better.

Happy Better

These "happy hormones" play an important role in how we feel.² When we're active, our body releases these chemicals, and this boosts our mood. As a general rule of thumb, the higher the intensity, the better the outcome. Regular physical activity produces the best results, but even single bouts of physical activity can result in better stress management and improved moods.

As a 4-H leader, you can teach your members that being active can help when they're feeling down. If you have 4-H members who seem to be experiencing mental health struggles, initiating an activity that gets everyone moving might be a great way to start off a club meeting. Physical activity can also serve as a healthy distraction from anxiety and stress.



DID YOU KNOW?

ParticipACTION's Everything Gets Better campaign highlights 23 areas to work on to get closer to our health and fitness goals, including Happy Better, Unwind Better and Breathe Better. In their own words, "Being physically active is about more than weight loss. It's about living Better!"³

Unwind Better

It's important to unwind after a tough day at work, or a busy week. Getting into heart-pumping physical activities like biking or running can decrease our body's stress hormones and stimulate those feel-good chemicals.⁴

Breathe Better

Breathing is one of our body's most important functions. When we are stressed, we hold tension that can cause us to breathe rapidly, shallowly, or erratically.⁵ By being active, we can work to increase the strength of our respiratory muscles, and do more with less breath. Teaching your 4-H members to breathe deeply can be a great tool to help them in many ways, from public speaking to resolving conflicts and problem-solving, to remaining calm in the show-ring.

Try this deep-breathing exercise (i.e., diaphragmic breathing) at your next 4-H meeting:⁶

- 1. Breathe in slowly and deeply, pushing your stomach out so that your diaphragm is put to maximum use.**
- 2. Hold your breath briefly (approximately 5 seconds).**
- 3. Exhale slowly, while relaxing every muscle in your body.**
- 4. Repeat the entire sequence five to 10 times, focusing only on your breath.**

Ask yourself: What activities help you unwind or feel less stressed?

Brainstorm a list of physical activities with members that you can incorporate into your 4-H meetings. From this list, consider incorporating one activity into each meeting.

If you're not sure where to start, here are some activity ideas that you can use to promote physical and mental health at your club meetings:

- ✓ **Walking** - regardless of fitness ability and in almost any location.
- ✓ **Yoga** - stretches muscles to help feel calm and relaxed.
- ✓ **Running** - a great way to incorporate a little cardio into your meeting.
- ✓ **Pilates** - simple movements help build strength and improve breathing.
- ✓ **Tai chi** - helps us feel calm and in control.
- ✓ **Weight-lifting** - lifting light weights can help build muscle, feel strong and blow-off steam!

The **Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines** recommend that individuals between the ages of 18 and 64 years get at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week.⁷ 4-H members between the ages of 6 and 17 years are encouraged to aim for a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day.⁸

For more information, check out the Happy Better, Unwind Better and Breathe Better pages at participACTION.com



4-H Canada has partnered with ParticipACTION to develop this resource
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