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As a 4-H and youth agent, I've tried to help parents examine ways they can more positively influence their children through 4-H. One way I share alternatives is on the cover letter of the monthly 4-H family newsletter. A recent cover letter received much positive feedback from parents in Chippewa County and from fellow 4-H and youth agents. Here it is:

Dear 4-H Family:

I would like to share some of my thoughts with every 4-H family about just how important parents are to the 4-H member. It is true that in Wisconsin only the young person actually enrolls in a 4-H Club, but it is also true that the parent(s) also signs the member's 4-H enrollment card. That signature, I would believe, commits the parent(s) to working with and helping their child in a direct way during the 4-H year.

"4-H is a family affair." You have probably heard that statement before, but it is true! Every member of the family, youngsters and parents alike, can benefit from *belonging to* and *participating in* a community group such as 4-H. Together the 4-H member and parent can share and learn new experiences. Besides learning about 4-H projects, activities, and programs, parents also help youth to learn, understand, and practice the democratic process as the 4-H Club functions in the community.

You, as a parent of a 4-H member, are extremely important. Your children need your support, help, and guidance to get the most out of any experience. There is a direct, positive ratio between the interest and support parents give their children and

what each 4-H member gets out of 4-H. If your children do not seem to be getting as much out of 4-H as you thought they might, are there ways you might give more support, help, or guidance to them?

We as parents ought to be concerned about the fact that we are the most important people in our children's lives. No one can do as much for our children as we can. We can not pay or hire anyone to do the job of what a parent can do for free and that is to *care about our children*.

I believe that 4-H programs, projects, and activities offer many ways for parents to positively influence their children. Parents, give thought as to how you can best support, help, and guide your children in 4-H. I am positive both you and they will benefit from your working together!

Respectfully Yours,
Don Dukerschein
Chippewa County
4-H and Youth Agent

Here's a summary of the feedback I got from parents, leaders, and agents who said that parent commitment ". . . is not stressed enough to parents . . ." "Your comments on family participation in 4-H . . . really hits homes with me." We must continue to help parents see themselves as ". . . a very strong influence on their children's development." As we work with families in 4-H we should ". . . continue to emphasize the importance of parents in the 4-H program and the fact that we just do not enroll members, but we are enrolling families."

The Forum is a place for **Journal** readers to express their feelings on any topic they think is important to Extension. Don't make it longer than one double-spaced page. Send to: Jerry Parsons, editor, 317 Justin Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506.