



Winter is Coming: And so too are winter holidays

The arrival of the winter solstice on December 21 brings with it a number of religious holidays such as Christmas and Las Posadas (Christian), Hanukkah (Jewish), Eid-al-Adha (Islam), and Diwali (Hindu), as well as cultural celebrations such as Kwanzaa (honoring African heritage) and the Luna New Year (Asian cultures), to name just a few.

A tradition of 4-H Clubs is hosting a winter holiday celebration during their December meeting. Celebrations – marking an important occasion by engaging in social activity – serves important developmental purpose like building emotional safety, strengthening a sense of belonging and connection, offering a time for reflection and goal setting, and commemorating achievements.

With the 4-H program stretching across California and open to all youth, regardless of religion or ancestry, 4-H Clubs are composed of families from many religious affiliations. The University of California has a strong commitment to inclusiveness reflected in 4-H core values of *appreciating and celebrating differences, practicing mutual respect, and fostering a sense of belonging*. 4-H Clubs are expected to be inclusive and sensitive to the cultural and religious practices of its membership.

While 4-H Clubs may find it easy to rename a celebration from “Christmas Party” to “Holiday Party,” ensuring inclusivity and celebrating differences must go beyond a simple name change. Here are a few examples to aid in planning inclusive celebrations.

- Host a multi-cultural celebration depicting a variety of holiday traditions with emphasis on the practices and beliefs of every family in the 4-H Club. Host an educational activity where youth and families share holiday traditions while a teen leader facilitates a discussion about how people celebrate in different ways and some people do not believe in any celebrations.
- Focus on celebrating a special occasion, instead of a specific holiday, perhaps by having a Winter Solstice Celebration or a New Year’s Party. Select activities, decorations, and foods that demonstrate cultural sensitivity and inclusivity by acknowledging multiple cultural traditions rather than imposing or endorsing a single tradition.
- Ensure that celebrations are not indirectly celebrating one religious holiday. Refrain from supporting one religion over another by not singing religiously affiliated songs or having decorations or games inspired from only one holiday.
- Clarify that all celebrations are voluntary. Families or 4-H members who decide not to participate in the celebrations should not be viewed negatively or penalized.
- And have fun! (Don’t forget it’s a celebration!)

Families feeling excluded from 4-H Club celebrations are encouraged to talk with their 4-H Club Leader and discuss how their Club’s celebration might be modified to be more inclusive.