

University of Vermont Extension

Guidelines for Reducing Risk for 4-H Volunteer Leaders

(adapted from University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension)

Introduction

4-H volunteers are responsible for the welfare of the 4-H members under their supervision. This fact sheet describes methods to reduce risk of harm to 4-H members. It also provides information that will help protect you, the 4-H volunteer, from legal action if harm does come to a 4-H member. Volunteers should contact their UVM Extension 4-H staff member for additional information or assistance.

To act responsibly, the following should be implemented by all 4-H volunteers:

Volunteer Agreement Form/Code of Conduct

All UVM Extension 4-H volunteers complete this form by filling out the Volunteer 4-H Leader Application. The form outlines the responsibilities an individual assumes as a UVM Extension 4-H Volunteer. Once completed, it remains on file in the local Extension office.

Volunteer Responsibilities

As a 4-H volunteer, you agree to:

1. Participate in appropriate volunteer training.
2. Conduct 4-H activities in compliance with UVM Extension guidelines.
3. Keep UVM Extension 4-H staff fully informed of club or project activities including field trips, fund raising events, and other special activities.
4. Maintain up-to-date enrollment information with the local UVM Extension office for yourself, your members, and other 4-H volunteers you direct.
5. Welcome all youth, their families, and other volunteers to participate in the program regardless of age, color, handicap, national origin, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital or familial status, or veteran's status.

Leadership and Supervision

- Always be alert to potential dangers.
- Provide thorough orientation for parents and other volunteers you direct.
- Make sure all participants, including parents, know the rules.
- Review safety rules and proper procedures with participants before starting any activity.
- Review conduct rules at the beginning of activities, and establish a procedure for handling infractions. Do this with member participation.
- Handle any rule or procedural infraction in a timely manner.
- Do not use any form of physical punishment.
- Provide an adequate number of adult supervisors, especially when involved in activities with high levels of risk (such as horse shows, swimming, working with power tools, etc.). For field trips, one adult for every four members is recommended.
- Make sure families are aware of special activities you are planning. A signed form giving the parent's permission assure that the parent is aware of the event, location, and risk involved. Use UVM Extension's permission forms.
- Use the "buddy system," which encourages participants to take responsibility for each other.
- Establish a system of accounting for handling club funds which has supervision by more than one person or family. Have annual audits of funds. Submit the last page of the Treasurer's book to the local Extension office on an annual basis. Do not use petty cash or shoe-box operations.
- Model healthy behaviors related to addictive substances (alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs).

Permission and Health Forms

- Use UVM Extension's 4-H permission forms when members are to participate in special activities and events. Permission forms show that proper planning went into an event. It alerts parents to the activity.
- UVM Extension's 4-H permission forms include health information about the member, name and phone number of the member's doctor, and the parent's signed authorization for emergency medical care to be administered, if necessary.

Insurance

- Health and accident insurance should be obtained for special events, activities and trips. Your UVM Extension 4-H staff can provide information about low-cost medical insurance that can be purchased on an annual or daily basis.
- Automobiles used for transporting 4-H members should have adequate auto insurance coverage. The recommended level of automobile liability limits is a minimum of \$100,000/\$300,000. Do not hesitate to ask to see proof of insurance coverage.
- If a certificate of insurance is required in order to use a building, ask your 4-H Extension staff member for help. Do this as soon as possible.

Transportation

- Require adequate insurance (see Insurance section).
- If you assume responsibility for establishing car pools, it is your responsibility to assure that all drivers are at least 18 years old and have a valid driver's license. You should not permit anyone to drive whose driving you know to be dangerous. Whenever possible, have parents arrange the car pool arrangements for their child(ren).
- Be sure that everyone uses a seat belt. Do not overload cars, and do not allow members to ride in the back of pickup trucks.
- Members who are known to cause trouble for drivers should be driven by their own parent or left at home. All accidents must be reported immediately to the responding police department and the designated UVM Extension 4-H staff member.
- 4-H volunteers should only use vehicles that are legally registered and inspected.
- Horseplay or fighting of any kind is prohibited while driving a vehicle.
- Driver shall observe all rules and regulations for safe driving as defined by the State of Vermont Motor Vehicle Department.

Emergency Procedures

- Care for injured person.
- Call for emergency professional help, if needed.
- Contact parents and UVM Extension 4-H staff by the fastest means possible. These staff are responsible for contacting UVM's Department of Risk Management.
- Follow the parent's instructions about obtaining medical care. If unable to contact the parent, confer with the UVM Extension 4-H staff. If none is available, use your best judgment.
- Stay calm. Eliminate confusion and fear. Have other adults handle the other members present.
- Assemble the facts and verify them from different sources; these may be needed for a report.
- If the media is involved, designate an UVM Extension 4-H staff person to speak to them. Protect the privacy of the injured person, and that of the other members of the group.
- Involve the UVM Extension 4-H staff member in processing any follow-up insurance claims, legal issues, or media coverage.

Child Abuse

- Avoid child abuse issues (real or perceived) by having at least three people (adults and/or youth) present at all times.
- If you suspect that a 4-H member is being abused, contact your UVM Extension 4-H staff member for guidance in reporting to the Vermont Social and Rehabilitation Services Department.

Harassment/Discrimination

- Harassment and discrimination are against University of Vermont policy. Included are harassment or discrimination on the basis of age, color, handicap, national origin, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital or familial status, or veteran's status.
- Avoid any verbal, written, graphic or physical conduct which might bring emotional, psychological, or physical harm, or explicitly degrade any individual.
- Educate 4-H members, parents and volunteers.

Safety Guidelines for 4-H Leaders

The role of safety in the 4-H program can't be underestimated. In all of our work with young people, we have a responsibility to them, and to their families, to provide a safe environment. By following a few simple guidelines, you can provide such an environment.

For all project areas, the following guidelines will be followed:

1. The leader(s) will review the project(s) and the planned program activities to identify areas of potential risk. Once identified, a plan to minimize these risks will be in place, understood, and practiced by all leaders involved in the project.
2. Adult leaders will develop guidelines to determine appropriate actions during an emergency. Emergency drills will be practiced, where appropriate.
3. The 4-H project will start with a discussion of the project and the safety procedures that one should follow when involved in that project.
4. Each member will demonstrate, through action or exam, that he/she fully understands and can follow the established safety guidelines for that project. The leader will document that each youth has demonstrated an understanding of these guidelines.
5. All machines or equipment used with the 4-H project will be in good repair with all safety features (guards, safety switches, etc.) in place and functional. An adult leader will check the equipment prior to use.
6. Protected safety equipment will be worn, when recommended or advised. State guidelines regarding safety equipment will be followed. In all cases, the following safety equipment will be used:
 - a. Protective floatation devices will be used by all youth who are on the water.
 - b. Safety helmets meeting the ASTM SEI guidelines will be worn by all youth when mounted upon, or being pulled by, one or more equine animals.
 - c. Safety goggles will be used by youth when using power tools.
 - d. Participants in the shooting sports program will follow the curriculum safety standards.
7. All equipment will be appropriate for the age size and ability of the participants. No youth under eight years of age will participate in any project or event involving large animals or firearms, nor will they operate motorized vehicles.
8. A specific supervision plan for each project activity will be prepared.
9. A first aid kit will be available at the meeting site.
10. In all 4-H programs, the leaders should understand the proposed program activity, know the experience and qualifications of the leaders involved, and assess the degree of risk before acting. All leaders are to act in a responsible manner where 4-H programs are concerned.

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