



A Framework for Best Practices in Youth Protection

As a positive youth development organization, 4-H has a moral and legal obligation to ensure the safety and well being of young people entrusted to its care. The same is true for other Extension programs that involve young people. We know, however, that participation in any program or activity brings with it some level of risk. How we choose to deal with that risk determines the level of safety afforded to the young people who participate in our programs.

RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Four common strategies exist for managing risk. Some risk can be **avoided** entirely by making an intentional decision not to engage in activities that present exceedingly high levels of risk. It is also possible to **reduce** the probability or negative impact of a particular occurrence. The consequences resulting from a particular occurrence can be **transferred** to another party through such things as insurance and waivers. Finally, some risk is minimal in terms of likelihood of occurrence and impact. In these cases, it may be advisable to simply **accept** the risk.

Participants in youth programs are particularly vulnerable because they may not yet have acquired the knowledge and life experience needed to make decisions regarding risk. Moreover, because young people are experiencing a period of rapid physical, social, and emotional growth they are more likely to suffer long-term consequences from a damaging event. This may suggest to some that it is wiser to avoid offering some programs entirely.

Conversely, well run youth development programs provide enormous benefits to both young people and society. Some would argue that not providing needed programs for young people because of their inherent risks violates society's contract with future generations.

In the end, employing effective risk management and youth protection practices is a matter of making intentional decisions regarding safeguards to be employed in light of the likelihood of a harmful incident occurring, its impact on the victim, and the potential benefits derived from participation.

BEST PRACTICES IN YOUTH PROTECTION

Research and experience has provided the youth development field with a fairly comprehensive array of tools for safeguarding young people from risk. This document represents a compilation of recommended best practices that should be employed nationwide to achieve the organization's goals of providing a safe and nurturing environment for growth and development.

Continued...



4-H National Headquarters, NIFA/USDA
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; MS 2225; Washington, D.C. 20250
<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/youthdevelopment4h.cfm>



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

The authors realize that state laws and institutional policies vary with regard to youth protection. Furthermore, policies and procedures for protecting young people who participate in 4-H are established by the Extension Service of each state. That said, it is important that 4-H nationally communicate its expectations for what constitutes reasonable care. Such expectations should, at the very least, inform policy development and institutional behavior. States are encouraged to review this document and implement practices identified after consultation with relevant university officials and within the context of state and local laws. This document is also intended to establish best practices for 4-H programs operated at the national level.

The following set of best practices were compiled by a task force consisting of administrators, 4-H program leaders, state 4-H specialists, and personnel from 4-H National Headquarters/NIFA/USDA. The task force reviewed youth protection guidelines from a wide range of organizations and institutions both internal and external to Cooperative Extension. Utilization of these practices is considered important parts of an overall risk management plan and overall volunteer program management plan for 4-H youth development programs.

ASSESSING BEST PRACTICES

The pages that follow group best practices into six key dimensions of protection. After each of the individual practices is space to make an assessment or rating of where the local, county, or state program stands in terms of that practice. Please use the following scale in making your self-assessment. The assessment can be made either by an individual or by a group.

- 1 = Practice is fully implemented
- 2 = Practice is partially implemented
- 3 = Practice not implemented at all

The results of the assessment can be used to begin a process of prioritization aimed at identifying and implementing those practices deemed as most critical to ensuring that youth are protected to an appropriate degree.

Developed by the **National 4-H Youth Protection Task Force**

Roger Rennekamp (OR) chair, Doug Swanson (NIFA), Lisa Lauxman (NIFA), Jill Martz (MT), Todd Tarifa (LA), Mary Jo Williams (MO), Janet Fox (LA), Fred Schlutt (AK), Christy Bartley (PA), Cody Stone (MT), Bill Woodrum (WV), and Amy McCune (NIFA)

A Framework for Best Practices in Youth Protection Checklist

CULTURE OF PROTECTION		
Recommended Practice	Rating	Comments
<p>Youth Protection is operationalized in an overall framework of positive youth development that builds personal responsibility for the care of self and others while addressing risks beyond the participant's control.</p>		
<p>Program leadership has established relationships with the institution's risk management officer, general counsel, Title IX coordinator, campus security personnel, and other university officials with responsibility for child safety.</p>		
<p>Institution recognizes that work with young people is central to its mission and that there are risks associated with that work. A collaborative approach to assessing potential risks and taking steps to manage such risk is imperative.</p>		
<p>Programs are designed, implemented, and evaluated in a way that youth protection is prominent and emphasized throughout.</p>		

SELECTING VOLUNTEERS		
Recommended Practice	Rating	Comments
<p>Applicants for positions that involve contact with youth provide information needed to conduct a thorough and inclusive national criminal history check for violations germane to the duties of the position.</p>		

<p>Personal interviews are conducted with each applicant prior to placement into the position for which they are applying.</p>		
<p>Position descriptions are developed that specify the range of responsibility for which the volunteer is approved.</p>		
<p>Applicants are evaluated in terms of their suitability for specific positions and placed into positions that best match their skills and experience.</p>		
<p>Volunteers certify in writing that they have read, understand, and agree to the institution's policies related to youth protection.</p>		
<p>Volunteers certify in writing that they agree to a code of conduct that communicates expected volunteer behavior.</p>		
<p>Application for volunteer service includes open-ended questions that can elicit information useful in determining suitability for a position that involves contact with youth.</p>		

<p>Names of potential references are obtained from the applicant. Screener speaks privately with references asking each reference a standard set of questions, including the following.</p> <p>“Would you be willing to place your child, or any other child for whom you are responsible, in the care of this individual?”</p>		
---	--	--

ORIENTATION AND TRAINING		
Recommended Practice	Rating	Comments
<p>All volunteers participate in a comprehensive orientation that communicates the youth protection policies, procedures, and expectations of the institution prior to the commencement of service.</p>		
<p>Training programs address the youth protection issues specifically related to the individual’s volunteer role.</p>		
<p>Adults who work with youth use institutional or group (rather than personal) social media accounts for communicating with youth involved in the program. Other laws and policies related to the use of social media are clearly communicated, including COPPA regulations.</p>		
<p>Institution utilizes a standard model for assessing risk. Instruction provided on using the model to assess potential risks and potential actions for addressing risk.</p>		

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Recommended Practice	Rating	Comments
<p>Personal information about minors is collected only if necessary and destroyed in accordance with the institution's document retention policies.</p> <p>All personal information about minors is treated as confidential and is secured at all times.</p>		
<p>Parents and caregivers have opportunities to provide information needed by staff to ensure that appropriate medical care is provided.</p>		
<p>Health records are reviewed for potentially life-threatening conditions.</p> <p>Health forms, consent for treatment, and insurance claim forms are easily accessed when need for them exists.</p>		
<p>Access to emergency healthcare is readily available at all 4-H events or activities. When such access cannot be guaranteed a qualified healthcare provider is on site to administer care.</p> <p>Records of treatment are maintained.</p>		
<p>Certified lifeguards are on site, safety rules are established and posted, and youth received training prior to entering the water.</p>		
<p>Facility has appropriate fire protection (smoke detectors, sprinklers, water hose).</p>		

<p>Youth and parents sign a participant code of conduct that communicates behavioral expectations.</p>		
<p>Institutional culture regarding traditions, initiation activities, hazing, hoaxes, and jokes is assessed periodically with corrective actions taken as needed. Incidences of sexual harassment or bullying are addressed promptly.</p>		
<p>Food and food products are kept in safe and sanitary conditions.</p> <p>If required by state regulations, cooks and food handlers have necessary certifications. Kitchen passes health department inspection.</p>		
<p>Institution has clear policy for release of participants to caregivers after an event as well as established checkout policy. No youth are left unaccompanied awaiting pick-up by a caregiver.</p>		
<p>Institution has clear policies for use of personal vehicles to transport participants.</p> <p>Institution has clear policies regarding use of motor vehicles by youth participants who are licensed drivers.</p>		
<p>Institution has policies for the number and minimum age of adults required for the supervision of various events. Such policies should be based on age of the young people and level of risk associated with the activity. These ratios tend to range between 8 to 12 youth per adult.</p>		

Adults avoid placing themselves in situations where they are alone with a single unrelated young person.		
At least one adult is within sight or hearing distance of youth at all times.		
Adults are housed in sleeping accommodations in a manner that provides the highest level of protection for youth participants.		
Site boundaries and restricted areas are clearly communicated to all volunteers and participants; sites are checked for hazards; risks are eliminated.		

CRISIS MANAGEMENT		
Recommended Practice	Rating	Comments
Emergency protocols (including communication, required actions, and documentation) are clearly communicated and reviewed annually.		
Contact information for first responders as well as medical providers, law enforcement, child protective services, and relevant institutional officials are easily accessed when needed.		

Plan is in place for monitoring weather conditions and for responding to weather emergencies and other natural disasters.		
Institution has a written plan for dealing with missing participants that includes investigation, communication, and reporting.		
A designated individual is identified to handle internal communications regarding the situation.		
A designated individual is identified to handle communication with the media and public regarding the situation.		

REPORTING		
Recommended Practice	Rating	Comments
Faculty, staff, and volunteers know and follow established procedures for reporting suspected child abuse as described by state law or university policy.		
Faculty and staff have easy access to the name and contact information for the University's Title IX coordinator; know and follow established procedures for filing reports of gender-based harassment or violence.		

Faculty and staff have easy access to the name and contact information for the University's Campus Security Authority (CSA); know and follow established procedures for reporting crimes according to Clery Act requirements.		
Faculty, staff, and volunteers know and follow established procedures for making insurance claims, have ready access to claim forms and other relevant documents needed to make a claim.		
Faculty, staff, and volunteers know and follow established procedures for reporting accidents.		
Faculty staff, and volunteers are aware of additional University reporting requirements; know and follow established procedures for making reports to designated officials.		

Bibliography

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures
<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/preventingchildabuse.html>

Boy Scouts of America

Youth Protection Training for Volunteer Leaders and Parents
http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/100-023_WB.pdf

Nonprofit Risk Management Center

Child and Youth Protection
<http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/search/youth.asp?cx=016947194574783241609%3At-cnjypalai&cof=FORID%3A11&q=youth>

US Department of Health & Human Services

Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect: Summary of State Laws
http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm

American Camp Association

Child Abuse: Child Health and Safety Issues
<http://www.acacamps.org/child-health-safety/child-abuse>

University of Illinois Extension

Illinois 4-H Child Protection Course
http://web.extension.illinois.edu/4hc/?childprotect_art