



## Reducing Risk for 4-H Volunteers

### Introduction

4-H volunteers are responsible for the welfare of the 4-H members under their supervision. This fact sheet describes methods to reduce the 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 county 4-H Extension Educator or check the UNHCE website at <http://extension.unh.edu> for additional information or help.

The State of New Hampshire provides legal protection for its volunteers. A law (RSA 508:17) limits the liability of volunteers working for nonprofit organizations. This statute protects volunteers from civil liability in any action resulting in damage or injury to any person if:

1. The volunteer is acting in good faith and within the scope of his/her official duties and responsibilities.
2. The damage or injury is not caused by willful, wanton or gross negligent misconduct by the volunteer.

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

### Volunteer Agreement Form

Active UNHCE volunteers are required to be currently registered with a county or state UNH CE office/program. Any volunteer working directly with 4-H youth must complete the 4-H volunteer screening and orientation process which includes an application, references, background review, interview and orientation. Volunteers must complete the online training course in the first 3 months. (See Volunteer Responsibilities # 4 below for more information.) Volunteers serve as non-paid staff of UNHCE. All volunteers also need to complete the volunteer agreement form which remains in the volunteer's file at the county Extension office.

### Volunteer Responsibilities

*As a 4-H volunteer, you agree to:*

1. Serve as a positive role model for youth and set a good example for their actions and behavior.
2. Maintain the standards of 4-H Youth Development by conducting yourself in a responsible manner.
3. Conduct all 4-H activities in compliance with UNH Cooperative Extension guidelines and in a safe and healthy environment.

4. Participate in required volunteer orientation and other ongoing volunteer training as appropriate, such as the online 4-H Volunteer Training at the following web address: <http://extension.unh.edu/4H/4HVolunt.htm>. If you do not have internet access, please contact your county 4-H Extension Educator about other alternatives. This training program should be completed for all volunteers within three months of signing a Volunteer Agreement.
5. Keep UNH Cooperative Extension staff fully informed of club or project activities, including field trips, fundraising events, and other special activities.
6. Maintain up-to-date enrollment and complete required reports with the county UNH Cooperative Extension office for yourself, your participants, and other volunteers you direct.
7. Welcome all youth, their families, and other volunteers to participate in the program regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, veteran's status, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, or disability.

#### **Leadership and Supervision Guidelines**

- 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.). One adult for every four participants is the recommended ratio.
- Always be alert to potential dangers.
- Orient thoroughly the parents and other volunteers you direct.
- Make sure all participants, including parents, know the rules.
- Review safety rules, proper procedures and behavior expectations with participants before starting any activity.
- Review conduct rules at the beginning of activities and establish a procedure for handling infractions. Involve participants in this discussion. The NH 4-H Code of Conduct form provides a guide to behavior expectations and consequences of behavior at NH 4-H events.
- Handle any rule or procedural infraction in a timely manner.
- Do not use any form of physical punishment.
- Volunteer chaperones for State, National or out-of-state events must be 25 years of age or older.

- Make sure families are aware of special activities that are being planned. Use appropriate 4-H forms.
- Use the “buddy system,” as it 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. Do not use petty cash or shoe-box operations. See the “4-H Club Treasurers Record Book” for specific guidelines ([4-H Club Treasurer's Book](#)) Financial reports with last bank statement are due to the county office annually.

### **Important 4-H Trip/Event Forms**

- Code of Conduct
- Permission form
- Medical Care & Treatment form
- Use these 4-H forms when youth are to participate in special activities and events. Using these forms indicates that proper planning went into an event. It alerts parents to the activity.
- 4-H forms are available at <http://extension.unh.edu/4H/4HForms.htm> or at your county 4-H office. Remember to take these forms with you on your trip.

### **Insurance**

- Health and accident insurance should be obtained for special events, activities and trips. Your Extension 4-H staff can provide information about low-cost insurance that can be purchased on an annual or daily basis.
- Automobiles used for transporting 4-H participants must be covered by automobile liability coverage. The recommended level of liability coverage is at least \$300,000. Ask to see proof of insurance coverage.
- If a certificate of liability insurance is required in order to use a building, ask your 4-H Extension Educator for help. Do this as soon as possible.

### **Transportation**

- Require adequate insurance (see Insurance section).
- Volunteers must rely on their own automobile insurance when using personal vehicles while performing their volunteer duties.
- At anytime that you drive a vehicle as part of your responsibilities as a UNH Cooperative Extension volunteer, you will have a valid operator’s license and personal automobile liability coverage. You will comply with all State and Federal laws pertaining to use of such vehicles including valid vehicle registration, inspection and availability and use of safety devices. You will

be sure that anyone you ask to drive on behalf of UNH Cooperative Extension has signed a 4-H Volunteer Agreement Form or [Activity Driver Form](#).

- UNH Cooperative Extension staff and volunteers are encouraged not to arrange transportation for others. In most situations, transportation is the responsibility of the participant's family, including transportation to and from 4-H youth development program/activity sites. Whenever possible, have parents make transportation arrangements for their children. In those cases where transportation in personal vehicles is arranged by Extension staff or volunteers, as a part of their responsibilities with UNH Cooperative Extension, the driver must be an enrolled 4-H volunteer who has signed a 4-H Volunteer Agreement Form or an adult who has signed a trip specific Activity Driver Form.
- All drivers for 4-H functions will be at least 21 years of age.
- The use of 15 passenger style vans is prohibited.
- You should not permit anyone to drive whose driving you know to be dangerous.
- Seat belts must be worn by the driver and all passengers. Do not overload cars. Do not allow participants to ride in the back of pickup trucks.
- Participants who are known to cause trouble for drivers should be driven by their own parent or left at home.

### **Emergency Procedures**

- Care for the injured person.
- Call for emergency professional help, if needed.
- Stay calm. Eliminate confusion and fear. Have other adults handle the other participants present.
- Contact both parents **and** Cooperative Extension staff by the fastest means possible.
- Follow the instructions on the 4-H Medical Care and Treatment form about obtaining medical care. If unable to contact the parent, confer with the Extension staff. If none is available, use your best judgment. If possible, accompany the youth to the hospital.
- Assemble the facts. Verify them from different sources. These will be needed for completing the subsequent UNHCE Accident/Injury/Incident form **and** UNH Report of Incident form.

- If the media is involved, designate one person to speak with them. Usually this is the Extension Educator. Protect the privacy of the injured person and that of the other members of the group.
- Involve the Extension Educator in processing any follow-up insurance claims, legal issues or media coverage.

### **Child Abuse**

- Avoid the potential of child abuse allegations (real or perceived) by having at least three people (adults and/or youth) present at all times.
- If you suspect that a 4-H participant is being abused, contact your 4-H Extension Educator for guidance in reporting. By law (RSA 169-C), any suspected child abuse must be reported to the Bureau of Child and Family Services, New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth and Families. Failure to report is a misdemeanor.

### **Harassment/Discrimination**

- Harassment and discrimination are against University of New Hampshire policy. Included are harassment or discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, veteran's status, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status or disability.
- Avoid any verbal, written, graphic or physical conduct which might bring emotional, psychological, or physical harm, or explicitly degrade any individual.

### **Safety Guideline for 4-H Leaders**

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

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

1. In all 4-H youth development programs, the 4-H volunteers should understand the proposed program activity, know the experience and qualifications of the 4-H volunteers involved, understand the skill level of the youth involved, and assess the degree of risk before acting. All volunteers are to act in a responsible manner where 4-H programs are concerned.
2. The 4-H volunteer(s) will review the project/activity and the planned program of activities to identify areas of potential risk. Once identified, a plan to minimize these risks will be in place, understood, and practiced by

all volunteers involved in the project/activity. Leaders should have a supervision plan for each project activity.

3. Adult volunteers will develop a guideline to determine appropriate actions during an emergency. Where appropriate, emergency drills will be practiced.
4. The 4-H project will start with a discussion of the project and the safety procedures that should be followed.
5. Each participant will demonstrate, through action or exam, that he/she fully understands and can follow the established safety guidelines for that project. The volunteer should be certain each youth understands the safety guidelines.
6. 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 volunteer will check the equipment prior to use and monitor their safe usage during the project.
7. Protective 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 utilized:
  - a. Personal flotation devices will be used by all youth and adults who are on the water.
  - b. Safety helmets meeting the ASTM SEI guidelines will be worn by all when mounted upon, or being pulled by, one or more equine, excluding commercial hay/sleigh/coach rides.
  - c. Safety goggles/safety glasses will be used by participants when using power tools, chemicals or nails.
  - d. Participants in the shooting sports program will follow the curriculum's safety standards.
8. 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 projects or events involving large animals or firearms, nor will they operate motorized vehicles.
9. When organizing an event, identify those with special medical training.
10. Have a first aid kit will be available at all times.
11. Inform participants of exits and emergency procedures of that site.

## University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension County Offices

### **Belknap County**

527-5475

### **Carroll County**

447-3834

### **Cheshire County**

352-4550

### **Coös County**

788-4961

### **Grafton County**

787-6944

### **Hillsborough County**

641-6060

### **Merrimack County**

796-2151

### **Rockingham County**

679-5616

### **Strafford County**

749-4445

### **Sullivan County**

863-9200

### **UNHCE Education Center**

Manchester

629-9494, 1-877-398-4769 (toll-free)

### **UNHCE State Office**

Durham

862-1520



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