



Reducing Risk for 4-H Volunteers

While no program is ever completely 'safe' and, in fact, some risk is important for learning and positive youth development, we have a responsibility to all 4-H program participants, and to their families, to provide as safe an environment as possible. 4-H volunteers are responsible for the welfare of the program participants under their supervision. This fact sheet describes methods to reduce the risk of harm to these participants. This information will also help protect enrolled 4-H volunteers from legal action in the case of accident or injury.

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 their official duties and responsibilities.
2. The damage or injury is not caused by willful, wanton or gross negligent misconduct by the volunteer.

The following information outlines key elements of how enrolled volunteers can act responsibly within the scope of their responsibilities.

Volunteer Screening & Agreement Form

Enrolled UNHCE volunteers are required to be currently registered with a county or state UNH CE office/program. Any volunteer working unsupervised and directly with 4-H youth must complete the 4-H volunteer screening process. Upon completion of this process, volunteer and staff sign a [4-H Volunteer Agreement](#) which acts as the official document or 'contract' between UNHCE and the volunteer. In order to maintain volunteer status and to be protected by NH RSA 508:17, it is essential that the volunteer abide by the terms of the agreement.

Reporting and Responding to Incidents of Child Abuse or Neglect

NH Law requires any person who suspects that a child under age 18 has been abused or neglected must report that suspicion immediately to NH Department of Children & Youth. 4-H Volunteers are thus considered to be *mandated reporters*. If abuse or neglect is expected:

- Call the NH Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Intake Unit
 - Toll free (inside NH only): (800) 894-5533
 - If calling from outside NH: (603) 271-6562
- Note: Proof of abuse and neglect is not required to make a report.
- Reporter can remain anonymous and it is ok to contact a 4-H staff to help with the report
- Proof of abuse and neglect is not required to make a report.
- After a report is made, the volunteer should document and follow all instructions given by the DCYF authorities or the police and contact a 4-H staff member as soon as possible.

Note: More details are included in the UNH "Protection of Minors for Staff and Volunteers" training, which all enrolled volunteers are required to complete prior to working unsupervised with youth.

Supervision of 4-H Programs and Activities

Effective and vigilant supervision of 4-H participants and activities is one of the most important ways to manage risk and is one of the most important duties of enrolled volunteers.

- 4-H programs need to monitor when children arrive and depart a program or activity. Sign-in and sign-out procedures should be used.
- Minors will be supervised at all times by staff or enrolled volunteers when non-enrolled volunteers or adults are present.
- To avoid the potential for uncomfortable situations and/or child abuse allegations, an adult should never be alone with a youth. It is recommended to always have at least three people (adults and/or youth) present at all times and to have at least two adults present at 4-H programs or activities.
- Ratios of Adults to Minors:
 - Participants ages 4-5: one adult for every six minors (1:6)
 - Participants ages 6-8: one adult for every eight minors (1:8)
 - Participants ages 9-14: one adult for every 10 minors (1:10)
 - Participants ages 15-17: one adult for every 12 minors (1:12)

Note: The 4-H program is designed for youth ages 5 and up. Volunteers are not trained or expected to work with younger youth as part of their 4-H responsibilities.

- Additional adult supervision may be needed for some activities. Please consult with a 4-H staff member for any of the following:
 - Overnight programs
 - High-risk programs, including but not limited to: work with large animals, work with power tools, shooting sports, backcountry trips or boating/swimming.
 - Participants with special needs
- Make sure staff and parents/guardians are aware of any special or out-of-the-ordinary activities that are being planned.

Important 4-H Forms

[4-H Activity Permission and Release Form](#) - (1) to inform parents/guardians of details of an activity or program; (2) to document parent or guardian permission for their child to participate

- Use this form with all participants who are non-members who are participating in 4-H programs or activities.
- Use this form with members or a non-members for a 4-H activity that is beyond the scope of what a parent/guardian has previously given written permission for or would be particularly surprised/nervous to hear about after-the-fact (e.g., special field trip or higher risk activity such as working with large animals, shooting sports, using power tools, boating/swimming etc.).

[4-H Health and Medication Form](#) – (1) to inform supervising adults of pertinent health history and medications; (2) to provide health history and consent-to-treat to medical personnel in case of injury/illness.

- Use this form with all minors who are non-members who are participating in 4-H Programs or Activities.
- Staff/Volunteers supervising the program or activity need to review form prior to activity and have it secure (for privacy) but accessible in case of injury/illness. The information is confidential and should only be shared on a need-to-know basis.
- All enrolled members should have one completed and on file at the county office and club leaders can print the forms directly from 4-HOnline.

[4-H Event Youth Code of Conduct Form](#) – an agreement to be signed by participants and parent/guardians to ensure behavior expectations are clear and understood

[UNHCE Accident/Injury/Incident Report Form](#) – a form to easily and consistently collect all relevant information about an accident, illness or injury.

- Use this Form whenever someone is injured during a 4-H program or activity. Note: minor injuries may become serious later
- Use this Form to document any accidents during a 4-H event or program that result in damage to property, a noticeable emotional impact on participants or their parent/guardians, or any other incident that is significantly out of the ordinary.
- Incident Reports should be filed with the staff supervising the 4-H Program or activity (supervising staff should also send a copy to the 4-H state office as well)

Transportation

If a volunteer takes on the responsibility of transporting a program participant or using a vehicle as part of their program or volunteer duties*, the following policy must be followed:

1. Youth Program staff or volunteers who transport minors are required to complete a NH motor vehicle records check every three years. Drivers who are UNH students need the check done annually. The check should be completed via UNH Human Resources and reviewed by the staff/volunteer's supervisor or other designated Youth Program manager. Staff or volunteers may not be permitted to transport program participants depending on the type of violations they may have had and when they occurred (as listed in *USNH Vehicle Management Policy and Procedures*). Drivers must immediately self-report any changes in their driving record such as at fault accidents, revocations or moving violations
2. National Safety & Health Council Defensive Driving Course (DDC) certification is required to:
 - a. Operate University vehicles,
 - b. Operate rental vehicles for University purposes
3. A Commercial Driver License and DOT Medical Card must be obtained to:
 - a. Transport 16 or more passengers
 - b. Operate a vehicle with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) in excess of 26,000 pounds or a combination of trailer and towing unit which exceeds 26,000 pounds GVWR with the trailer in excess of 10,000 pounds GVWR.

4. If a personal vehicle is used:
 - a. Driver's personal insurance will be the primary liability coverage. USNH's liability insurance may be excess over any personal automobile liability insurance carried by the employee depending on the circumstances. The employee or volunteer and their personal insurance policy is responsible for any damage to their vehicle. USNH will not reimburse for deductibles. USNH recommends that staff and volunteers who regularly use their vehicles on business should carry adequate auto liability insurance and ensure there is no business use exclusion on their policy.
 - b. Personal vehicles shall be in compliance with all federal and state laws pertaining to use of such vehicles, including but not limited to, possession of a vehicle registration and inspection.
5. If a 15-passenger van is used, there may only be 9 passengers plus one driver. Vehicles must be modified by removing the back seats to reduce the seating capacity to 10.
6. Drivers will be at least 21 years of age if transporting others.
7. Adults should not drive alone with a minor unless they are the parent/guardian of the minor.
8. Driver Responsibilities, as listed in *USNH Vehicle Management Policy and Procedures* include, but are not limited to the following:
 - Drivers must operate vehicles in a lawful manner so as to reduce the likelihood of accidents and assure the safety of employees, passengers and the general public, and so as to not damage public or private property.
 - Seat belts must be worn by all drivers and passengers.
 - Drivers are prohibited from using a cellular phone or other held electronic device while driving, unless hands-free technology is utilized, and may never send or read text messages while driving.
 - Driver will observe all vehicle specific limitations such as maximum loads
 - Drivers are personally responsible for any fines, tickets or citations resulting from their violation of applicable laws, rules and regulations. USNH funds may not be used to pay such fines.
 - If an accident occurs it must be immediately reported to driver's supervisor within 24 hours.

* Transportation that is arranged or conducted by participants and their families and not by a staff or volunteer (e.g., driving to and from club meetings or 4-H events), is not generally considered to be part of the 4-H program itself and thus would not be considered an activity that is part of a volunteer's duties.

Communications with Youth

Communications between adult volunteers and minors, whether by phone or electronically, should:

- Be appropriate

- Be conducted with parent's permission
- Only be program-related (non-personal topics)
- Avoid one-on-one communication when possible - include the parent/guardian whenever possible, or email/text groups of minors

Insurance

- All 4-H programs and activities that are supervised by enrolled volunteers acting in good faith and within the scope of their official responsibilities, are covered by UNH liability insurance.
- If a certificate of liability insurance is required in order to use a building, ask a 4-H Staff to help you obtain a certificate of Liability – it may take a couple weeks to get it.
- Supplemental health and accident insurance can be obtained for a club and 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.

Harassment/Discrimination/Bullying

- 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.
- The NH 4-H Program also believes that having diversity within our programs adds to the quality of our activities.
- Volunteers should not tolerate any bullying or harassment and avoid any verbal, written, graphic or physical conduct that might degrade any individual.

Accident/Injury/Emergency Procedures

- Care for the injured person.
- Call for emergency professional help, if needed.
- Stay calm. Manage confusion and fear. Have other adults handle the other participants present.
- Contact both parents and UNH Cooperative Extension 4-H staff as soon as possible.
- Assemble the facts and **complete the [UNHCE Accident/Injury/Incident Form](#)**. Submit form to a 4-H staff member.
- If the media is involved, defer communications if possible to Extension 4-H Staff and work to protect the privacy of the affected individuals and the other members of the group.
- De-brief the incident with 4-H Staff and other crises trained individuals as necessary.

Specific Safety Guidelines for Activities

1. Volunteers should understand the proposed program activity, know the experience and qualifications of the volunteers involved, understand the skill level of the youth involved, and assess the degree of risk before acting. All volunteers should be conservative in these assessments and act in a responsible manner where 4-H programs are concerned.

2. Volunteer(s) will review the planned program activity 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 program activity. Leaders should have a supervision plan for each project or activity.
3. Adult volunteers should understand appropriate actions during an emergency. Where appropriate, emergency drills will be practiced. Inform participants of exits and emergency procedures of that site.
4. All youth & adults should be oriented to the activity and any specific rules or safety guidelines should be shared in a manner that is thorough (e.g., take into account late arrivals and differing levels of skill) and is easy to understand (e.g., takes into account ages of participants, distractions and special needs). The activity should not proceed unless it is certain all involved understand the safety guidelines.
5. 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.
6. All machines or equipment used with a program activity 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. All equipment will be appropriate for the age, size and ability of the participants.
8. The following program activities require specific equipment or guidelines:
 - Personal flotation devices will be used by all youth and adults who are on the water.
 - 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.
 - Youth under the age of eight will not work directly with large animals.
 - Protective eyewear will be used by participants when using power tools, chemicals or nails.
 - Shooting sports programs will only be facilitated by enrolled leaders who have completed 4-H shooting sports training and must follow guidelines outlined in [NH 4-H Shooting Sports Policy Manual](#).
9. Have a first aid kit available at all times
10. For larger events, a formal Emergency Action Plan should be developed with a 4-H Staff member and an Emergency Response Coordinator Identified

The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. University of New Hampshire, U.S. Department of Agriculture and N.H. counties cooperating.