

Risk Management for 4-H Youth Development Work: Special Events and Activities¹

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This is the third of an eight-part series that explains Risk Management for the 4-H Youth Development Work. This publication will focus on risks one could face when dealing with special events or activities such as fairs, conferences, and overnight trips.

In many 4-H activities, it is important to recognize the possibility of risks occurring. The goal of any 4-H experience is to successfully conduct educational events and activities that coincide with the 4-H mission and mandates while protecting participants. The safety of participants, sponsors, property, finances, and the goodwill/reputation of the 4-H name can be at risk. Although risk may sometimes be avoided, other times it is inevitable or worth the trade-off for the activity planned. This risk management guide has been created to prepare for activities that may involve risk and outline ways to deal with the risk.

Animals

When working with any large animal, there is always risk. Animals are unpredictable and sometimes react unexpectedly. Because of this, the

handler must be educated in and practice good *risk management*.

Avoidance is the best approach for animal projects. Youth and volunteers should avoid putting themselves in danger. Risks should be identified at the beginning of the project and plans to deal with what could happen should be in place. Consider some of the following in the development of a risk management plan:

- Number of large animals and the proximity of the animals to the general public
- Care of the animals in open areas
- Movement of large animals from one location to another including transporting to a single site
- Access of food, water during events
- Sanitary clean-up of animal waste
- Washing stations for those who touch animals
- Potential for loud noises that may startle animals

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- Ethical treatment of animals
- Adequate signage for the general public to avoid mingling with large animals
- Harm to the animal by the public
- Exercise areas
- Holding areas/gates/plans if animals get loose
- Security for animals and humans
- Emergency plan for handling human or animal injuries
- Fire drills, escape plans, evacuation routes, and emergency numbers
- Severe weather (lightning storms, tornados, hurricanes, flooding) procedures
- Missing person emergencies, including critical contact numbers
- Unidentified person in the facility
- Medical emergency procedures and contact numbers
- Clear chain of command for communication purposes

Camps

There is an endless list of risks that can be identified at 4-H residential and day camps. There must be practices to keep youth safe, secure, and healthy during camp experiences. A separate *State 4-H Camping Handbook* has been developed to provide in-depth information on camp planning and safety.

Volunteers should be trained to deal with youth and accidents that may occur. Everyone, including youth, camp staff, chaperones, and 4-H agents should be observant and prepared to deal with danger at any time. Accidents can happen in workshops, classes, swimming, canoeing, archery, recreation, and even with youth relaxing in their cabins. Precautionary measures, such as emergency plans, should be made available and remembered by all who participate or chaperone. (Emergency plans are addressed in another section of this risk management guide.)

All camp experiences involve extra planning to ensure the safety of program participants:

- It is expected that camps include an educational plan and trained youth and adult volunteers who implement the experience.
- Safety for program participants and emergency situations must be part of the education plan.

Adult and youth volunteers and extension staff must be aware of emergency procedures for the facility used for the overnight experience:

A variety of volunteers support the overnight experiences. A number of volunteer roles require special considerations.

Counselors

- Must be 14 years of age at the time of camp
- Role must be focused on working with young people and not on camp maintenance or clean-up
- 20–40 hours of in-depth training for counselors on working with youth and safety procedures is expected
- Camp counselor expectations must be in compliance with Florida Child Labor Laws. Consult the *Youth as Volunteers: Camp Counselors Reference Guide*.
- Free Time: Camp counselors and adult chaperones or camp staff needs to appropriately monitor youth during free-time activities. A strong sense of structure is needed with youth events to ensure their safety. Providing supervision of youth during "down time" is important for their health and safety.

Resource Volunteers

Resource volunteers who support the educational experience must be trained on working with youth or supported by a trained volunteer through a county youth protection program.

Cooks / Food Handlers

Cooks and volunteers who handle food must comply with kitchen facility requirements and restrictions and follow proper food handling procedures.

Lifeguards

Lifeguards must be certified by the Red Cross and in compliance with best practices for serving in this role. According to the requirements of the American Red Cross, an individual may be hired as a lifeguard if they are at least 15 years of age and have the appropriate current certification. If the person is going to lifeguard on a beach or lake (e.g., where swimming, kayaking, canoeing, etc. also take place), they need to have current lifeguard certification with the addition of *Waterfront Lifeguard* certification.

Refer to the following site to find out more about lifeguard certification:

<http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.86f46a12f382290517a8f210b80f78a0/?vgnnextoid=5208aeeb860b1210VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=default>

- A lifeguard may supervise up to 25 people in the water
- If 26 or more people are in the water, at least two lifeguards must be on duty
- There also needs to be a ratio of one adult (not necessarily lifeguard certified) for every 10 youth present to help with supervision
- Best practice policy, as implemented at Florida 4-H camping facilities, is that one of the staff lifeguards needs to be on the waterfront in order for campers to swim
- Additional lifeguards may come from the county and their certification must be current

Additional Considerations

Other things to consider in a risk management plan for day and residential camping:

- Animal care, if present for educational purposes

- Cabin safety
- Check-in/check-out procedures and camper care during the process
- Facilities check for hazards and repairs
- Food and/or water availability (particularly on hot days)
- Free-time activities and prevention of horseplay
- Harmful reptiles/animals
- Establishment of a review board prior to the start of the activity

Educational Coordinators (Chaperones) for Overnight Experiences

1. **Ratio:** Youth-adult ratios are commonly based on the age of child. A ratio of one adult chaperone for every ten youth is recommended. For overnight events, this ratio is required. An even lower ratio is recommended if you are working with younger children, e.g., for 8–10 year olds, a good ratio would be one adult to eight youth. The preference is also to have the ratio of like gender (e.g., one male chaperone to ten male youth or fraction).
2. In the case of overnight stays, allowances can be made when both **genders** are staying in the same facility (e.g., hotel rooms located next to each other). However, it is preferred that at least two adult chaperones check the rooms where youth are staying. In the case where a pair of female chaperones are checking a room of male youth (or vice versa with male adults checking room of female youth), it is imperative that females not enter the male rooms (and vice versa). In the best situation, male and female chaperones should check rooms together. If the facility does not allow for lodging in close proximity (e.g., dorm rooms or camp cabins), groups should be separated by gender and age.
3. **Youth protection:** All adults serving as chaperones for overnight events must have completed the *4-H Youth Development Youth*

Protection Process including a background screening. Plans need to be in place for prevention of youth truancy, injury (emotional or physical) due to horseplay or other problems that could occur during free and unstructured time.

4. **Age requirements:** Chaperones should be at least 21 years of age.
5. **Rooming:** It is not recommended that adults and young people stay in the same room. This avoids situations of inappropriate behavior or accusations. In addition, it does not allow young people to spend free time with other youth or to practice skills like decision-making, problem-solving and assuming responsibility. There may be an exception for family members, where this may be allowed but not encouraged, because the young person's interaction with other youth is important.
6. **Transporting youth:** Youth should not be transported from the main facility to another location by an educational coordinator without letting the event coordinator or agent-in-charge know. If there is a medical emergency, a designated person should be transporting the youth. Parents need to be contacted as soon as possible.

Shooting Sports

The 4-H Shooting Sports Program is a national program with guidelines provided by the National 4-H Shooting Sports Committee. The Florida 4-H Committee and the 4-H National Headquarters' Committee is made up of extension professionals, industry representatives, volunteers and others. The committee plans, organizes, and conducts state-level training programs to certify instructors in order that they might conduct shooting sports training programs.

To serve as a shooting sports leader, 4-H certified leaders must be at least 18 years old and must have participated in at least one state-level training program.

4-H leaders and volunteers must have received shooting sports certification in the discipline

in which they are providing supervision. If an adult leader is not certified, he/she cannot provide hands-on or safety instruction without a certified leader being present. A leader may obtain certification in an additional discipline, such as archery, air pistol, hunting/wildlife ecology, muzzle loading, rifle (.177 pellet, .177 BB, and .22), and shotgun, by completing a certification workshop provided by 4-H certified state training team members. More details on the Florida Shooting Sports Program can be found in the publication entitled *Florida 4-H Shooting Sports Program State Plan*, Revised 2005.

References

Practicing good risk management. (1990). In Florida 4-H program handbook (Sec 4: pp. 10, 18-20). Gainesville, FL: UF.