

Guidelines for Supervising Youth

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Very seldom do unpleasant incidents occur, but the potential for their occurrence does exist. Here are suggestions for you concerning the supervision of 4-H youth.

Medical Form

The use of a parent medical authorization form is required for each activity. One form could be used each year for routine club meetings, but a separate form should be used for special activities and out-of-town trips. The form allows you to provide necessary care until the parents can assume direct supervision of the situation; parents should be advised of the situation at the earliest possible time. If an activity involves potential hazards, advise the parents before the activity takes place.

The medical authorization form is a necessity since doctors and hospitals will not treat a minor without signed authorization. Some hospitals will accept only a notarized form; thus, it is suggested that you contact the hospital in the area where the activity will be held to ask if a notarized form is required. Along with the medical form, include a statement that parents will assume financial responsibility for medical services. It is also advisable to request information about the health of the child: allergies to medication(s), religious restrictions on medical treatment, etc.

Be sure to have these forms readily available at all times. One suggestion is to photocopy the form and have the 4-H'er carry it in a wallet or purse during the activity. This will prevent delays if you are at another location when the 4-H'er is injured.

In some instances, a parent will refuse to sign a parent medical authorization form. Usually this is a result of semantics and can be resolved. However, if the parents ultimately refuse to give you medical authorization, you may determine that the child is not authorized to participate in the activity without a parent.

There is no standardized form for a release/medical authorization form. However, the above-mentioned factors should be included in one.

Appropriate Conduct

Before the activity, parents and 4-H'ers should have access to a copy of all rules for appropriate conduct of the 4-H'er at the activity, including disciplinary action that may be imposed for misconduct.

Safety Precautions

Safety concerns that you identify should be emphasized with the youth before and during an activity. For example, if you are staying overnight at a motel that has a swimming pool, the 4-H'ers should be advised to observe and obey rules and restrictions posted by the motel.

General Guidelines

Your supervisory authority and responsibility remain constant from the time you receive control of the 4-H'er until the 4-H'er has been returned to parental authority. Here are some suggestions.

- Provide a minimum of 1 adult chaperone for every 8 to 10 youth. If the nature of the activity is particularly risky, reduce the ratio.
- Violations of the law by 4-H'ers cannot be tolerated, regardless of your personal beliefs.
- Have access to a basic first-aid kit.
- All drivers of vehicles involved in the activity must be adults (someone who is 21 or older). Consider using public transportation whenever practical.
- Avoid actions that might suggest that you were incapable of supervising the group (for example, drinking alcoholic beverages).
- Avoid the use of physical punishment such as spanking. Other nonphysical methods should be used. Youth should be returned to their parents if a major problem develops.

Incidents

If an incident occurs, you will be faced with two immediate concerns: proper care and concern for any injured person, and proper supervision of the group. Some basic knowledge of first aid can be extremely helpful. Common sense is appropriate in determining whether medical or police authorities should be contacted. You may need to assign someone to supervise the remainder of the group while you are helping an injured person. For this reason, it is suggested that at least two adults accompany groups on hikes or similar activities.

After an incident, notify your supervisors as soon as is reasonably possible and follow their instructions. Also, notify the State 4-H Office at the earliest possible time.

- Write down names and addresses of all persons who witnessed the incident and of others (such as police) who became involved.
- Note the time and exact location of the incident and any other factors that might have affected the incident.
- Assemble any written information that was used in planning and conducting the activity. Make note of instructions that were given—what was said, when, where, and to whom.
- Maintain a file with this information until you are advised by an appropriate authority that it is no longer needed.

- If you or your county 4-H program carries liability insurance, notify the insurance company as soon as possible and follow their instructions.

Always use courtesy and consideration when contacting the family of the 4-H'ers involved in the incident.

- Notify the family as soon as possible and take a sincere interest in the situation.
- Should the family be hostile toward you, advise your supervisor, the State 4-H Office, and the insurance company and follow their instructions.
- It is advisable to have another adult present when you contact the family.
- Report facts to the family; do not include conclusions or opinions, such as who you believe was at fault.

Summary

In supervising youth, **use common sense**. No list of instructions could cover all the circumstances you might face. Your challenge is to supervise them.

Although the information presented here comes from reliable sources, it is recommended that you consult with your supervisor or your own legal counsel on specific issues.

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