Overview

Volunteers play an important role in fulfilling the mission of the NDSU Extension Service, which is to create supportive learning environments for youth and adults to reach their fullest potential as capable, competent and caring citizens.

The Youth Protection Policy represents a code of ethics which all volunteers and staff are expected to observe.

Whether we are staff members or volunteers, teens or adults, all of us who work closely with young people have the potential to profoundly affect the well-being of children. In addition to providing safe and appropriate environments, we must also be positive role models, focusing on how we communicate with youth, our methods of discipline and problem-solving, and how sensitive we are to the individual needs of all youth.

The primary purpose of the Youth Protection Policy is to ensure the safety and well-being of all youth participants, their families, volunteers and paid staff. Every new volunteer who applies to work with Extension youth programs and all paid Extension staff participate in a process that fulfills the requirements of this policy. A prospective volunteer’s acceptance as an NDSU Extension Service volunteer is contingent on clearance through the North Dakota Child Abuse Information Index and the North Dakota Office of Attorney General Convicted Sex Offenders and Offenders Against Children – Public List, and satisfactory results from a reference and review process.

In North Dakota, volunteers with the NDSU Extension Service are considered ‘unpaid staff’ when they are functioning in an official capacity on behalf of the NDSU Extension Service.

Every six years, volunteers and staff are asked to reaffirm their commitment to promoting the safety and well-being of all youth program participants by resubmitting a Behavioral Expectation Code of Ethics and a Volunteer Information for Recertification.

The responsibility for the well-being of children lies with each and every one of us. The North Dakota State University Extension Youth Protection process is designed to help us carefully select volunteers who work with our youth development programs.
Ensuring a Safe Environment for All Participants in Youth Programs

The following guidelines help establish positive environments and program barriers that promote safety and well-being for all program participants.

- To protect ALL individuals, volunteers and staff need to work with young people in reasonably open places where others are welcome to enter (NOT behind closed doors).
- Be aware that while spending time alone with a single child can be positive and helpful, it can also be a reason for concern for everyone involved.
- Parents and guardians are always welcomed and encouraged to attend Extension youth program meetings and events.
- Respect privacy. Adults need to respect the privacy of youth. The privacy issue is especially relevant in situations where changing clothes or taking showers may be in facilities lacking privacy. In these situations staff (volunteer and paid) should intrude only to the extent that health and safety requires.
- There will be a minimum of one responsible adult (at least 18 years old) for every 8 to 10 youth, for any NDSU Extension Service youth-related activities involving an overnight stay. This is consistent with national 4-H guidelines established on December 31, 1993.
- Paid staff and volunteers should be alert to the physical and emotional well-being of youth under their supervision. Signs of injury or suspected child abuse or neglect should be reported.
- Extension paid staff and volunteers are reminded that adult behavior can have an impact on youth in many situations and environments, during extension programming and outside of those responsibilities.
- Extension staff and volunteers will not, under any circumstances, discipline youth by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care, such as food and shelter.
- An adult should not share a room with one minor child who is not his/her child. Youth should room with other youth. If the situation dictates that an adult and a youth must share a room, there should be several youth present with a single adult.

Anti-bullying Policy

The North Dakota Extension Service exists to help youth and adults enhance their lives and communities. To achieve this goal, a safe and positive environment needs to be maintained; thus, bullying behaviors by youth, volunteers and/or staff are prohibited.

Definition of Bullying

Bullying behavior is defined as unwanted deliberately negative action by another individual or group of individuals with intent to harm. Bullying may inflict harm or distress, including physical, social, sexual, psychological or educational harm, on the targeted individual or group. Bullying often includes an imbalance of power between individuals/groups.

Cyberbullying is bullying that happens through email, chat rooms, instant messaging, a website, text messages or social media. Bullying may include, but is not limited to, verbal aggression, emotional attacks, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, physical aggression, isolating others or electronic harassment.

Alcoholic Beverages and Illegal Drug Use

It is expected that adults working in Extension youth programs be positive role models for participating youth. Adults must obey the laws of the state and the rules of the organization.

The influence of alcohol or illegal drugs can inhibit reasonable judgment and reduce one’s ability to provide a safe environment for youth. The liability coverage carried by NDSU would not provide protection to an employee or volunteer who violates state or local laws or ordinances concerning alcohol or illegal drugs.

Since consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs is not acceptable for young people in Extension youth programs, adults should not consume these substances while working with youth. Any Extension volunteer or paid staff can be liable both criminally and/or civilly if underage drinking associated with an Extension youth activity is condoned, ignored or accepted. It is important that adults recognize and continue to help communicate the powerful and negative health and safety consequences of drug and alcohol use.
**Insurance**

**Personal Liability Insurance**
Volunteers receive special protection under North Dakota law as do state employees. The attorney for NDSU has stated that it appears that volunteers acting on behalf of a state agency would be covered in most liability cases. All volunteers and youth taking part in Extension youth program activities should be properly registered by their local Extension office. Having enrollment forms and program plans on file is valuable documentation in case of a claim. University coverage and laws may change.

It is also critical that the roles and responsibilities of those who work with youth programs be documented in written form before an accident happens. Extension volunteer and paid staff should record activities and related plans through written programs, meeting minutes, personal notes or letters, memos, annual reports, job descriptions and rosters.

It is important that individuals act in a reasonable and prudent manner when working with youth programs. This means that a person is acting in a way others who have similar background and training would act in a similar circumstance. Negligence is conduct in which a reasonable and prudent person would not have engaged. A reasonable and prudent person will use this document to understand personal obligations and responsibilities related to promoting the well-being of youth in Extension programs.

**Automobile Insurance**
Volunteers rely on their personal auto policy for protection when working in an Extension youth program. It is recommended that all Extension volunteers and paid staff review their personal property liability coverage and consider a personal and family umbrella liability policy. Volunteers must also have liability insurance coverage to at least meet North Dakota state law. Refer to the N.D. Department of Insurance website for the coverage and minimum limits mandated by law at:

[www.nd.gov/ndins/consumer/auto-insurance-information/auto-insurance-faqs](http://www.nd.gov/ndins/consumer/auto-insurance-information/auto-insurance-faqs)

**Accident and Illness Insurance**
Specialized insurance plans are obtained by some county Extension offices to provide accident and illness coverage for many NDSU Extension Service youth-related activities. This insurance covers youth program participants and volunteer leaders. Counties obtain the insurance annually based on Extension rosters.

Any incidence of accident or violation of established rules should be reported to the Extension staff (the youth program contact) in the county. The youth program contact should report accidents through the NDSU Safety Office.

**Code of Conduct and Health Statements** Code of conduct agreements and health forms are available from your county Extension office. These forms should be completed for each participant in an event where the child is away from home overnight or activities might cause concern about the safety of the child. Adult volunteer or paid staff should have these forms available in the event that youth need emergency medical treatment.

**Safe Operation of Motor Vehicles, Machinery and Equipment**
Anyone who transports youth to participate in Extension youth program activities and events must possess a valid motor vehicle operator’s license.

NDSU Extension prohibits use of 15 passenger vans for transportation of youth participating in NDSU Extension programs. This decision is based on the potential risk to occupants during certain driving conditions. Effective Jan 1, 2003.

Volunteer and paid staff must operate vehicles in safe ways, using common sense and good judgment, following accepted operating procedures, and obeying traffic laws including use of seat belts. Overloading vehicles or using vehicles not designed to transport multiple passengers is unacceptable.

Adults are role models. They are responsible for the safety of youth they work with and influence the development of lifelong safety habits in youth program participants. Adults should use safe practices and common sense when operating machinery and equipment such as power tools, hand tools, agricultural equipment, lawn and garden equipment, chemicals, pesticides, shooting equipment. Protective clothing (hats, ear and eye protection, etc.) should be used when needed.
Non-Discrimination Policies

Using the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequent legislation as a guide, Extension volunteers and paid staff must not show discrimination in designing or delivering programs on the basis of age, color, disability, gender expression/identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, public assistance status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or status as a U.S. veteran. Those representing Extension must make sure programs are equally accessible to anyone desiring to participate. They should use all reasonable efforts to make individuals who have not participated feel welcome.

The intention of Affirmative Action is to strengthen and expand Extension youth program opportunities to all youth, particularly those who have not had full access to the program. In addition, it ensures that programs are being delivered fairly to the people who have funded them. Inclusion of diverse participation brings new perspectives and experiences which enrich learning and develop life skills necessary to live in a multi-cultural society.

Equine Helmet Policy

All young people who participate in any mounted horse activity within the scope of the NDSU Extension Service are required to wear a properly fitted American Society of Testing Materials/Safety Equipment Institute (ASTM-SEI) approved harness helmet. This certification will be noted by a label permanently attached to the inside shell of the helmet. Such headgear will be secured with the harness engaged and be properly fastened when mounted on a horse. Effective January 1, 1999.

The requirement that a helmet be worn while riding a horse in an Extension Service related activity is for two principle reasons:

1. Protection of our young people is of paramount importance and their safety must always come as first priority in Extension Service programs;

2. Risk management practices that reduce the potential of injury and resulting liability to the university and the volunteers and staff responsible for the event or activity always need to be followed.

Head injuries are one of the most common causes of death or injury in horse related accidents, with young riders being the highest percentage of those hurt. The NDSU Extension Service policy supports conclusions from medical studies reported by the American Medical Equestrian Association and the Horsemanship Safety Association.

Handling and Care of Animals

Adults and youth in leadership positions with Extension youth programs may be involved in situations where animals are present and/or part of the learning environment. Extension volunteers and paid staff are expected to handle animals in a responsible manner and refrain from physical mistreatment. In addition, Extension paid staff and volunteers should teach youth appropriate animal care practices. Some specific animal care practices include:

- Providing animals with clean, fresh water and sufficient food.
- Disposing of manure and waste frequently.
- Supplying adequate shelter and bedding.
- Using approved handling procedures.

Please direct your questions to:

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Visit North Dakota State Extension Service on-line at www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension

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