



Volunteer Learning Modules: 4-H Chaperones

Overview

Chaperones play an important role in helping young people have successful experiences by building positive relationships that helps encourage their participation, answer their questions, and calm their apprehensions. This module provides information and policies critical to the success of volunteers that will be chaperoning overnight events.

Section 1: Welcome and Putting Youth First

Chaperones serve a vital role in the success of Michigan State University Extension youth events. By serving as a chaperone, you are helping to empower young people with important skills, allowing them to gain real life experiences, attend new activities, travel to new places, grow their confidence and ignite their dreams for the future. Chaperones play an important role in helping young people have successful experiences by building positive relationships that helps encourage their participation, answer their questions, and calm their apprehensions. Here are a few important examples of how to apply a youth centered approach to your chaperone role:

- Youth participants come first for safety and participation.
 - We want to do all that we can to manage risk and encourage the active participation of our young people so they can engage in positive youth development.
 - Youth should be active participants rather than recipients of programs and that means they are engaged whenever possible.
 - Be alert to health concerns and any considerations participants may need.
- While you are at the event you may have an opportunity to engage in activities, field trips, or projects, however, your role as chaperone takes precedence. This means that at times your role may require you to step away from what is happening as part of the event to assist with the youth you are chaperoning.
- Work in cooperation with event staff and other chaperones to create an environment that fosters trust, open communication, responsibility among all participants and adheres to policy and procedure.

Section 2: Communicating with Participants, Parents/Guardians

Creating open lines of communication with participants is a vital part of chaperoning. You may recall this from earlier trainings about effective youth- adult partnerships. This practice is characterized by youth and adults respecting each other, working together for a common goal, and making decisions together using the strengths of each party. Some important tips to remember:

- Give youth time to talk—don't always jump in with the first comment or decision.
- Spend time building relationships through team building activities.

To contact an expert in your area, visit extension.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)

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- Give youth permission to use first names.
- Create an environment of mutual respect.
- Use active listening skills through engaging eye contact and open body language.
- Provide opportunities for youth to make their own choices.

As a chaperone you will need to communicate with MSU Extension Professionals. This can be seen as a two-pronged approach; communicating with the specific event staff and your local contact. It is important to ensure event staff are made aware of things that happen at the event as soon as possible. Then your local contact will also need to be made aware so they can handle anything that will need to be addressed at the local level. You should be sharing any areas of concern but also the good and exciting moments that took place, as well. Both help to ensure a successful program at the time and in the future.

Section 3: Behavior Expectations

MSU Extension volunteers are expected to abide by the MSU Extension Volunteer Code of Conduct, which is signed in Volunteer Central but can also be viewed. Expectations of event chaperones are also outlined in the role description for your specific event. If you are not familiar with your role description, please contact your event coordinator to get a copy. Here are a few important expectations of chaperones:

- Be at least 21 years old and a MSU Extension Gold Level Volunteer
- Successfully complete all training prior to the event.
- Be familiar with and work within the philosophy and guidelines of the MSU Extension program you are chaperoning.
- Remain on site for the duration of the event unless the responsibilities of your role at the event take you off site.
- Provide direction, encouragement, and support to participants during the event.
- Communicate with MSU Extension event staff on any questions or concerns as soon as possible.
- Follow all event safety protocols as outlined in training and orientation specific for the event.
- Become familiar with any additional policies and practices related to the specific event and/or venue. This may include accommodation requests, field trip protocol, roommate requests, or procedures related to venue use. Communicate any concerns about these policies and practices with MSU Extension staff.
- Make reasonable efforts to avoid one-on-one contact between adults and minors participating in the event.
- Be willing to supervise an activity, manage a task, or help with a project as asked from event staff or local MSU Extension Professionals. This helps ensure that youth are having a meaningful experience and is crucial for the success of the event.

Resources:

- MSU Extension Volunteer Code of Conduct: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/volunteer-code-of-conduct>

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Section 4: Behavior Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Events

Michigan State University (MSU), MSU Extension and Michigan 4-H are inclusive and welcoming of all forms of diversity. MSU Extension has a shared value of “welcoming all, fostering inclusivity across our organization, in our programming, through our community partnerships and in our hearts. We aim to nurture an environment that respects and values human differences as we continuously work to expand our reach to diverse audiences.”

Ideas to infuse diversity, equity, and inclusion into your role as a chaperone

- Look for ways to recognize and value differences and diversity with the group you are chaperoning. Think about asking open-ended questions that can allow everyone to see what participants might have in common, respectful discussion about differences, and allow for time and space to learn from each other.
- During discussion on diversity, equity, and inclusion, a particular person or group should not be the focus. It is important to protect the privacy of the individual(s). Instead, look for ways to have a positive and informational discussion focused on building a sense of belonging and comfort for all participants to be themselves at our programs.
- Create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their pronouns and names, and commit to using those terms. It is important to use the name a youth provides, which may be different than their legal name. You can do this by modeling the behavior for participants. Introduce yourself with your chosen name and pronouns and encourage others to do the same.
- Treat all participants in the same manner.
 - If the event venue provides shared spaces for showers and changing clothes, then everyone must be permitted to use them according to their gender identity. It is best practice to offer all participants the option of privacy at all 4-H events and camps. Additionally, adult chaperones should remain within hearing distances of participants during showering and changing times to prevent potential bullying. At no time should an adult visually supervise participants during showering and changing times.
 - All participants, including youth and adults at 4-H programs, should dress appropriate for the itinerary. This includes wearing appropriate clothing and footwear required for the activities that are being offered. Be careful to prevent selective enforcement of these dress guidelines, as targeting individuals of certain sexes, gender identities, gender expressions, or sexual orientations could be seen as biased or discriminatory.
 - Volunteers should be cognizant of participant's religious beliefs or practices. If or when a youth or their family asks for an accommodation to be made at an event because of a religious belief, the accommodation should be made unless it imposes an undue hardship.
- As a chaperone you may have access to information about youth that must be kept private or confidential because it's not your information to share with others. An example would be if you are aware of a youth's personally identifiable information such as their gender identity (gender expression), sex assigned at birth, or sexual orientation. Other examples of confidential information a chaperone may have access to is a youth or family's religious beliefs, socio-economic status, or medical diagnosis/history. This information is only used and shared when absolutely necessary.
- Be sure to use creative ways to split youth into groups. Avoid grouping youth by assumed characteristics or observational traits such as gender, race, religion, or national heritage.



For additional information, visit extension.msu.edu

Resources

- MSU Extension Shared Values: https://www.canr.msu.edu/od/directors_office/
- To report incidents of bias that you experienced, witnessed, or were informed of, contact the MSU Office for Civil Rights and Title IX Education and Compliance by phone at 517-353-3922 or by [Completing the Public Incident Reporting Form](#)

Section 5: Encouraging Youth Participation at Events

4-H volunteers who choose to take on a role as a chaperone hold a large responsibility for ensuring that positive youth development concepts are followed during 4-H events and activities. One of the best ways for chaperones to follow positive youth development concepts is by encouraging youth participation. We can't force youth to participate, but there are several ways to encourage their participation., drugs, or sexual materials to a minor; and violations of the MSU antidiscrimination policy).

What you can do to encourage participation	Extended description
Be engaged	Modeling good behavior is essential to being a chaperone. Be sure to stay off your phone, be alert, and ask questions. Be sure to attend sessions, free-time activities, and full-group sessions because youth want to see that you're engaged too. Your presence, engagement, and attitude will be noticed by the youth.
Be involved	Remember that as a chaperone, the goal is for youth to participate in their own development and it's likely that the experience is geared toward youth, not adults. You can be appropriately involved in activities by making yourself available to help the youth when needed.
Monitor involvement	As a chaperone it's important to monitor all youth that you are chaperoning for involvement. Some youth may be extroverted and seen as social, out-going, vocal or sociable. Other youth may be introverted and need alone time to recharge, be seen as quiet, shy or reserved. Some youth are a mix of both! It's important to monitor youth's involvement to ensure they are engaged, learning, and fully participating regardless of their personality type and work to meet their specific needs. Be present to engage with youth.
Ask questions	Associated with each step of the Experiential Learning Model are questions that adults can ask youth to help them recognize the educational value they are gaining during their 4-H experience.
Be knowledgeable	It may seem simple, but a great way to encourage participation is by being knowledgeable about the event or activity you're chaperoning. By knowing or having access to the event's schedule, youth are less likely to try to skip going to activities.

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Create a welcoming environment

For youth to fully participate in an experience, they need to feel welcome. That means recognizing and appreciating differences, using respectful language, and acknowledging when feelings or emotions fluctuate.

Resources:

- 4-H and Positive Youth Development: <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/4-h-positive-youth-development>
- Defining the 4-H Positive Youth Development Experience <https://4-h.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ECOP-Defining-4-H-PYD-Final-Draft-2-17.pdf>