

Volunteer Handout for 4-H Club Overnight Activities



The Michigan 4-H Youth Development Youth-Adult Overnight Housing Policy

Each of us involved with Michigan State University Extension 4-H Youth Development has a responsibility to do all we can to ensure that the young people in our programs have positive, healthy and safe experiences. In fact, one of our 4-H Guiding Principles is that we will provide programs in which youth are physically and emotionally safe.

To help ensure the safety and well-being of both youth and adults involved with Michigan 4-H, the “Youth-Adult Housing Policy for 4-H Overnight Events” was implemented on January 1, 2008. This mandatory policy applies to any Michigan 4-H–sponsored state-, regional-, multicounty-, county- or club-level overnight event where adults are housed with or share bathrooms with unrelated youth (such as workshops, events, fairs, exchanges, overnight trips, lock-ins and camps). For purposes of this policy, a “Michigan 4-H–sponsored event” is defined as any event that has an affiliation with 4-H through the use of the name or emblem, and that involves a representative of 4-H (either a 4-H staff member or a 4-H volunteer).

The core of the policy relates to housing youth with unrelated adults: *Youth can be housed with unrelated adult chaperones of the same gender aged 21 and over at overnight 4-H events as long as the youth-adult ratio is **at least two youth to one adult** and the adults have been through the MSU Extension Child Well-Being Volunteer Selection Process.*

Many 4-H clubs across Michigan enjoy the experience of having their adult volunteers and youth participants take overnight trips as a group. Whether it’s an overnight trip to another town to go to a museum or theme park, or an overnight camping trip, or some other kind of overnight event, those participating enjoy these opportunities to learn, socialize and have fun away from home.

As part of this experience, the 4-H volunteers involved are charged to exercise their best judgment to ensure the safety of the young people involved. This includes carrying out overnight trips in accordance with the Michigan 4-H Youth Development Youth-Adult Housing Policy for Overnight Events. As the 4-H volunteer responsible for a club planning an overnight event, you have two major responsibilities related to the policy: communicating with your local 4-H staff and with the parents and guardians of the youth involved, and determining the lodging arrangements for the trip.

Communicating With Staff, Parents and Guardians

In order for youth to take part in any overnight trip or event that is considered a 4-H–sponsored event and where youth will be housed with or sharing bathrooms with unrelated adult chaperones, a

“4-H Overnight Housing Parent/Guardian Permission Form” must be completed. Here are the steps for getting this done:

1. Alert your local 4-H staff member about your club’s plans for the overnight trip.
2. Obtain a copy of the “4-H Overnight Housing Parent/Guardian Permission Form” from your 4-H staff member. Add the pertinent trip information to both portions of the form: event name (for example, “Happy Clovers 4-H Club Trip”), event date and destination, and the name and cell phone number of 4-H volunteer in charge of the event in case a parent or guardian needs to make contact. Indicate at the top of the form the return date needed and the person to whom it should be sent.
3. Make enough copies of the form so that each youth has a copy to take home.
4. Make sure you collect signed forms for each youth – keep in mind that a young person cannot go on the trip without signed parent or guardian permission.
5. Before your group goes on the trip, give the signed forms to your local 4-H staff member. The forms will be kept on file at the county MSU Extension office.



MSU is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status or family status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Thomas G. Coon, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned. The name “4-H” and the emblem consisting of a four-leaf clover with stem and the “H” on each leaflet are protected under Title 18 U.S.C. 707.
10/09

Keep the following in mind as you carry out this process:

- At the bottom of the “4-H Overnight Housing Parent/Guardian Permission Form,” you’ll see the Michigan 4-H Code of Conduct for 4-H Activities. Be sure to review this code with the youth and adults in your group before going on the overnight trip so that everyone understands the conduct expectations.
- If you encounter parents or guardians who don’t complete the form, work with your county 4-H staff member to determine how follow-up should be made with these folks. If a family is not willing to complete the form, the child will not be able to participate in the event.

And don’t forget... in addition to the “4-H Overnight Housing Parent/Guardian Permission Form,” you need to make sure you have medical authorization forms/health forms for each child. These should accompany the group on the trip and can be returned to the individual upon return from the trip. If a county 4-H office requires these forms to be completed at enrollment or reenrollment time, the county 4-H office can provide you with copies when your group travels.

Making Overnight Lodging Arrangements

As the overnight housing policy states, youth can be housed with unrelated adult chaperones as long as the youth-adult ratio is at least two youth to one adult and as long as the adults have been through the MSU Extension Volunteer Selection Process. The policy further states that adults should be housed with youth whenever possible – in accordance with the policy. When this is not possible, adults must be housed within hearing distance of any lodging rooms housing only youth.

Keep the following in mind as you make arrangements:

- Youth-adult ratios: More than two youth can be housed with an unrelated adult, and it’s important to use your best judgment to keep young people safe and not put adults in unreasonable situations. Consider the needs and maturity level of your group when making these arrangements.

- Housing youth with related adults: Youth can be housed one-to-one with related adults (19 and over) who are their parents, legal guardians or other family members (such as step-parents, domestic partners, grandparents, aunts, uncles and adult siblings).
- Sharing beds: Youth who attend state-level 4-H events do not share beds and, where possible, youth attending overnight club-level events should not be assigned to share a bed. Exceptions might include when youth of the same gender have a prior relationship and choose to share beds. The comfort and safety of the youth involved should be the primary consideration. Keep in mind that an unrelated youth and adult must never share a bed.
- Sleeping outdoors: If your club is planning to camp during their overnight experience, you might end up with youth and adults sleeping in a variety of tents or shelters. Keep in mind that the adults must be available at all times and within hearing distance of youth. If there are adults participating who have not been through the MSU Extension Volunteer Selection Process, you need to make arrangements for their tents or shelters to be in an area away from the youth.

Need more information?

Additional information related to the policy and to specific kinds of situations that might apply to your group can be found at: web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/downloads/housingpolicy/ For example, you can find out how the policy would apply to a child who has special health care needs or what to do in overnight housing situations involving unrelated older and younger youth. You can also contact your local MSU Extension 4-H staff for more information.

