

Addressing Challenges & Concerns in the 4-H Youth Development Program

Effective involvement of volunteers in planning, implementation and evaluation of programs is essential to the overall success of the Ohio 4-H Youth Development program. Engaging volunteers is the primary method for multiplying Extension efforts and is highly beneficial to the growth of the program in both quantity and quality. Extension's goal is to maintain a strong 4-H program by building and maintaining strong relationships between volunteers, parents, guardians, youth, paid staff, and the community in general.

County Extension Educators have the overall responsibility for the 4-H Youth Development program in counties across Ohio. More specifically, 4-H Educators:

- Work with volunteers and the general community to develop and implement educational programs that meet the needs and interest of youth;
- Facilitate volunteer development through a variety of methods to plan, implement and evaluate educational programs;
- Seek input from a wide range of stakeholders, through advisory committees to meet the needs of local youth;
- Provide administrative leadership to all volunteers, including the identification, selection, orientation, training, utilization, recognition and evaluation; and
- Provide safe environments for youth to participate through the implementation of statewide and county policies and procedures.

It is important to recognize that the 4-H Educator, in the specific county, has overall responsibility for the program that includes final authority in decisions regarding the 4-H program. It is expected that 4-H Educators engage advisory committee members when new policies are developed and implemented; major programmatic changes are made on the local level; or when there are significant decisions to be made that affect a large portion of the program. From time to time, challenges and concerns are brought forth by 4-H volunteers, parents, participants, or other stakeholders.

Suggested Procedures for Addressing Challenges & Concerns

The following sequence will be followed when addressing issues involving the county 4-H Youth Development program. This procedure is in line with the 4-H philosophy which is: "to the extent possible, problems and concerns should be resolved at the level of the problem."

1. Volunteer, parent, guardian, or community member shares their concern/problem/challenge directly with the County 4-H Youth Development Educator;
2. County 4-H Educator will collect facts concerning the situation from all parties involved. This step may include meeting with other parties, asking individual bringing the issue forward to provide additional information, or reviewing historical documents (i.e. meeting minutes, bank records; etc.);
3. The County 4-H Educator may consult their County Extension Director, Regional Extension Director or the State 4-H Leader (or their designee) as they collect and analyze all information pertaining to the issue;

4. If there are policy or procedure violations, the County 4-H Educator will follow-up with those involved to take corrective action. Follow-up will generally be in the form of verbal and written communication;
5. If corrective action involves a volunteer, the County 4-H Educator will determine the most appropriate disciplinary action to take (counsel, educate, place on probation, suspend, or terminate); and
6. If the issue does not involve volunteers, rather 4-H members, the County Educator will work directly with parents/guardians to seek resolution of the issue. The County 4-H Educator will follow-up verbally and in writing in these situations.

It is very important to remember the following once you have brought an issue or concern to the attention of the County 4-H Educator:

1. When necessary and appropriate, the County 4-H Educator will work with the State 4-H Office;
2. If volunteers, parents, guardians, members, or other stakeholders contact the State 4-H Office first, they will be referred to the County Extension Office or Regional Director (depending who all is involved); and
3. Only in limited circumstances will the organization inform you of the outcome of situations. The organization is obligated to address issues and concerns that warrant action, but are not obligated to inform you of action taken, especially when it involves paid staff or volunteers.

Written by Ryan Schmiesing, OSU Extension, Associate State 4-H Leader.