Guidelines for Electronic Communication and Virtual 4-H Activities

These guidelines outline what are appropriate electronic communications and virtual activities, so that youth, parents/guardians, leaders, and staff can stay engaged in a safe, fun, and inclusive environment.

This list has been adapted from **Youth Safety at 4-H in Canada** policies and the **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** guidelines for establishing boundaries for online schooling.

The **4-H in Canada Code of Conduct** always applies and concerns about communications or activities that fall outside of these guidelines should be reported immediately to your provincial organization.

Communicating with youth and parents/guardians

- Use communications platforms authorized by your provincial organization or platforms set-up for your club, as opposed to personal accounts. This demonstrates the legitimacy of the activities and provides protection from outside users.
- Keep communication transparent by including parents/guardians and other leaders in all correspondence and replies.
- Do not communicate with youth via private messaging or individual texts. Instead communicate via emails, social media groups, or group chats with all leaders and members included.
- Maintain professionalism by communicating during appropriate times of the day.
- Remind parents/guardians and youth that leaders will not request passwords, financial, or personal information in your communications. Immediately report any such requests (also known as phishing).
- Consider trying to deliver communications in a patterned or scheduled way (i.e., weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.) whenever possible. This way, members and their parents/guardians have a good understanding of when information is expected.

Using social media

- Create club pages or 4-H addresses to communicate (i.e., not personal Twitter, Facebook, or email addresses). These accounts should be indicated communicated to the provincial 4-H organization as the official club channels.
- Messages to youth and families should always come from these accounts and be youth-appropriate and inclusive of members and families.
- The club should agree on a process for reviewing content prior to it being posted.
- Enable privacy settings on group social media accounts to ensure discussions and planning details are kept private.
- Some platforms, like Facebook, have age restrictions for creating an account. Review the platform policies before inviting youth to the group.
- While a blanket media release may be part of the annual registration package, guardians and youth should have an opportunity to review any posts that include an image, identifying information, or a quote.

- Only use the first name, first initial of last name, and the province or club (i.e., Jennifer D., ON) on social media, in virtual events, or publications. Do no tag youth social media accounts.
- Be conscious of your leadership role in 4-H when interacting on social media. You may want to enable your privacy settings to prevent youth from viewing your account.

Leading clubs in a virtual environment

- Verify with your provincial organization that the virtual club or activity you are leading is approved.
- Your provincial organization may have software licenses to share and should be consulted to ensure technology platforms are appropriate to be used in 4-H programs with youth. Local school boards can be a good resource for appropriate software to use.
- When selecting a technology platform (i.e., online auction, virtual judging, video or slide sharing) it is important to research the following aspects of digital privacy, and to provide information to participants and families so they can make an informed decision before participating.
  - Does the platform have secure passcodes for only invited participants? Review to ensure only invited and verified participants can interact with youth or have access to photos, videos, or information posted.
  - Does the platform have a privacy policy? Review to ensure they are not selling personal information and that data is stored securely, ideally on Canadian servers.
  - Can you control the data retention? Once the event or program is over, will 4-H be able to delete the data? Consider the digital footprint you are leaving.
  - Does the platform have ad tracking? User information and data may be sold to Facebook or Google.
- Promote a safe, inclusive, and fun environment by discussing expectations with youth about how the Code of Conduct applies. For example, appropriate attire must be worn, words and actions must be respectful and kind, and all participants should be in common/high traffic household areas (bedrooms and bathrooms are off-limits).
- Use a technology platform that allows for a secure passcode to ensure only invited participants can attend.
- To ensure appropriate supervision and you are achieving the Rule of Two:
  - Have two leaders in the virtual meeting.
  - One-on-one coaching or mentoring is not allowed.
  - Ensure the leader starts the meeting exactly on time and ends promptly for all. This will mitigate the potential for leaders being alone with youth for a long period waiting for the meeting to start or end.
  - Ask members to participate from their kitchen table or a central part of their home.
  - When using virtual breakout rooms it is appropriate to have a single trained leader in each breakout room and another floating trained leader that can drop-in to any of the breakout rooms.
- Before sharing a video stream of your private space on a virtual meeting, ensure your backdrop is professional and appropriate for youth.

- Consider your "classroom" and the risks youth may be taking while participating. For example, a youth cannot work alone with an animal while on a virtual call as a leader is not there to ensure safety or administer first aid. Review the risk in any of the activities you are demonstrating and communicate directly to the youth and parent/guardian that supervision is required for at-home project work. At-home work is outside the scope of 4-H insured activities.

Tips for Using Virtual Meeting Platforms (ex: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, etc)

- Never share meeting links or information about how to access meetings publicly (i.e., on social media). You should always deliver this information in a safe way, such as by email.
- Most virtual meeting platforms have a waiting room or lobby function. Ensure you know who you are admitting as strangers may try to enter your virtual meeting.
    - Ask participants to sign in to every meeting using their name or an identifier you've agreed on.
    - Do not assume an unknown name is someone you likely know. Do not admit them into the meeting.
- To help youth stay engaged and to promote participation it can be helpful to encourage attendees to keep their cameras on.
    - Provide a "virtual background" to promote a sense of privacy to those who do not want their family members or private spaces to be seen on camera. Virtual background images are very easy to find on the internet or your club could design its own.
- Ensure you have consent before recording virtual sessions and ensure all participants understand how the recording could be shared. Record only the video of the presenter, not youth members.
- Many virtual platforms give the host the ability to limit who participants are able to communicate with using the chat function. For example, participants may only chat with the host or may chat privately with one another.
    - Turn off the private participant chat function if you are worried that there is a risk of situations like bullying occurring.
- Identify the roles at the beginning of the meeting and update your name to include "staff", "leader", or "tech" to make it easy for participants to message you using the chat function.
- Remind participants not to share personal details or the details of others (i.e. email address, social media handles, etc.) in the chat
- Be sure to save the chat log at the end of the meeting to capture any important notes or decisions.

Resources for leaders and parents/guardians

Safety Considerations for Child-Serving Organizations Offering Virtual Programming: protectchildren.ca/pdfs/Edu_SafetyConsiderations_OnlineProgramming_ChildServingOrgs_en.pdf

Learn more about keeping youth safe online: protectkidsonline.ca

If you have any concerns about a child online, report to Cybertip.ca

Immediate mental health support for youth: kidshelpphone.ca

Mental health resources for youth and leaders: 4-h-canada.ca/healthyliving/mentalhealth