Best Practices for Virtual Youth Programming

The guidance below is intended to support 4-H Alberta clubs, regions, districts, and provincial staff with developing and implementing virtual programming for youth participants. **Recommendations are offered as best practices and should not be construed as an official 4-H Alberta policy.**

Virtual Interactions

- Virtual interactions can allow youth programs to reach wider audiences and engage participants in creative and effective ways. However, online interactions pose new and different risks to youth which must be considered in program design and implementation. Additional considerations are, but not limited to:
  - Ensuring youth protection in a virtual setting.
  - Incorporating technology risk management controls.
  - Implementing virtual behavioural controls or a code of conduct.
  - Addressing any technical issues.
  - Ensuring consistent program or activity delivery.
  - Educating parent/guardian and program participants of online safety practices.
  - Designing programs to eliminate any 1:1 unmonitored or private interactions.

Electronic Communications

- Communicate with youth through designated or authorized organizational "group pages" or "group profiles"' on social media platforms (Google, Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom, Facebook, etc.).
- Ensure that leaders, volunteers, and 4-H staff designate their personal social media profiles to "private" so youth cannot befriend or access personal information.
- When using video conferencing apps, ensure leaders, volunteers, staff and youth are aware of their background surroundings and personal appearance or attire in order to maintain professionalism and personal privacy.
- Use electronic communication strategically to communicate with youth by keeping conversations focused on 4-H programs or projects, goal attainment, and safety tips, rather than personal details of one's life.

Set Standards for Online Contact

- Provide an agenda outlining the activities, including the times, days, and how to access content.
- Ensure that the 4-H Rule of Two is followed in all instances, including online.
- Keep conversations and interactions focused on the program or activity goals and objectives.
- Create an environment where everyone is welcomed and given the opportunity to succeed.
- Ensure that all participants are treated with dignity, fairness, and respect.
- Harassment will not be tolerated. Hazing of any kind is prohibited. Cyberbullying is prohibited.
- Address problems that are brought to the attention of the club, region, district, or 4-H staff.
- Do not share personal information, email, or social media accounts with minor participants.

Set Conduct Expectations with Youth Participants

Participants at a minimum should:

- Participate in the digital environment to the same standard as a physical environment, including participating when called on, listening attentively, and minimizing distractions to others.
- Not share links or passwords for club meetings or content.
- Challenge themselves to engage, be present and learn.
- Complete assigned projects on time.
- Request help if needed.
- Mute when not talking.
- Dress appropriately when on video.
- Not take inappropriate screenshots or images.

Set and Enforce Conduct Expectations with Leaders, Volunteers, & 4-H Staff

Integrate online conduct expectations into any existing Codes of Conduct.

- Limit virtual contact to purposes consistent with your club's, region's, district's, or 4-H Alberta's purpose and/or for a clear educational, developmental, or health-related

purpose, in the presence of another screened leader or volunteer, and with the consent of the youth.

- Conduct all virtual interactions in a manner that promotes safety and complies with the general contact guidance outlined in the Standards, including:
  - Observing the Rule of Two in online meetings and all other virtual communications.
  - Using only program-sponsored email, phone, video conferencing, or social media platforms.
  - Avoiding text and electronic one-on-one communication between a single staff person, leader, or volunteer and a youth. Instead, use technologies and platforms which are accessible by multiple staff members, leaders, and/or volunteers (e.g., a shared email inbox or a group chat functionality) and/or a youth's parent.
  - Not engaging in purposeful communication or contact including phone or electronic communication or social networking with youth outside of sanctioned program activities.
- Never share personally identifiable information of youth without the requisite consent in place. Be mindful of your online presence and the content shared publicly via your social media or other platforms.
- Ensure online and virtual interactions are conducted via safe, known platforms that limit risks to youth participants (Google Meet, Google Classroom, and Zoom).
- When providing general encouragement or support to youth at this challenging time, keep in mind the necessity to maintain consistent and professional boundaries to protect oneself from false allegations.
- Ensure any conversation that may be misinterpreted as inappropriate is immediately brought to a leader's or 4-H Alberta staff member's attention.
- Treat all youth equitably, including ensuring equitable access to and support for any technology needed to fully participate in 4-H activities.
- Proactively address harassment, bullying or other inappropriate conduct of youth participants.
- Do not engage in any derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating online conversations with youth.
- Do not engage with youth in sexually-oriented online conversations, memes or posts.
- Do not post inappropriate or suggestive comments on pictures/videos on youths' profiles.

Address program-specific considerations in your leader or staff training.

Topics to consider addressing include:
- What do 1:1 interactions look like in an online environment? How are they different from in-person interactions? What additional risks do they pose? What additional preparations need to be made to ensure 1:1 interactions do not happen?
- How can leaders, volunteers, and staff set and maintain appropriate boundaries online? For example, communicate your 'on' hours to participants and their families and strictly avoid 'off-hours' contact.
- The importance of using official 4-H accounts, if you have one, for program activities and communicating with participants. What might be challenging about using shared accounts and how can you overcome those challenges to ensure transparency youth safety?

Engage with leaders, volunteers, and staff around conduct code violations or general concerns.

- Have ongoing conversations with all leaders, volunteers, and 4-H staff about how the program or activity is running, and specifically address virtual interactions.
- Solicit and address any group concerns.
- Monitor methods of communication for leaders, volunteers, 4-H staff and participants to ensure safe and appropriate interactions. Immediately address any concerning behaviours or violations of 4-H's conduct code.
- Make sure leaders, volunteers, and 4-H staff are trained on security features of selected technology platforms and discuss scenarios that may arise requiring them to act (i.e. inappropriate communication, "Zoom-bombing," etc.).

Engage with Parents

Inform

- Educate parents about the technology you are using and how youth will interact with them, and encourage parents to discuss online safety with their children.
- Reiterate parents are responsible for monitoring their child's time online and that 4-H leaders, volunteers, and 4-H staff are not responsible for nor able to monitor this with distance learning.
- Consider sharing resources (such as those below) with families.
- Parents should understand that they or the member are responsible for

○ Ensuring participant is in an environment that meets the goals of the 4-H program or activity.

○ Ensuring participant logs in on time and is prepared.

○ Limiting distractions and keeping participant safe throughout the duration of the program or activity.

○ Working with 4-H leaders, volunteers, or 4-H Alberta staff to resolve issues that may arise.

○ Reporting illegal or inappropriate online behaviour by leaders, volunteers, or 4-H staff or other program participants.

Get consent
- Ensure you solicit consent for participation in online youth programming.
- Provide details about how, when and by what means youth will be interacting virtually with your program.

Enlist parental supervision

- Suggest parents/guardians be present in the room with participants during online engagement or programming. This is especially important for 4-H activities that require physical activity or the use of safety or other personal protective equipment.

Preserve Youth Privacy

- **Members' sign-in information should only display first name and last initial to protect the member's identity.**
- Restrict or limit any information relating to the location or hometown of members.
- Promote the use of virtual backgrounds to allow for more privacy for leaders, volunteers, 4-H staff, and members.
- Set defaults, so all participants are on "mute," with members un-muted individually or collectively when called upon by the leader, volunteer, or 4-H staff or when there are questions or discussion comments.

Recording Virtual Youth Programming

Recording virtual interactions can be helpful in preserving the proceedings and facilitating evaluations of participants. However, recording any online interaction requires careful consideration of the privacy of youth participants.

- Never record youth's images or interactions with youth, except if you have considered the information below and with all requisite consents in place. This includes video recordings of online interactions, screen captures, screenshots, or creating other photo or video records of youth.

Before recording, consider:

- What purpose does recording achieve? Is it necessary to achieve the program or activity goal?
- Can you accomplish that purpose through other methods? For example, if you want to make your educational content available to a broader audience or for those who can't join in real-time, can you record lecture components (presented by leaders, volunteers, guest speakers, and 4-H staff or another adult) but stop the recording when transiting to a participant-driven Q&A? Maybe you can request questions ahead of time or through a non-recorded real-time method, and posed to the speaker by staff or another adult, without the youth's identifying information being shared?

If you decide to allow recording:

- Clarify the (ideally narrow) circumstances when recording is allowed, and who is allowed to initiate recordings.
- Understand and adhere to the retention schedule for recordings. Ensure they are stored in a centralized, safe, secure place. Consider who needs to have access to recordings and for how long.
- Develop consent materials to communicate the collection and use of data recordings to parents and youth as applicable. Include the rationale for recording, how youth will be notified before recording begins, who will have access to recordings, and your retention practices. Allow youth or parents to opt-out of attending a live recording.
- Prohibit recording of any kind outside of the allowable program or activity recording guidelines.

Youth Privacy and Security (Google Meet)

Enable available security features.
Google Meet is one of 4-H Alberta's suggested technology platforms with security features to protect youth privacy and strengthen safety.

Best practices for securing a Google Meet can be found here:

For example, in Google Meet you can:
- Create a Google Meet with a unique nickname. Nicknames are the best option to limit entry to specified time and not allow participants to re-enter once meeting has ended.
- Disable or prevent participants from sharing their screen during the meeting.
- Disable chat messages during the meeting. At the bottom, click Host controls. Turn **Send chat messages** on or off.

Design program activities to eliminate private, unmonitored 1:1 interactions.

- For example, when using Google Meet, ensure there will always be two background checked and trained leaders, volunteers, or staff members in each video session.
- Plan ahead to ensure the **Rule of Two** is observed and include this requirement in your communications to parents.

Youth Privacy and Security (Zoom)

Enable available security features.
Zoom is one of 4-H Alberta's suggested technology platforms with security features to protect youth privacy and strengthen safety.

Best practices for securing a Zoom classroom can be found here:
https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/03/27/best- practices-for-securing-your-virtual-classroom/

For example, in Zoom you can:
- Require a unique password to join a meeting.
- Enable the "waiting room" feature to give meeting organizers control over who joins the meeting.
- Disable screen sharing by non-hosts.
- Lock a meeting once all known participants join.
- Disable the chat and group messaging features.

- Turn off file transfers.

Design program activities to eliminate private, unmonitored 1:1 interactions.

- For example, when using Zoom, ensure there will always be two background checked and trained staff members in each video session.
- Plan ahead to ensure the **Rule of Two** is observed and include this requirement in your communications to parents.

Other

- Require registration.
- Allow only authenticated users.
- Use a random meeting ID number.
- Require a password.
- Prevent attendees from joining before a host.
- Enable a virtual waiting room.
- Restrict chat capabilities.
- Lock the session once all participants join.
- Control or disable screen sharing capabilities by non-hosts.
- Disable file sharing features.
- Mute program participants.
- Use attendee on-hold option as an alternative to removing a user.
- Do not post links to sessions on public websites.
- Do not post pictures of virtual program or activity online.

Resources

Resources & Research: Online Safety – protectchildren.ca

ProtectKidsOnline.ca

Online Safety 101: How to Keep Your Kids Safe Online

Canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada

Common sense education- Resources for educators

Connect Safely

ConnectSafely.org

Staying Safe on Social Media

Electronic Communication with Youth in Challenging Times

Contacts: