



Best Practices When Connecting with Youth Outside of Face-to-Face Experiences

General Practices

As a volunteer and caring adult, there are opportunities that may arise to connect with youth participants outside of a face-to-face experience. Carrying out club and project business may rely on these opportunities. Below are some general best practices to guide you when connecting with youth outside of face-to-face experiences.

- The Iowa 4-H Volunteer Code of Conduct applies to virtual and online settings.
- When possible, communicate with groups rather than individual participants. Include a second adult in all messages. Use group texts, messages or other communication methods.
- Avoid communicating privately with youth. If you must message a youth individually, include parents/guardians in the communication. Carefully review messaging to ensure intent cannot be misinterpreted.
- Do not use social media or other communication tools, such as Snapchat, that purposely do not maintain a record of communication.

Communication Tools/Social Media

Setting up a consistent and reliable communication method is important in any group. There are many ways to do this in our ever evolving world of technology. Instant communication tools are a great way to develop connections and enhance communication. There are some things to consider as you develop a plan that is best for you and your youth participants.

- Establish expectations with youth to communicate using group texts or group direct messaging on social media.
- Communication options could include group email, Facebook group chat, and/or a text message group that all youth participants can use.
- Create a communication plan that includes all participants and considers what access the youth may have to communication methods.

When using communication apps (such as Remind, GroupMe), get parent/guardian permission to communicate with youth in that format.

- Provide information regarding the communication method and a link to where additional information can be found.
- Make sure the communication method is a closed group that requires approval to join.
- Ensure two adults are included on the communication stream.
- Share details on how people can be added or deleted to the app.



Communication Tools/Social Media (continued)

Connecting with youth on social media is a personal decision. Some things to consider when making that decision: what will youth see on my social media account, what will I see on their account, what is the intent or purpose of connecting? Other things to consider if you do connect with youth on social media include:

- Consider letting the youth initiate the request. Do not ask to friend/follow youth.
- Explore settings in each social media platform that limit what youth can see on your profile and what you see from their posts (such as hide posts, unfollow, etc.).
- If you create a Facebook group, consider making it a closed group. Also, add a local county 4-H staff member to the group.
- If you post a photo/video to your personal page, confirm that photo/video permission has been given from all youth included and do not include any identifiable information. Do not tag people in the post and possibly restrict allowing others to tag themselves. Coach families/youth that if they would like to share the photo/video, they can download and post it themselves to their page.

Virtual Meetings

Meeting with youth participants in a virtual setting may help expand the current club or project experience when face-to-face meetings are not possible. To ensure youth safety and protect yourself as a volunteer in this online setting, there are some things you can do when setting up and conducting this experience.

- Avoid sharing virtual meeting links on public platforms like social media.
- When setting up the meeting, enable the setting that requires a password for users to enter a meeting and uncheck the box that enables others to join before the host.
- Recording meetings should be very limited. If you must record, receive permission from all parents/guardians prior to the meeting. Announce at the beginning that you will record the meeting and provide participants the opportunity to opt-out of participating. Also, consider only recording meetings where youth have their audio and video turned off.
- Avoid meeting one-on-one with a youth in a virtual setting. Just like in a face-to-face setting, include another adult in the meeting if you are providing feedback or coaching to an individual youth or do it with a group of youth at one time.