

# Pack Your Bags!

## A 4-H Chaperon Guide



**Colorado**  
**State**  
University  
Cooperative  
Extension

Congratulations on being selected as a 4-H Chaperon! You have an opportunity to make the travel, training, or camping experience of young people a positive, life-long memory. You'll be able to develop close relationships with some wonderful young people, help them develop life skills and be a role model for them.

This guide is designed to help you have a positive experience with young people by preparing you for the event. You may be going to an overnight camp, a weekend retreat, interstate exchange or state or national event with 4-H youth. You may be with eight-year-old youth on their first overnight or seasoned eighteen-year-old travelers. Whatever the age and wherever the travels, these tips and guidelines will make it easier for you to promote learning, friendship, problem solving, and leadership with the young people involved.

#### **4-H Chaperon Expectations**

Be an active participant! Joining in on the activities allows you to interact with, and set a good example for, the students. Youth look to you to set boundaries and provide leadership. Chaperons are expected to comply with the same rules and are needed to help enforce them.

Every county is responsible to designate chaperons for youth at 4-H events. This should be accomplished well in advance of any event. Chaperons are mature adults who help and guide youth participants. Chaperons are responsible for monitoring youth behavior. Chaperons assure that youth attend all event sessions, understand, uphold and follow Code of Conduct expectations, respect the rights of others, to be quiet after curfew, report any observed damages or facility problems to event managers, and serve as good role models. Chaperons are expected to attend event sessions. Chaperons volunteer to help make events the most educational and meaningful experience possible for youth.

Chaperons are responsible for the supervision, advising, and any needed disciplinary action of their delegation. Primary responsibility for youth behavior rests with the chaperons who are acting on behalf of the 4-H Youth Development Program at the level at which they are selected.

In emergency situations, take appropriate steps first (911, police, fires, etc.) and then inform the event organizers.

We recognize that counties may be sharing chaperoning responsibilities of male and female youth. Make sure your youth know to whom they are responsible.

#### **Checklist Prior to Event for Agent/Chaperon**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Confirm that transportation arrangements of participants coincide with registration. Make plans for when and where late arrivals will meet or how they will be able to contact one another by phone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Collect and keep all youth medical forms and insurance information with you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Conduct an event orientation meeting:
- \_\_\_\_\_ Acquaint participants with one another.
  - Cover objectives, schedule, procedures, financial obligations, and expectations.
  - Review dress code.
  - Review expectations, Code of Conduct and the consequences for violations.

#### **Checklist During Event**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Register delegation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Distribute room keys

- \_\_\_\_\_ Make a rooming list of names, roommates and room numbers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Check assigned lodging for damages prior to and after the event. Individuals and counties will be responsible for any damages incurred.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in orientation for all adults/coaches/chaperones/agents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Conduct county meetings and nightly curfew check. Make sure that all youth are present and accounted for.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Enforce the dress code and Code of Conduct
- \_\_\_\_\_ Check on health and well-being of youth participants. Make sure all are fully participating in activities.

During programs some children will become exhausted, get grumpy, or suffer from homesickness. Pay attention to their energy and moods and support them. Encourage them to become involved and actively participate in the planned activities. Monitor and reinforce good eating habits, observe curfew at designated times, and get sufficient sleep every night. Ensure that those with prescriptions take medications on schedule.

### **Housing Guidelines (cabin/tent/dormitory/residence hall/floor/private residence)**

Housing varies from event to event. Youth may select room-mates or be preassigned. It is the responsibility of the chaperons/agents to supervise all aspects of housing including discipline, curfew, clean-up procedures, and other guidelines established during the event.

- Youth from your county/area are your primary responsibility. In some instances chaperons or agents may be housed with other youth such as large dormitories at the state fair, camps, etc. It is appropriate and expected that chaperons and agents will supervise and discipline, as needed, any youth assigned to their cabin, floor or wing.
- Youth should not be allowed to change room assignments without approval of the chaperons and event coordinator.
- Youth should not be allowed to miss scheduled activities, break curfew, sleep late or violate any other guidelines established for the event.
- Male youth are not permitted in female youth areas, rooms, hallways, wings, and cabins nor are female youth permitted in male youth rooms/cabins, etc.
- Rooms should be checked at night. It is the responsibility of the chaperon/agent in that cabin or dorm floor to insure that participants are in appropriate rooms.
- One adult and one youth are not permitted to share a room unless that chaperon/agent is the parent/guardian of that youth.
- Rooms/tents/cabins should be restored to a condition as good as, or better than, that in which they were found with floors cleaned, trash picked up or emptied and rooms generally clean. Any damages and financial obligations should be reported and paid prior to leaving the facility.

### **Positive Approaches to Behavior**

First, model the behavior you expect. Youth are looking to you for guidance. In addition, working successfully with youth requires an understanding of their developmental needs, personal energy, patience and tolerance. A chaperon/agent who manages a group in a way that meets the needs of the individuals as well as the group will be more successful. In order to meet both sets of needs, it is necessary to establish and maintain a level of structure and discipline that is effective.

Each youth has individual characteristics as does the group. Adding to the challenge are the different personalities and leadership styles of the chaperons. Working to mesh all three characteristics is one of the greatest challenges to discipline.

### **Setting Limits for Youth**

- All youth must abide by the 4-H Code of Conduct at all times
- Curfews and their enforcement
- Dress codes for the event
- Respecting all participants and other chaperons
- No physical injury to another person
- No discrimination against others
- No lying, cheating, stealing
- No destruction of property
- No interfering with other's rights
- No alcohol, illegal drugs, or tobacco use
- If you have to question it - don't do it!

### **Strategies for Discipline**

- Stop bad behavior, separate youth from the situation
- Identify what not to do
- State the reason
- Be firm but warm

### **Develop responsibility**

- Share feelings with child - "That's too bad about the situation you're in. . ."
- Place responsibility on their shoulders - "What are you going to do about . . ."
- Give ideas about how other youth have taken responsibility - "Do you want to hear about how others have handled this kind of thing. . ."
- Share good ideas that will help them solve the problem, conflict, etc.

### **Contact parents, supervisory adults or law enforcement when appropriate**

- Give advance warning to youth
- Call

### **Keep in mind:**

- Clearly communicate expectations
- Consistently use corrective responses for similar misbehavior
- Have courage to follow through

### **Handling Sensitive Issues**

Handling sensitive issues means being prepared for the ups and downs of youth work. It is often little hills that become mountains because issues were not handled with utmost care and compassion immediately.

### **Policy**

All events and organizations have written and unwritten guidelines. Prior to any activity or event, all chaperons/agents should understand them. It is imperative to understand what is expected of the youth and adults in attendance.

In addition to general discipline procedures, a clear understanding of reporting incidents and accidents should be discussed prior to the event. This may include completing any reports and notifying any paid staff as well as other parties.

## **Managing Behavior**

Beyond laying the ground work for expectations for behavior, the only behavior a chaperon/agent can control is his/her own. Your reaction to a situation may help or hinder the progress toward resolution.

Keep in mind:

- Being aggressive puts others on the defensive.
- The anger of others is more about themselves and their behavior than about you.

## **Developing Communication Skills**

One key to managing your own behavior in a crisis situation is developing effective communication skills. These skills enhance your abilities in dealing with people as well as easing tensions of a stressful situation. Perhaps the strongest skill needed for a crisis is the ability to listen openly and whole heartedly.

Effective communication skills include:

- Paraphrase what has been said to be sure that the facts are being presented.
- Consider different interpretations of words and ask for clarification.
- Give feedback based on facts and specifics.
- Listen to everyone involved.

## **Delegate Huddles/Meetings**

Reflection and journaling are part of the learn-by-doing process which reinforce the learning taking place during the event. Take time each day to talk to your delegation about the experiences of the day. Make sure that everyone is able to respond to the same question. Journal writing provides an opportunity to capture the events of the day for young people to look back on. This reflective, quiet time after dances, touring, recreation, etc. helps to settle the group down and make the transition to lights out. You'll also learn a great deal about the experience of each delegate and head off problems when they are small.

Sample questions to pose or adapt as necessary:

- What was your favorite activity today? Why? How was it different than other experiences you've had?
- What was the least favorite part of your day? Why do you suppose it was included in the program?
- What workshop have you chosen for tomorrow? What are your expectations? Why did you select it?
- What are you looking forward to the most in tomorrow's schedule? Why?
- Describe an activity you participated in today. How will it be valuable to you when we return home? How will you share what you learned with others?
- How have you changed as a result of this event? How would you communicate that to the organizations that helped to fund your trip?
- Who has anything else they'd like to share about our experience so far?

These meetings are also great times to review the next day's:

- schedule
- dress code
- expectations
- challenges
- etc.