

# Keeping Kids Safe!



## The Michigan 4-H Youth Development Youth-Adult Overnight Housing Policy

**The 4-H Youth-Adult Overnight Housing Policy aligns with our second 4-H Guiding Principle that states that we will provide programs in which youth are physically and emotionally safe.**

It is the responsibility of those involved with Michigan State University Extension 4-H Youth Development to do all we can to ensure that the young people in our programs are treated with respect and dignity, and are provided with safe, caring environments in which to learn and have fun. All 4-H staff and volunteers who work closely with young people have the potential to profoundly affect the well-being of children.

To help ensure the safety and well-being of both youth and adults involved with Michigan 4-H, the “Youth-Adult Housing Policy for 4-H Overnight Events” was developed. This mandatory policy, which goes into effect on January 1, 2008, applies to any Michigan 4-H–sponsored state-, regional-, multicounty-, county- or club-level overnight event where adults are housed with or share bathrooms with unrelated youth, such as workshops, events, fairs, exchanges, overnight trips, lock-ins and camps. For purposes of this policy, a “Michigan 4-H–sponsored event” is defined as any event that has an affiliation with 4-H through the use of the name or emblem, and that involves a representative of 4-H (either a 4-H staff member or a 4-H volunteer who has been through the MSU Extension Child Well-Being Volunteer Selection Process).

The core of this policy relates to housing youth with unrelated adults:

*Youth can be housed with unrelated adult chaperones aged 21 and over at overnight 4-H events as long as the youth-adult ratio is **at least two youth to one adult** and the adults have been through the MSU Extension Child Well-Being Volunteer Selection Process.*

Before a child goes on any overnight 4-H activity, the policy requires that his or her parent or guardian must sign a “4-H Overnight Housing Parent/Guardian Permission Form.” This form is designed to inform parents or guardians that their child may be sharing lodging with an unrelated adult (who has been through the Volunteer Selection Process) – and always with at least one other youth. If a parent or guardian does not sign and submit this form, their child will not be able to take part in the activity.

The policy also addresses other aspects of overnight housing for 4-H activities. For example, it addresses **youth lodging with a related adult** – in this situation, one-on-one lodging is acceptable. It addresses **special needs situations** where, for example, a youth might have special health needs requiring one-on-one lodging with an unrelated health aide. It also addresses **housing older youth with younger youth** and stresses housing youth of similar age together whenever possible. This is to help protect younger youth from situations where younger youth might be involved with inappropriate conversations, for example, or where activities such as bullying might occur.

More information on the policy is available at your county MSU Extension office or at <http://web1.msu.edu/msu.edu/4b/downloads/housingpolicy/index.html>.

### What You Should Know About Child Sexual Abuse

One researcher has written that “Child sexual abuse should be seen as a virus that flourishes in secrecy and isolation. The best treatment for inoculating communities and protecting children is open communication.”<sup>1</sup> It can benefit all of us to enhance our knowledge about child sexual abuse. Following are several points to consider:

- **Child abuse and neglect** refers to harm or threatened harm to people under age 18.
- **Child sexual abuse** includes having sexual contact with a child, using a child for prostitution, taking sexual pictures of a child, and not stopping others from sexually abuse a child.
- During 2006 in Michigan, there were 16,401 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect involving 27,148 victims. “Substantiated” means there is proof that a child has been abused or neglected and that there is high risk of future harm. Of these substantiated cases, 1,227 kids were victims of sexual abuse.

**MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION**

MSU is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status or family status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Thomas G. Coon, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned. The name “4-H” and the emblem consisting of a four-leaf clover with stem and the “H” on each leaflet are protected under Title 18 U.S.C. 707.

9/06

<sup>1</sup> From *The Socially Skilled Child Molester*, by C. van Dam. Published in 2006 by The Haworth Press, New York.

- When sexual abuse has occurred, a young person can develop a variety of distressing feelings, thoughts and behaviors.
- Some people doing research on child sexual abuse think that incidences of child sexual abuse perpetrated by people outside of the family are significantly under-reported.
- In one study, 20 percent of these “outside the family” perpetrators said they accessed children via an organized activity such as a youth group.
- **Teach children the difference between touch that is okay and touch that is not okay.** Talk about touch that feels good (such as hugs or comforting), touch that feels bad (such as hitting or pinching), and touch that makes children feel “funny” or uncomfortable or scared.
- **Teach children that it is not okay to try to touch or control someone else’s body.**
- **Teach children concrete rules such as “talk with me if anyone – family, friends or anyone else – touches your private parts.”** Make it clear that you will believe a child if he or she ever needs to share this kind of information.

---

## Reporting Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

Because of the nature of their jobs and the licensure they maintain for those jobs, some people are required by Michigan law to report suspected child abuse or neglect. If a child tells you about abuse or if you suspect abuse has occurred, contact your county 4-H staff and your local Child Protective Services staff. A person making a report in good faith will be supported, as their actions are to protect the welfare of the children in our care. The identity of a reporting person is confidential, subject to disclosure only with the consent of that person or by judicial process.

---

## Teaching Children About Personal Safety

Following are points that parents and guardians can keep in mind to better protect children from child sexual abuse:

- **Start early and talk often.** Use everyday opportunities to talk about sexual abuse. Don’t stop talking about this issue just because your child grows out of young childhood – continue looking for teachable moments.
- **Teach children the proper names of body parts.** This knowledge gives children the correct language for understanding their bodies, for asking questions that need to be asked, and for telling about sexual abuse.
- **Make it clear to kids that their bodies belong to them and no one has the right to touch them without permission.** They have the right to say “no” if someone touches them in any way that makes them feel uncomfortable, afraid or confused. They also have the right to say “no” if the person touching is a relative or trusted adult. Teach children that respect does not mean blind obedience to adults and to authority.
- **Teach kids not to give out their e-mail addresses, home addresses, or phone numbers while using the Internet.**
- **Be proactive.** If a young person seems uncomfortable with or resistant to being with a particular adult, ask why.

---

**When youth organizations talk openly about child sexual abuse and prevention efforts, they are putting potential abusers on notice that they are paying attention to this issue.**

---

### For More Information, Contact:

Michigan 4-H Youth Development  
Michigan State University Extension  
160 Agriculture Hall  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1039

Phone: (517) 432-7575

E-mail: [msue4h@msu.edu](mailto:msue4h@msu.edu)

Web: <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/>

