# UConn 4-H Chaperone Guidelines

There are many exciting opportunities for volunteers to serve as chaperones at 4-H events and activities. These range from local field trips with club members to state and national 4-H conferences involving hundreds of teens 4-H’ers. While all of these events are fun and educational, chaperones for events do have specific responsibilities. Please review the following Policy for 4-H Chaperones with parents, guardians, or other volunteers who may assist as chaperones for field trips, exchanges, etc.

As a chaperone at a 4-H event, you are representing 4-H. The responsibility that the University of Connecticut 4-H Program has for supervision of the member is delegated to you. Through this delegation, you are assigned temporary custodial responsibility. Any parent/guardian who attends an official 4-H event, paying their own way, must follow the guidelines for chaperones and may be called upon to perform chaperone duties.

## Selection

Age requirements for chaperones vary slightly depending on the activity, conference, or event.

* For national 4-H award trips and competitive events, chaperones must be **25 years of age or older** by the date of the event or be employed as a UConn Extension faculty/staff member. Family members should not be chaperones for youth attending these events. However, this will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis as parents/guardians often serve as coaches for national 4-H competitive events.
* For New England 4-H Programs at the Big E, chaperones may be **21 years of age or older by the date of the event** provided there is another chaperone from the state delegation who is 25 years of age or older.
* UConn 4-H robotics teams participate in regional and national competitions. Custodial chaperones must be **21 years of age or older by the date of the competition**. Chaperones under the age of 21 will serve in a non-custodial capacity.
* Overnight chaperones supervising at county 4-H fairs must be 21 years of age or older by the date of the event provided there is another chaperone over the age who is 25 years of age or older. Chaperones under the age of 21 will serve in a non-custodial capacity.
* Other 4-H entities such as 4-H Camps & 4-H Education Center at Auerfarm will adhere to their organization policies and the associated State of CT Camp Licensing Guidelines.

An appropriate chaperone/youth ratio or, in most instances, at least 1 adult to 8 youth must be maintained. Chaperones should be selected who will maximize the educational value of events for youth and who will exercise mature judgment and action to assure the health and safety of participants.

## Chaperones should:

* Be recognized as mature adults and elicit positive response and respect from youth.
* Be willing to assume and exercise the chaperone's responsibility.
* Enjoy working with youth.
* Believe youth should have a chance to develop self-discipline but be firm with the necessary rules.
* Be able to maintain a relationship with youth that encourages fun but demands respect, being one with the group instead of one of the groups.
* Have the stability to let youth question established ways of thinking and doing without compromising responsibility.
* If driving is involved, be a good driver and obey all traffic rules, regulations, and laws. Be sure all occupants of the vehicle are wearing seat belts.
* Have knowledge of the type of activities in which the youth will be involved, the purpose of the event, and its present and potential relationships to community and county 4-H activities.
* Understand and believe that the purpose of 4-H is to develop “blue ribbon youth.” This may or may not mean first place or a championship in a particular event. Dealing with last place in a mature manner may do more to develop “blue ribbon youth” than winning first place.

## Authority

Chaperones should be delegated full authority to make decisions about the job they are asked to perform with priority consideration given to the educational purposes of the experience and the health and safety of individuals and the group. This authority might include:

* Discipline
* Making recommendations for withdrawal of premiums or prizes
* Calling Extension professionals and parents/guardians and sending youth home
* Making decisions about the appropriate time to leave events (e.g. in the event of bad weather, driving conditions, etc.)

For the well-being of the entire group of participants at an event, chaperones must exercise responsibility for all youth (whether from their own group or not) in carrying out the stated rules of the event. Except when a chaperone has specifically been appointed to exercise broader responsibility, this responsibility for youth from other delegations should be limited to expression of concern about behavior and the communication of problems to appropriate chaperones. Chaperones should maintain morally responsible behavior and the excellent reputation enjoyed by 4-H.

Chaperones should know the name and phone number of the person(s) conducting the event as well as Extension professionals in their home state who are responsible for coordination of the state’s participation and should contact these individuals for clarification of stated rules of the event and discuss special circumstances and solutions to problems.

Any enforcement of rules must be done with sensitivity and understanding of the needs of youth. This should be balanced with the expectation that 4-H members will fully participate in the event and will carry out their responsibilities.

## Duties

Chaperones will provide supervision for the entire length of the activity, i.e. for the duration of the field trip or twenty-four hour supervision for overnight trips. Broadly speaking, this means chaperones should adhere to the same schedule as that established for youth, i.e. check with youth delegates in the morning, attend meals, workshops and social activities and be present at curfews. Chaperones will be provided for monitoring after curfew to ensure that curfew is being maintained.

An exception may be when one chaperone has made arrangements with another chaperone to assume responsibility for specific period(s) of time. In this case, youth must know to whom they are responsible and for what period of time. The “delegated chaperon” must always know the location of the original chaperone and be able to contact that person in the event of an emergency.

## Chaperones will:

* Have undergone a UConn 4-H background check prior to attending the overnight event.
* Participate in UConn Minor Protection training before attending the overnight event.
* Enroll and be active in UConn 4-H Enrollment system
* Understand and enforce rules of conduct.
* Accept the responsibility that being a chaperone is the primary purpose for their attendance at a 4-H event.
* Make appropriate arrangements for lodging if the arrangements are not being made by an Extension employee.
* Chaperones may not have a room with one youth delegate in a hotel or conference center setting.
* A married couple who are chaperoning may room together if it fits in with the conference rooming situation. For example, sharing a room would not be appropriate if there are designated gender floors.
* Unmarried chaperones of the opposite sex will not room together.
* Retain in their possession a list of all the individuals (youths and adults) in the delegation and, specifically, those for whom they are responsible. The list must include each person’s name, address, telephone number, and the name of a parent/guardian (and their address if it is different from the young person’s) and where they can be reached in case of an emergency. Also get the name and number of one or two alternate emergency contacts. Chaperones should also carry in their possession participant health forms which note special medications or medical problems, including food allergies along with a medical treatment release, signed by a parent/guardian for each individual so they can be admitted to a hospital for treatment, if necessary.

This information should be available to all chaperones at all times. In situations where a chaperone is planning an event, they should obtain forms from Extension staff. Inform the Extension staff members about the group’s trip and prepare an accounting for the group.

All medications must be in a medicine bottle and labeled with the participant’s name, doctor’s name and phone number, medication name, and dosage.

It is the parent/guardian’s responsibility to contact the 4-H volunteer or professional staff in writing to make them aware of any medication that will need to be administered during the program. Parents must designate on the health form whether medication will be brought to the event or not and whether the medication or medical devices can be self-administered (age 14 and above only) or need to be administered by the on-site provider. Limited amounts of medication for life threatening conditions may be carried by the child or ward (i.e. bee sting kits, inhalers).

* Meet with the appropriate Extension Educator, Extension Coordinator or Extension Specialist to review expectations, regulations, and finances.
* Keep track of finances for the trip and file an accounting with the appropriate Extension Educator, Coordinator or Specialist upon returning.
* Attending scheduled pre-trip orientation meeting(s). At that time, participants will meet chaperones and discuss details about the trip such as:
	+ 4-H Code of Conduct
	+ Transportation Arrangements
	+ General Trip Information
	+ Finances
	+ Medical Forms
	+ Parent/Guardian Permission Forms
	+ Use of Photos Permission Form
* Know the schedule for the day and make proper arrangements to enable participants to meet the schedule such as times of events/meetings, chaperone assignments, etc.
* Make sure all participants are present and accounted for before leaving any location, e.g. morning, evening/” lights out,” different destinations during the day.
* Use rotating supervision to cover after curfew hours.
* Make regular checks on special situations such as medications needed, homesickness's, etc.
* Be sensitive to interactions with delegates and among delegates from the state and from other states.
* Allow no behavior which excludes others from participating.
* Be an enthusiastic role model for participants and abide by the same rules as the participants.
* Not engage in relationships of an inappropriate personal nature with a minor youth in their custodial care.

Chaperones need to be aware that delegates may perceive adult behavior in an unintended manner. Therefore, a cautious awareness is recommended.

Immediately after an event, or sooner if appropriate, chaperones shall report to the Extension employee responsible, the results of the event, including emergencies, injuries, evaluations, recommendations, etc.

If differences arise, the final arbitrator is the University of Connecticut Extension representative (Assistant Director, Associate Director or Dean and Director)

The University of Connecticut complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding non-discrimination, equal opportunity and affirmative action, including the provision of reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Extension program participants with disabilities may request reasonable accommodations to address limitations resulting from a disability. For more information, please contact the UConn Extension Civil Rights Liaison at extensioncivilrights@uconn.edu.