DISCIPLINING OR DISMISSING A VOLUNTEER

Wisconsin 4-H Policy Committee

Procedures for UW-Extension Faculty and Staff

4-H volunteers serve as representatives of a UW-Extension and USDA sponsored youth development program called 4-H. In this capacity, 4-H volunteers must comply with all federal and state nondiscrimination laws and policies. Volunteers are also expected to abide by the behavior standards for volunteers established by UW-Extension, and to conduct themselves as positive role models for youth. All 4-H volunteers are ultimately accountable to UW-Extension for their 4-H related actions.

All 4-H volunteers working with youth are required to complete the youth protection program. This includes a background record check, participation in a volunteer orientation program, and signing the volunteer behavior expectation form.

Dealing with volunteer misbehavior is not a matter to be taken lightly. Discretion needs to be used when discussing allegations and information with people who are not directly involved in the situation.

Criminal Charges

Criminal Charges require immediate action. If a volunteer is charged with a child abuse offense or a serious crime of any type, he/she should be immediately suspended pending resolution of the charges. If convicted, their 4-H volunteer status will be terminated. Contact your 4-H district liaison or the state 4-H office immediately in these situations. If you are made aware of allegations of criminal behavior by a 4-H volunteer, you should discuss those allegations with your District Attorney’s office. They can advise you as to whether or not the allegations will justify further investigation and potential prosecution by their office.

Problem Behavior

Evaluating the Issue. When questionable volunteer behavior is reported, the first step is to document the concerns and behaviors. It is difficult to evaluate the severity of the concern without documentation to support the allegations of misbehavior. A written account of the event(s) in question is very important. Documentation may be in the form of your own notes describing the behavior, or written statements from other observers. Complaints and concerns should be in writing and signed by the individual observing the situation. Statements should be as specific as possible.

Talk with your district liaison. Discuss the situation with your district liaison. Even though you may feel confident in dealing with the problem alone, an initial consultation before taking any action may save a lot of time and effort. Your liaison will be aware of other situations that may be similar to yours. If your experience is unique, then it may become instructive for others who face similar situations in the future.
Talk with the volunteer in question. When the issue does not involve legal action, set up a meeting with the person in question to discuss the concerns. This meeting can include representatives of your county 4-H leader organization, appropriate county 4-H committee, and/or the county UW-Extension Department Head. Do not conduct this meeting without other individuals present to verify the discussion. Take minutes of this meeting. The goals of this meeting should be to:

- Inform volunteer of concerns
- Let the volunteer explain their perspective

Following this meeting, re-evaluate the situation and the perspective provided by the volunteer in question. If further action is needed, consult with appropriate individuals (may include district program liaison, state program leader, department head) to determine next steps.

If behavior changes are needed, schedule a meeting with the volunteer in question to:
- Clarify specific behavioral expectations
- Set timelines for expected behavior changes

Following this meeting, a letter should then be sent to the volunteer detailing the expectations and the timelines. Take actions to insure the letter will be received by the volunteer (ie., delivered in person, certified mail)

Give them a chance to change. If behavior does not violate youth protection guidelines or state or federal laws, give the volunteer a chance to change.

Monitor their behavior and actions as a 4-H leader. Be direct in your feedback. Expect success.

Document problems or success with stated expectations. Make notes or have a reliable source monitor and document the volunteer’s actions – both positive and negative. Another 4-H volunteer can perform this kind of monitoring. Results should be kept as part of documentation.

If behavior changes according to agreed upon expectations, the matter can be dropped.

If problems persist and questionable behavior continues or occurs again, discuss the situation with liaison. Options at this point may range from prescribing specific limitations or conditions for the volunteer’s continued service, to termination from the 4-H program. In addition to the district liaison, the agent may wish to consult with appropriate representatives of the county 4-H leaders organization and the County UW-Extension Department Head in making this determination. The official letter notifying the volunteer of their status may be sent from the county or the state, depending upon the circumstances.

Complete files should be kept in the County UW-Extension Office with all correspondence and documentation of the process. This material should be handled in a confidential manner.