

Youth Protection Standards

Qualification of Volunteers



Volunteer Handbook

2008-2009

Introduction

Overview:

The Youth Protection Standards Program was established by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service to protect youth involved in Extension programs. Volunteers are the heart and hands of Extension programs; however, potential risks always exist.

The purpose of the Youth Protection Standards Program is to:

- Provide a safe and secure environment for youth involved in Extension programs.
- Establish best management practices related to volunteer service and reduce associated risks.
- Protect the image and integrity of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and its affiliated groups.

History:

The Volunteer Qualification Task Force in Texas was developed in May of 1997 to review the policies and procedures for recruiting training and maintaining volunteers. The committee included volunteers, county Extension agents, specialists, and an administrator. Special focus was placed on the safety of the youth involved in Extension programs. It was determined that Extension could systematically enhance the positive impact of its volunteers on youth and families in Texas.

In 1990, Myron D. Johnsrud, Administrator of Extension Service of USDA, sent the following memo to all states:

The increasing incidence of reported child abuse is a special concern for the Cooperative Extension System. I urge states to initiate action to develop appropriate child abuse policy and guidelines for paid and volunteer Extension Personnel. The following recommendations have been approved by the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP). It is recommended that state policy and guidelines include:

- *Screening procedure for salaried and volunteer staff which includes background checks.*
- *Training on child abuse identification and reporting.*
- *Written guidelines for all salaried and volunteer staff who work directly with youth.*

The Extension Service in each state is encouraged to develop a written policy which clearly defines management practices related to prevention of child abuse. The policy should include approved practices for recruiting, training and supervising salaried and volunteer staff; a code of conduct for salaried and volunteer relationships with children; reporting procedures for incidents when they do occur; and the responsibility to parents on this issue.

Screening policies and procedures from different states' Extension Services and youth organizations throughout Texas were reviewed to look at a variety of volunteer selection rules and guidelines. These included programs in Kansas, Washington, Colorado, Wyoming, Florida, Georgia, Indiana and Illinois; also the following youth organizations: Boy Scouts, Camp Fire, Girl Scouts, Montgomery County Juvenile Probation, Big Brothers, and the YMCA.

Definitions to Determine Procedures for Respective Volunteers

Direct Volunteer:

Any adult volunteer who meets the following criteria:

- a. provides unpaid support for Extension through face-to-face contact;
- b. provides a learning experience for youth or adults within Extension;
- c. has a volunteer application on file with the appropriate program area;
- d. has a position description on file; and
- e. has passed a criminal background check within the past three years.
- f. *Examples: club manager, project leader, livestock mentor, master volunteer, camp counselor, teacher and coach.*

Indirect Volunteer:

Any volunteer who meets the following criteria:

- a. provides unpaid support for Extension which does not include face-to-face contact;
- b. does not provide a learning experience for youth or adults within Extension;
- c. has a volunteer application on file with the appropriate program area; and
- d. has a position description on file.
- e. *Examples: youth/adult board members, committee members, livestock show boards/donors.*

Master Volunteer:

Any adult volunteer who meets the following criteria:

- a. undergoes 20 or more hours of specialized training in a subject matter area;
- b. is able to make significant contributions to leadership in the subject matter area;
- c. Commits to give 50 or more hours of service in the subject matter to the program (combined total of 80 hours with training);
- d. has a volunteer application on file in the county Extension office;
- e. has passed a criminal background check within the past three years;
- f. has a position description on file.

Episodic/Random Volunteer:

Volunteer involved with a single or limited activity, event, or program on a short-term basis. They may volunteer for more than one episode.

School Enrichment Volunteer:

An individual conducting Extension-sponsored educational programs in recognized educational institutions who has been selected and trained by the Extension staff responsible for the program.

Screened Volunteer:

Any volunteer that has gone through the Volunteer Qualification Process and has been granted or denied placement.

Volunteer:

Anyone who is without salary/wages and performs a task at the direction and on behalf of Extension.

Youth Volunteer:

Any young person under the age of 18 who is assuming the responsibilities of the afore-mentioned volunteer categories. Youth are strongly encouraged to volunteer. Adults work closely with young people to place them in volunteer roles that are appropriate to their skills and maturity. As with all volunteers, youth volunteers should be documented by being recorded on the volunteer list maintained by the county Extension office. A criminal background check is not conducted for youth.

Volunteer Screening Process

I. Who is screened through YPS?

A. All direct volunteers

1. All direct volunteers who work with youth and adults should be screened through the Youth Protection Standards Program. See Attachment A.
2. Initial screening of a volunteer is conducted when he/she applies for a volunteer role with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Volunteers must be screened prior to fulfilling any volunteer roles.
3. Re-screening through the YPS program is conducted every three years from the volunteer's most recent screening.

II. Volunteer Forms

- A. All 4-H volunteers must complete and submit a Texas 4-H Adult Volunteer Application.
- B. All Master Volunteers must complete and submit a Volunteer Background Check Form.
- C. All forms are available at: <http://texas4-h.tamu.edu/publications/> or <http://texasvolunteer.tamu.edu/yps.htm>.

III. Screening

A. What kind of criminal background check is conducted?

1. A national criminal background check is conducted through the Volunteer Center of North Texas. This is a nonprofit group designated through legislation that all state agencies with volunteers must use to conduct background searches.
2. The criminal background check is a national search of forty-eight (48) jurisdictions and state and national sex offender lists.

B. What information is required for screening?

1. Full, legal name (first, middle and last)
2. Address
3. Date of Birth
4. Gender
5. Race/Ethnicity (Although optional, this helps affirm the volunteer's identity.)
6. First five digits of social security number
7. Driver's License number (Although optional, this helps affirm the volunteer's identity.)

Note: All information is a determining factor that helps confirm the volunteer's identity when a background check is completed.

C. How much does the screening cost?

1. The cost of screening is \$10.00 per volunteer.
2. One check per county submission is required from the appropriate volunteer group or association.
3. Checks should be made payable to Extension Account #255003.
4. Each county, club and/or association is responsible for determining how to cover the cost associated with screening volunteers.
5. Screening of volunteers is not conducted until payment is received in the Office of Volunteer Development.

D. Is screening conducted by other entities accepted by Extension?

1. Volunteers may document a prior criminal background check from another entity on the volunteer application.
2. Extension will only accept screenings performed by entities on the approved list. See Attachment B. The minimum requirement is a criminal background check conducted through DPS or a national criminal search entity.
3. Documentation of screening by other entities is required.
 - a. Documentation may include a letter of acceptance from the employee or volunteer group, a letter written to Extension stating the volunteer has been screened and passed, or a copy of the volunteer card or credentials.
 - b. A copy of the letter stating the volunteer has been screened by another approved entity should be forwarded to the Office of Volunteer Development, along with the volunteer application, with copies also maintained in the county office. These files will be permanently maintained in the Office of Volunteer Development.
 - c. A volunteer who completes a volunteer application and submits a letter of screening from an approved entity and, therefore, does not need to be screened through YPS, does not need to submit \$10.
 - d. If a volunteer claims prior screening, but it is not from an approved entity, he/she must be screened through the Youth Protection Standards Program.
4. Although volunteers may have been screened and passed a criminal background check through an approved entity, it is Extension's policy that volunteers be screened every three years, no matter the entity.

Example: A volunteer who passed a criminal background check when he/she was hired by a school district in 2000, but has not been re-screened by the school district since the initial screening, must be re-screened through the YPS Program.

E. Volunteer applicants are identified with one of the following status categories:

1. Cleared: Approved to fulfill all duties of the role for which the volunteer is applying.
2. Restricted: Restrictions may be imposed based on the charges or conviction records.

Example: A conviction of numerous hot checks would result in a restriction of not handling or managing any group funds.

Example: A DWI conviction in the last ten years would result in a restriction of not driving youth other than the volunteer's own legal children.
3. Pending: This determination is based on an incomplete criminal history report, no disposition of a case or a question related to a charge. Additional information may be requested from a volunteer. Any follow-up information is sent to the Office of Volunteer Development. Details regarding records are not shared with county or other program faculty.
4. Dismissed: A volunteer is dismissed based on certain convictions of the Texas Penal Code. Automatic dismissals result from indecency with a child, injury to a child, sexual assault, murder or felony drug convictions.

Example: A conviction of embezzlement or mishandling Extension group funds would result in dismissal.
5. Denied: A volunteer applicant is denied based on certain convictions of the Texas Penal Code.

Example: A registered sex offender would result in a denial.

Disqualifying Offenses

No person may serve with youth or children who has ever been convicted of any disqualifying offense, been on probation or received deferred adjudication for any disqualifying offense, or has presently pending any criminal charges of any disqualifying offense before a determination of guilt is made including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication.

Disqualifying offenses are as follows:

- A. A felony or misdemeanor classified as an offense against the person or family or involves an offense against the person or family.

Examples: Offenses against the person include, but are not limited to murder, assault, sexual assault, injury to a child, and abandoning or endangering a child.

Offenses against the family include, but are not limited to bigamy, incest, interference with child custody, enticing a child, and harboring a runaway child.

- B. A felony or misdemeanor classified as an offense against public order or indecency.

Example: Offenses against public order or indecency include, but are not limited to prostitution, obscenity, sexual performance by a child, possession or promotion of child pornography, and disorderly conduct.

- C. A felony or misdemeanor violation of any law intended to control the possession or distribution of any substance included as a controlled substance in the Texas Controlled Substances Act.

- D. Criminal offenses that are more than 10 years old (from the date of arrest) will not be considered for volunteer dismissal unless the offense is child abuse.

Driving while intoxicated (DWI) may or may not be a disqualifying offense.

Other offenses will be considered on an individual basis. Offenses that have occurred within the last ten (10) years from the date of screening, may allow a volunteer restriction on work or placement based on Evidentiary Law 609.

Criminal Offenses from the Texas Penal Code

The following constitute criminal offenses included in the Texas Penal Code, Sections 19-25 and Section 43:

Offenses Against the Person

- Criminal Homicide:
 - Types of Criminal Homicide
 - Murder
 - Capital Murder
 - Manslaughter
 - Criminally Negligent Homicide
- Assaultive Offenses:
 - Assault
 - Sexual Assault
 - Aggravated Assault
 - Aggravated Sexual Assault
 - Coercing, Soliciting or Inducing Gang Membership
 - Harassment of Public Servant
 - Injury to a Child, Elderly Individual or Disabled Individual
 - Abandoning or Endangering a Child
 - Deadly Conduct
 - Consent as Defense to Assaultive Conduct
 - Terroristic Threat
 - Aiding Suicide
 - Tampering with Consumer Product
 - Leaving a Child in a Vehicle
- Kidnapping and Unlawful Restraint:
 - Unlawful Restraint
 - Kidnapping
 - Aggravated kidnapping
 - Unlawful Transport
- Sexual Offenses:
 - Homosexual Conduct
 - Public Lewdness
 - Indecent Exposure
 - Improper Photography or Visual Recording
 - Indecency with a Child
 - Improper Relationship Between Educator and Student
- Trafficking of Persons

Offenses Against the Family

- Bigamy
- Prohibited Sexual Conduct
- Interference with Child Custody
- Agreement to Abduct from Custody
- Enticing a Child
- Criminal Nonsupport
- Harboring Runaway Child
- Violation of Protective Order or Magistrate's Order
- Sale or Purchase of Child
- Advertising for Placement of Child
- Interference with Rights of Guardian of the Person

Public Indecency

- Prostitution
 - Prostitution
 - Promotion of Prostitution
 - Aggravated Promotion of Prostitution
 - Compelling Prostitution
 - Accomplice Witness: Testimony and Immunity
- Obscenity
 - Obscene Display or Distribution,
 - Obscenity
 - Sale, Distribution or Display of Harmful Material to Minor
 - Sexual Performance by a Child
 - Employment Harmful to Child(ren)
 - Possession or Promotion of Child Pornography

Grievance Procedure

The following is the procedure if a volunteer chooses to dispute a decision made during the application process or at any time during the volunteer's appointment with Extension.

- A. Volunteer submits concern in writing to the Office of Volunteer Development, with a copy to the District Extension Administrator and county Extension agent. Letters should be sent to the following address:

Courtney Dodd
Extension Program Specialist
7607 Eastmark Drive, Suite 101
College Station, TX 77840

- B. The appeal is reviewed and the volunteer receives a written statement from the Office of Volunteer Development regarding the decision made within a reasonable amount of time.
- C. This grievance procedure pertains only to decision(s) made by Extension personnel. If a concern is raised about the information obtained through a criminal background check, the volunteer should be given the following information.

If an applicant disputes information that is on the criminal history record transcript, he/she must follow the procedure to review personal criminal history record, which includes getting fingerprints and sending the prints to DPS along with the appropriate form. If it is determined that the record is indeed the applicant's own record and the applicant feels that there is a mistake in the criminal record, a letter should be written specifying the area of concern. An investigation will be conducted to determine whether or not an error has been made. Any costs associated with the process will be the responsibility of the volunteer.

The letter should be addressed to: Texas Department of Public Safety
Error Resolution Department
P.O. Box 15999
Austin, TX 78761-5999
512/424-2151

Recognizing Signs of Child Abuse

What is Abuse?

Abuse is mental, emotional, physical, or sexual injury to a child or failure to prevent such injury to a child.

The first step in helping abused children is learning to recognize the symptoms of child abuse. Although child abuse is divided into four types -- physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment -- the types are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child for example is often emotionally maltreated as well, and a sexually abused child may be also neglected. Any child at any age may experience any of the types of child abuse. Children over age five are more likely to be physically abused and to suffer moderate injury than are children under age five.

RECOGNIZING CHILD ABUSE

Experienced educators likely have seen all forms of child abuse at one time or another. They are alert to signs like these that may signal the presence of child abuse.

The Child:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or performance;
- Has not received help for physical/medical problems brought to the parents' attention;
- Has learning problems that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes;
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen;
- Frequent injuries such as bruises, cuts, black eyes, or burns without adequate explanations;
- Frequent complaints of pain without obvious injury;
- Burns/bruises in unusual patterns that may indicate the use of an instrument/bite;
- Has signs of cigarette burns on any part of the body;
- Lacks reaction to pain;
- Lacks adult supervision;
- Is aggressive, disruptive, and destructive in behavior;
- Is passive, withdrawn, and emotionless in behavior;
- Has a fear of going home or seeing parents;
- Has injuries that appear after a child has not been seen for several days;
- Has unreasonable clothing that may hide injuries to arms or legs;
- Is overly compliant, an overachiever, or too responsible; or
- Comes to activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home.

The Parent:

- Shows little concern for the child, rarely responding to requests for information, for activities, or for activities the child is interested in;
- Denies the existence of -- or blames the child for -- the child's problems;
- Asks the adult volunteer or Extension personnel to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves;
- Sees the child entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome;
- Demands perfection or a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve; or
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs.

The Parent and Child:

- Rarely touch or look at each other;
- Consider their relationship entirely negative; or
- State that they do not like each other.

Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones or black eyes;
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after a prolonged absence;
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home;
- Shrinks at the approach of adults; or
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury;
- Describes the child as "evil," or in some other very negative way;
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child; or
- Has a history of abuse as a child.

Under normal conditions, children bump into a table or fall off of a bike, but children may be abused who have bruises, welts, black eyes, burns, and frequent injuries that can't be explained reasonably.

As they are growing up, children develop a sense of modesty about their bodies and like to dress to show their individuality, but children who are reluctant to sit down, don't want to change clothes in physical education class, who wear long sleeves even in hot weather or who complain of pain when no injury is obvious may be experiencing physical abuse.

During normal development, children often do not think they have value or are important, but children who display poor self concept, who are frequently tardy or absent from school, who show aggressive or destructive behavior or who are withdrawn and passive may be experiencing abuse.

Some ways abusers hurt children include:

- Beating
- Squeezing
- Suffocating
- Preventing the child from sleeping
- Exposing the child to excessive heat or cold
- Poisoning
- Burning
- Binding
- Sensory overload
- Cutting
- Severe spanking

Neglect

Neglect includes:

- (1) failure to provide a child with food, clothing, shelter and/or medical care; and/or
- (2) leaving a child in a situation where the child is at risk of harm.

Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services have been offered and refused.

SIGNS OF NEGLECT

Consider the possibility of neglect when the child:

- Is frequently absent;
- Begs or steals food or money;
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations or glasses;
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor;
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather;
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs; or
- States there is no one at home to provide care.

Consider the possibility of neglect when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child;
- Seems apathetic or depressed;
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner; or
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs.

Suspect neglect when you see:

- Obvious malnourishment
- Lack of personal cleanliness
- Torn or dirty clothing
- Stealing or begging for food
- Child unattended for long periods of time
- Need for glasses, dental care or other medical attention
- Frequent tardiness or absence

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or producing pornographic materials.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the child:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age fourteen (14)
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Is unduly protective of the child, severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Describes marital difficulties involving family power struggles or sexual relations

Suspect sexual abuse when you see:

- Physical signs of sexually transmitted diseases
- Evidence of injury to the genital area
- Pregnancy in a young girl
- Difficulty in sitting or walking
- Extreme fear of being alone with adults or a certain sex
- Sexual comments, behaviors or play
- Knowledge of sexual relations beyond what is expected for a child's age
- Sexual victimization of other children

Physical and verbal behaviors may be exhibited by a child who has experienced sexual abuse:

- Makes indirect remarks hoping someone will see the cues
- Mentions sexual behavior that normally one would be unaware of
- Mentions an irritation, pain or injury around the genital area
- Acts nervous, aggressive, hostile or disruptive consistently
- Withdrawals of behavior changes dramatically

Always remember: One sign alone may NOT be a positive indicator, a number of signs present is a clue to the possibility of sexual abuse.

All children are at risk for sexual abuse:

- All ages, but especially ages 7-13
- Rural and Urban
- All ethnicities and races
- Every socioeconomic level
- All cultural and religious groups
- All sexes (47.3% are boys and 50.7% are girls)

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in a child's growth, development, or psychological functioning. It includes extreme forms of punishment such as confining a child in a dark closet, habitual scapegoating, belittling, and rejecting treatment for a child.

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the child:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity or aggression;
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging);
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development;
- Has attempted suicide; or
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent.

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child;
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's school problems; or
- Overtly rejects the child.

Suspect Emotional Abuse When You See:

- Over compliance
- Low self-esteem
- Severe depression, anxiety, or aggression
- Difficulty making friends or doing things with other children
- Lagging in physical, emotional, and intellectual development
- Caregiver who belittles the child, withholds love, and seems unconcerned about the child's problems.

Your Role Regarding Child Abuse and Neglect

1. Child abuse and neglect are against the law in Texas, and so is failure to report it.
2. If you suspect a child has been abused or mistreated, you are required to report it to the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services or to a law enforcement agency.
3. You are required to make a report within 48 hours of the time you suspected the child has been or may be abused or neglected.
4. If you have reason to suspect child abuse, but are not positive, make the report. If you have any doubts about whether or not it is abuse, call the hotline. They can advise you on whether the signs you have observed are abuse.

5. How do I make a report?

Call the abuse and neglect hotline at 1-800-252-5400.

When you make a report, be specific. Tell exactly what happened and when. Be sure to record all injuries or incidents you have observed, including dates and time of day and keep this information secured.

Reports should be made as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before bruises and marks start to fade. It is important for the investigators to be able to see the physical signs.

Give the agency person any information you have about the relationship between the child and the suspected abuser.

Please provide at least the following information in your report:

Name, age, and address of the child

Brief description of the child

Current injuries, medical problems, or behavioral problems

Parents names and names of siblings in the home

6. Will the person know I've reported him or her?

Your report is confidential and is not subject to public release under the Open Records Act. The law provides for immunity from civil or criminal liability for innocent persons who report even unfounded suspicions, as long as your report is made in good faith. Your identity is kept confidential.