



UF/IFAS Extension Florida 4-H Youth Protection Policy

Definitions

Care, Custody, or Control of Minors: adults who are present at a youth activity and have the primary responsibility for supervision of the youth at any given point throughout the activity. More than one adult must exercise Care, Custody, or Control of Minors during the same activity.

Two-Deep Policy: a minimum of two adults must be present when engaging with youth in-person and online. One-on-one interactions between adults and youth are prohibited. Youth programs must be coordinated in a way that eliminates one-on-one interactions and ensures adequate staff-to-participant ratios are always in place.

Level 1 Volunteer: serving in a non-supervisory (Care, Custody, or Control of Minors) role of youth or other volunteers. Serving less than 10 hours per month.

Level 2 Volunteer: serving in a supervisory (Care, Custody, or Control of Minors) role of youth or other volunteers **or** volunteering more than 10 hours per month.

After-School/Out-of-School Programming: extended learning programs occurring outside of the normal school day hours.

Summer Programming: summer activities and events to include residential/overnight and day camp events at the local, state, or national levels.

Law Enforcement: an individual employed by a local county or state law enforcement agency, having completed all DCF background screening requirements.

Military Youth Programs: an individual employed by military youth programs, working on installation and having completed the required military youth program background screening requirements.

School District Staff: employed by a local school district, having completed DCF requirements.

4-H Online: approved volunteer and membership management system for UF/IFAS youth development programs.

Reporting Child Abuse, Neglect, or Abandonment

Florida state law mandates any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare is a mandatory reporter. Required reports include those of child abuse, abandonment, neglect, sexual abuse of a child, and juvenile sexual abuse; reports of death; and reports involving a child who has exhibited inappropriate sexual behavior. **Immediately report abuse to the central abuse hotline. Additional information can be located at the UF Youth Compliance [Child Abuse Reporting](#) website.**

Step 1: Report abuse to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Florida Abuse Hotline.

Immediately report the abuse to the DCF Florida Abuse Hotline via one of the following methods and provide your UF email:

- Telephone: 1-800-962-2873 (24-hour hotline)
- Fax: 1-800-914-0004
- TTY: 1-800-955-8771 or 711 (Florida Relay)
- [Online Report](#) (professional reporters encouraged to create an account)

Step 2: Save DCF Florida Abuse Hotline intake email and all electronic correspondence.

- The DCF Florida Abuse Hotline will provide reporters with an intake email. The email informs the reporter whether the abuse report was accepted or denied for investigation.

Step 3: Notify your supervisor.

- Discuss the details of the child abuse report with your direct supervisor.
- Volunteers: Provide your direct supervisor with a summary of the reported abuse allegation and a copy of the DCF intake email.

Step 4: Report child abuse to UF Youth Compliance.

- Faculty/Staff will submit the [Incident Report Form](#) to UF Youth Compliance. Include the following information in the Incident Report:
 - Reporter's name, email, and phone number
 - Date, time, and location of the reported abuse
 - Summary of abuse allegations
 - Hotline intake email and all electronic correspondence from DCF
- Volunteers: The direct supervisor (faculty/staff) will upload the Incident Report on behalf of the volunteer.

In case of a crisis, such as mental health, contact "988" [Florida Lifeline](#) for local support.

Register Youth Programs in 4-H Online

Enrollment System in Lieu of UF Youth Compliance Program

Keeping up-to-date information about 4-H participants and their interactions with other people is required. In accordance with UF Youth Compliance requirements for UF-affiliated youth activities, all youth supervised by UF/IFAS Extension entities must be reported individually in [4-H Online](#), regardless of program hours.

All UF/IFAS Extension-sponsored programs with youth participation (5–18 years old) are defined as UF/IFAS Extension 4-H Youth Development, shall be promoted as such, and should be reported via 4-H Online. This policy and corresponding procedures apply to all camps and activities led by UF/IFAS Extension faculty/staff for youth, either on or off campus. The policy does not apply to programs that UF/IFAS Extension faculty assist with if they are not responsible for having Care, Custody, and Control of the youth attending (such as when contributing to another organization's event).

4-H Enrollment & Roster Requirements

Who needs to be enrolled in 4-H Online?

- All volunteers involved in youth activities must have an approved enrollment for the current program year.
- All youth participating in clubs must have an approved enrollment for the current program year.
- All youth participating in events where UF/IFAS Extension has Care, Custody, or Control must have an approved event registration.
- County employees working with the 4-H program must also be enrolled in 4-H Online for the current program year.
- Youth and adult profiles must be linked to the specific program (club, 4-H event) they participate in within 4-H Online.

Determine your level of responsibility. Do you (UF/IFAS personnel) have Care, Custody, or Control of minors at the event?

- IF YES (You DO have Care, Custody, or Control):
 - You must collect event registration through 4-H Online, which will maintain a roster of all minors, adults, volunteers, and staff in attendance.
- IF NO (You DO NOT have Care, Custody, or Control):
 - You are still required to report demographics through group enrollment in 4-H Online. Collecting event registration through 4-H Online is the best practice.

Table 1. 4-H Program Event Registration Requirements.

Example program(s)	Who has Care, Custody, and Control of participants?	Participant registration in 4-H Online	Volunteers and staff registration in 4-H Online	Group enrollment
Camp (day camps and overnight camps), conferences, workshops/seminars, internships, field days	Florida 4-H	Required	Required	Required. Use group enrollment feature as part of event registration.
Programs/events where all youth will have a parent/guardian present	Parents/guardians	Best Practice	Best Practice	Required. Collect participant demographics and report in 4-H Online . A roster must include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full name• Age• Zip code/county• Parent/guardian name(s) and contact (e.g., phone number) Volunteers: Identify Level 1/Level 2 screened. Staff: Include the same info and clearly label as staff.
School enrichment (e.g., public speaking, embryology), one-time workshops hosted by another organization, visits to outside groups (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs of America)	Third party	Best Practice	Best Practice	Collect participant demographics and report in 4-H Online .

Youth Protection Training and Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Training

All UF-affiliated youth programs are responsible for ensuring that any program faculty, staff, and volunteers who will engage with minors on behalf of UF/IFAS Extension successfully complete an annual Youth Protection Training and Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Training.

These training courses must be completed before interacting with 4-H youth.

Volunteers must access the training on [4-H Online](#) as a part of the enrollment process.

UF faculty and staff should access the training in these steps:

1. Navigate to UF's [myTraining](#) portal.
2. If you have a Gatorlink account, you may use that credential to log-in.
3. Start the training courses by choosing: YCS800 and YCS100.

Visit the [UF Youth Compliance Trainings](#) website for more information about the Youth Protection Training and Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Training.

Background Screening Requirements

Level 1 screening is required for volunteers who will be interacting with youth; will not have Care, Custody, and Control; and will be working with youth less than 10 hours a month.

Level 1 screening will

- Search for criminal records through designated systems (local law enforcement/county records) based solely on name, date of birth, and/or any other personal information such as physical address.
- Check the [National Sex Offender Registry](#).
- Be required once every 5 years.

Level 2 Department of Children and Families (DCF) Clearinghouse background screening is required by state law before having Care, Custody, or Control of Minors for working/serving 10 hours or more in a month during a Florida 4-H program.

Both UF/IFAS Florida 4-H Afterschool (e.g., leading a community 4-H club) and Florida 4-H Summer Program screenings are required for Level 2 screening.

DCF will require out-of-state background checks for individuals who have lived outside of Florida in the past 5 years.

Level 2 screening will

- Search for criminal records through designated systems (local law enforcement/county court records) based solely on name, date of birth, and/or any other personal information such as physical address.
- Check the [National Sex Offender Registry](#).
- Search state criminal records from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and check national criminal history through the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This process requires providing electronic fingerprints through a University of Florida-designated vendor.
- Be required once every 5 years.

(See the following Florida Statutes for more information: [section 39.201](#), [section 409.175](#), and [chapter 435](#).)

Additional Screening Information

- Volunteers needing DCF Clearinghouse screening will also need to complete the Affirmation of Good Moral Character and Privacy Policy forms in 4-H Online.
- A break in service of over 90 days will require rescreening and clearance prior to beginning service with youth. For episodic volunteers (who serve specific functions throughout the year), it is not considered a break in service if they remain an enrolled 4-H volunteer and their service remains in good standing with the IFAS faculty/staff member who has appointed them.

- Volunteer screening information must be kept updated.
 - Annually, an approval/denial letter will be provided to the volunteer by the UF/IFAS Extension agent/county Extension director or direct supervisor. This will also be uploaded to the volunteer's profile in 4-H Online.
 - DCF Clearinghouse eligibility and print expiration dates, along with DCF report record and the date uploaded by the person facilitating screenings.
- All criminal records discovered from Level 1 and Level 2 criminal background screening will be reviewed and assessed based on these factors: the nature and gravity of the offense, the time that has elapsed since the conviction, the nature of the volunteer position being considered, recurrence and pattern of criminal behavior, and falsification of employment and personnel-related materials.
- Criminal background screening may be conducted for current volunteers when there is a suspicion of engagement in an activity that violates federal and state laws and university policies.
- Current employees, volunteers, and contractors shall notify appropriate University management of any charges for a felony or first-degree misdemeanor offense. Such notification must be made as soon as possible, within 24 hours.

(See UF Human Resources policy, [11-007 Criminal Background Screening](#), for more information.)

Information Only for Level 2 Screening

- Individuals with background screening through the DCF Clearinghouse must be rescreened every 5 years from the original fingerprinting date on file in the DCF Clearinghouse database.
- Volunteer screening is facilitated by 4-H State Headquarters (may also include UF/IFAS Business Services, UF Youth Compliance/UF Human Resources).
- DCF will provide volunteer approval/denial based on the results of Level 2 screenings.

Screening Exceptions and Special Circumstances

Please Note: Public School Board, Law Enforcement, and Military Youth Program employees who wish to lead a 4-H Club within the community (having Care, Custody, and Control of youth participants) and outside of school/law enforcement program oversight will be required to complete Level 2 volunteer screening.

Public School Board Employees

Public school board employees in the state of Florida who have been screened in accordance with Chapter 1012 of the Florida Statutes within the past 5 years are exempt from DCF Clearinghouse background screening when providing 4-H programming **during** school hours or during school district sanctioned activities (such as an afterschool program where the school has Care, Custody, or Control of Minors) and for [Florida 4-H Summer Programs](#) (residential/overnight events). Verification on school letterhead sent via official mail or email is required, stating the person is a current employee who has been screened under the Chapter 1012 standards within the past 5 years. This letter will need to be provided annually to verify employment status with the school district.

Private school teachers and employees are screened under the Volunteer and Employee Criminal History System (VECHS). Individuals screened through VECHS are **not** exempt from being screened through the DCF Clearinghouse.

Please Note: Affirmation of Good Moral Character acceptance and completion of the Youth Protection Training and Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Training courses in 4-H Online are required prior to working/serving with minor participants.

Law Enforcement and Corrections Officers

Currently employed law enforcement and corrections officers in Florida are exempt from DCF Clearinghouse background screening for [Florida 4-H Summer Programs only](#) (residential/overnight events). Verification on law enforcement letterhead sent via official mail or email is required before beginning service.

Please Note: Affirmation of Good Moral Character acceptance and completion of the Youth Protection Training and Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Training courses in 4-H Online are required prior to working/serving with minor participants.

Military Youth Programs

Employees of any branch of the military also employed in a military youth program facility have been screened through a rigorous process. The Department of Defense-United States Department of Agriculture MOU provides support for the 4-H Military Partnerships. These paid staff, who work in support of the 4-H Military Partnerships by providing 4-H youth development programming on installations, are exempt from screening.

4-H Volunteers Serving in Schools

When the school has Care, Custody, and Control of youth participants, 4-H volunteers (currently approved in 4-H Online and having completed all 4-H Volunteer requirements) serving during school hours or within a school's after-school program may also be subject to whatever documentation and/or screening required by the school.

Parents/Guardians Attending Events with their Own Children Without Responsibility for Other Minor Youth

A parent/guardian attending a 4-H program with their own children, without responsibility for other minor youth, is exempt from screening. The parent is not acting in a volunteer role during the event.

Teen Counselors

Youth aged 18 and under who serve as "junior camp counselors," "counselors in training," and so forth, are not required to have a background check because they are not supervising (Care, Custody, or Control of Minors) other minors. They are youth participant members of a 4-H leadership program.

Adults Helping with Programs Led by Screened Individuals

Background screening is not required for adults who are not responsible for supervising (Care, Custody, or Con-

trol of Minors) youth during programs, work/serve less than 10 hours in a month, and are always in the presence of screened employees and/or volunteers when in contact with youth. These helpers are never left unsupervised. Examples of adult helpers include event judges, guest educators/presenters, and parents serving snacks at a club meeting.

Background Screening of Employees

All employees working with the Florida 4-H program are required by Florida law and UF policy to be Level 2 background screened. Employees and the employees' supervisors are responsible for ensuring their UF/IFAS and county employees are background screened and kept current, in accordance with Florida law and UF policy. Business Services will assist in processing screenings through UF Human Resources.

Adults Serving with County 4-H Associations/Foundations

Level 1 background screening, at a minimum, is required for adults serving on county 4-H Associations/Foundations. Association/Foundation members will be enrolled in 4-H Online for liability purposes.

Best Practice: Require Level 2 screening for county 4-H Association/Foundation check signers/credit card holders.

Shooting Sports

All 4-H Shooting Sports volunteers are required to be Level 2 screened and approved in 4-H Online prior to participating in shooting sports training and volunteering in the 4-H Shooting Sports program.

Screening Costs

Although UF Human Resources pays for screening of UF employees, the costs of background screening for volunteers and county employees are the responsibility of the UF/IFAS Extension program or respective UF/IFAS units.

Volunteer Files

All volunteer files must be maintained in 4-H Online. All screening documents and results, as well as national sex offender search, local criminal history search, references, and approval, denial, and release letters, must be uploaded under the volunteer's profile.

For continuity, it is best practice to upload interview notes, reference checks, training certificates, awards, and so forth, throughout the volunteer's career.

Interactions with Youth (aka Two-Deep Policy)

4-H faculty, staff, and volunteers will eliminate private one-on-one interactions with youth. Program coordinators will ensure they always have two authorized, Level 2, enrolled individuals present during any interactions with youth. In situations that require personal conferences, the meeting is to be conducted in view of other adults. This policy includes the transportation and virtual learning of youth participants as part of a 4-H program. One of the two authorized adults should be 21 years of age or older.

Overnight events require separate accommodations for adults and youth. Youth are not permitted to sleep in a room with an adult unless it is their own parent/guardian.

Program coordinators should make certain that activities are coordinated in a way that will ensure that appropriate supervision ratios are always in place. For more information, visit the UF Youth Compliance [Supervision of Minors](#) website.

Interactions with Youth Virtually

The University has an approved list of online platforms that can be used: Zoom, YouTube, Microsoft Teams, and Google Suite. While facilitating online programming, it is imperative to engage in approved platforms with accounts linked to UF. University faculty and staff have access to additional platform features via the UFL system. This provides a higher level of security, which is crucial to online youth protection.

Interaction with youth in a virtual setting will follow the "two-deep policy," where two approved volunteers/staff must be part of the conversation with youth.

When communicating with youth through direct messaging (text, social media messages) or email, the two-deep policy should be followed. A second adult must be included in the conversation. Apps such as Remind, Slack, and Band are not approved forms of communication for staff and volunteers when communicating with youth, except for statewide 4-H events where the Remind app has been approved for general notifications.

Volunteer Services may cease at any time, at the request of the volunteer or at the discretion of the Extension agent. The decision made by the Extension agent, county Extension director (CED), or state 4-H program leader is final and cannot be appealed.

Additional Help

Leadership for 4-H Youth Development programs is provided at the following levels by these individuals:

- County: [UF/IFAS Extension 4-H agent](#)
- Extension Administrative Districts: [4-H regional specialized agents](#)
- Statewide/Campus: [Florida 4-H Headquarters](#) and state specialized agent of Volunteer Management and Development

[4-H Business Services](#)

[UF Youth Compliance](#)

For questions related to 4-H Youth Protection, please contact the UF/IFAS Extension state specialized agent for Volunteer Management and Development: extension_volunteers@ifas.ufl.edu.

For questions related to volunteer screening, please contact 4-H Business Services: 4hbgs@ifas.ufl.edu.

For questions regarding 4-H Online, please contact the State 4-H Information Coordinator: 4honline@ifas.ufl.edu.