



## Guidelines for Electronic Communication and Virtual 4-H Activities

These guidelines outline what are appropriate electronic communications and virtual activities, so that youth, parents, leaders, and staff can engage in a safe, fun, and inclusive environment.

This list has been adapted from Youth Safety at 4-H in Canada policies and the **Canadian Centre for Child Protection** guidelines for establishing boundaries for online schooling.

The **4-H in Canada Code of Conduct** always applies and concerns about communications or activities that fall outside of these guidelines should be reported immediately to your provincial organization.

### Communicating with youth and parents

- Use communications platforms authorized by your provincial organization or platforms set-up for your club, as opposed to personal accounts. This demonstrates the legitimacy of the activities and provides protection from outside users.
- Keep communication transparent by including parents and other leaders on all correspondence and replies.
- Do not communicate with youth via private messaging or individual texts. Instead communicate via emails, social media groups or group chats with all leaders and members included.
- Maintain professionalism by communicating during appropriate times of the day.
- Remind parents and youth that leaders will not request passwords, financial, or personal information in your communications. Immediately report any such requests, which are called phishing.

### Using social media

- Create club pages or 4-H addresses to communicate (i.e. not personal Twitter, Facebook or email addresses). Messages to youth and families should always come from these accounts and be youth appropriate and inclusive of members and families. These accounts should be communicated as the club channels to the provincial 4-H organization.
- Enable privacy settings on group social media accounts to ensure discussions and planning details are kept private.
- Some platforms, like Facebook, have age restrictions for creating an account. Review the platform policies before inviting youth to the group.
- Ensure you have consent before capturing or sharing images on social media of youth, their project, or other identifying information.
- Be conscious of your leadership role in 4-H when interacting on social media. You may want to enable your privacy settings to prevent youth from viewing your account.

## Leading in a virtual environment

- Verify with your provincial organization that the virtual club or activity you are leading is approved.
- Promote a safe, inclusive and fun environment by discussing expectations with youth about how the Code of Conduct applies. For example, appropriate attire must be worn, words and actions must be respectful and kind, and all participants should be in common/high traffic household areas (bedrooms and bathrooms are off-limits).
- Use a technology platform that allows for a secure passcode to ensure only invited participants can attend.
- Supervision and Rule of Two:
  - Have two leaders in the virtual meeting.
  - One on one coaching or mentoring is not allowed.
  - Ensure the leader starts the meeting exactly on time and ends promptly for all. This will mitigate the potential for leaders being alone with youth for a long period waiting for the meeting to start or end.
  - Ask members to participate from their kitchen table or a central part of their home.
- Before sharing a video stream of your private space on a virtual meeting, ensure your backdrop is professional and appropriate for youth.
- Consider your “classroom” and the risks youth may be taking while participating. For example, a youth cannot work alone with an animal while on a virtual call as a leader is not there to ensure safety or administer first aid. Review the risk in any of the activities you are demonstrating and communicate directly to the youth and parents that supervision is required for at-home project work. At-home work is outside the scope of 4-H insured activities.

## Resources for leaders and parents

Learn more about keeping youth safe online: [protectkidsonline.ca](https://protectkidsonline.ca)

If you have any concerns about a child online, report to [Cybertip.ca](https://Cybertip.ca)

Immediate mental health support for youth: [kidshelpphone.ca](https://kidshelpphone.ca)

Mental health resources for youth and leaders: [4-h-canada.ca/healthyliving/mentalhealth](https://4-h-canada.ca/healthyliving/mentalhealth)