



Social Media Guidelines

for Missouri 4-H Youth Development Faculty and Staff

Purpose of this Document

Social Media is technology used to connect people with others. It is utilized by the majority of youth, with applications that include Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube and many more. Many views exist on how a social media presence by a 4-H staff person should be handled.

These guidelines apply to Missouri 4-H professionals and staff who allow youth to access their online content. These guidelines are intended to take a moderate, “real world” approach, to help ensure that the youth-adult interaction which occurs through social media is a safe, appropriate, positive experience for all concerned.

Expectations of 4-H Staff

Unlike many other careers, your actions outside of work impact your ability to function as a trusted, responsible member of the 4-H youth development profession. Your offline and online actions are viewed by 4-H youth and parents within the capacity of your 4-H role, speaking to your credibility and reflecting on Missouri 4-H as a whole. For these reasons, the following expectations are in place for faculty and staff who allow 4-H youth to view their online content in social media settings:

- You are a human being. It is perfectly acceptable to have online content that shows you are a real person who has friends, has fun and has a life outside of your 4-H role.
- All expectations of your offline conduct while on the job apply to your online conduct too. Social media is part of the “real world.”
- Your social media presence should not contain any content, media or information by yourself or others that (a) undermines your position as a trusted, responsible youth professional, (b) does not properly represent the values and standards of Missouri 4-H, or (c) damages the image of 4-H and/or the University of Missouri.

This includes content (posted by yourself or others on your site) that:

- contains gossip, innuendo or unflattering references towards others;
 - is not consistent with that of a professional who values their colleagues, stakeholders and those they serve;
 - depicts alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, inappropriate attire, illicit behavior, etc. in settings you are portrayed as being a part of;
 - pushes or inhibits a specific religious or political agenda;
 - conflicts with the University’s non-discrimination statement;
- If your social media presence conflicts with any of the above bullets, you should make the necessary adjustments to your content, ask the owner of offending content to “un-link” you from that content on their site, or establish a separate “personal” account that 4-H youth and volunteers cannot access.
 - Do not rely on privacy settings to protect inappropriate content. These settings and their conditions can change over time, and anything posted online will likely stay online well into the far-distant future.
 - You are not responsible for 4-H’ers photos posted elsewhere by others.



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Best Practices

The following are general guidelines to follow when working with social media as a member of the 4-H youth development profession:

- Use your own best professional judgment. The items below are only guidelines.
- *“Have big eyes and ears and a small mouth”* – Avoid responding to every youth post or injecting yourself into every conversation.
 - *Think of an aunt/uncle or other adult whom you adored as a teenager. Did you invite them to go with you on dates, or take them whenever you went to hang out with your friends? Be a safe presence in their online world, but understand that “less is more.”*
 - Intervene if you assess a potentially dangerous situation, but understand the appropriateness of language or conversation topic between youth is usually a matter better left to their parental guidance. What would your authority be if you saw that young person chatting with their friends at a local mall or other public place?
 - Exception: When the content could reflect negatively on 4-H or impact an area of your professional responsibility.
- *“It is better to be friended than to friend”* – Do not “friend” (create linkages to) youth whom you don’t work with, do not know well, or who don’t know you – it may create misperceptions.
- *“Be a bright light, but not a spotlight”* – In activities like photo tagging, you should not identify youth to a greater extent than they identify themselves.
 - Most youth tag themselves and others with great frequency, but be aware of those rare ones who don’t. There may be good reasons. Err on the conservative side – if you aren’t sure, don’t do it.
 - Unless a young person tags themselves frequently, in photos that are available to your networks, it is a better practice not to tag at all. Instead, tag yourself so that your “friends” will be notified, and let them finish the tagging themselves if they so desire.
- *“Be somewhat exclusive”* – Use privacy settings to limit who can view all content you post. For example, allowing your photos to be viewed by “friends of friends” is usually appropriate, and preferred because it’s part of the fun of a social network, but do not make them “available to everyone.”
- Have fun, as you leverage your skills and experience to be effective!

