



Online Security Guidelines

More and more of our communications are moving online—on the one hand, this means we can reach a broader audience. But on the other, it means our information becomes more vulnerable to security concerns. Whether posted on a blog, website or social media network (like Facebook), everything on the internet can be found with a simple Google search—even a newsletter meant only for 4-H families can be found by anyone with the right search terms. When posting things online, here are a new set of safety guidelines to keep in mind:

Member Information

Posting personal or identifying details about 4-H volunteers and members is very risky. Research has shown that posting personal information is the number-one online risk as it increases your chances of being involved in all types of negative online behaviors, from identity theft to cyberbullying and other dangerous contact. To help keep members safe, do not include details like:

- Full names
- Birthdates
- Locations (ex: schools attended, neighborhoods, hometowns)
- Contact information (ex: email addresses, phone numbers)

Photos

As per Cooperative Extension policy, any photos used on 4-H print materials and websites must have an accompanying photo release for the youth and adults in the picture. This includes sites built at the state level, county sites and project sites created on behalf of the county or state. Any videos posted should comply with the same guidelines—there must be a signed release for young people appearing in the videos.

Appropriate social media use

Facebook pages, blogs, Twitter and other social sites are a great additional way to keep in touch with older 4-H youth, families and volunteers—many counties use them to announce meetings and events and communicate important programming information. But sites like these need to be moderated. As long as users can post comments, the pages need to be watched to make sure that posts don't reveal personal information or include anything that might be hurtful or inappropriate. Administrators, whether they are county staff or adult leaders, need to be ready to delete comments, videos or photos with derogatory, violent, profane or inappropriate content very quickly.

It is also important to remember that anything posted online can be seen by friends, family and co-workers. Remind youth that any photos, comments or links they post on Facebook, blogs or other social sites can be seen by teachers, colleges and even future employers!