



Expanded Learning Opportunities: Managing Risks

EC484

PARTICIPANT
GUIDE

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Lesson Goal

Children and youth in out-of-school settings reach their full potential as a result of positive youth/adult interactions, purposeful learning experiences, and safe environments.

Nebraska School-Age and Youth Development Core Competencies

Core Knowledge Area: Health, Safety, and Nutrition

- **1.1** Recognizes and follows Nebraska State Law requiring the reporting of suspected child abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.
- **1.2** Is aware of the policies and procedures necessary to maintain a safe environment; to prevent and reduce the incidence of illnesses and injuries; and, when applicable, to meet licensing safety standards.
- **1.15** Examines indoor and outdoor environments to ensure they are healthy and safe for youth.

Learner Objectives

After completing this lesson, you will:

- be aware of youth safety and protection.
- recognize the importance of risk management.
- identify and use risk management strategies.

>> Introduction

Positive youth development programs provide safe environments where youth can learn new skills, interact with others, and develop into contributing adults. Youth safety is a top priority and concern for youth development programs. Safe playground equipment, well-planned emergency procedures, proper supervision of youth, and implementation of youth protection policies are important components in reducing risk and providing overall youth safety.

>> Risk and Risk Management

We often think of risk as a hazard or threat, something dangerous or unexpected, or a possibility that something might go wrong. Youth participate in activities each day in which risk factors exist or there is the potential for risk. The process of identifying, evaluating, managing, and planning for these potential and future risks is risk management (4-H-3039A, Iowa State University, 2012).

>> Why Manage Risks?

Developing an effective risk management plan will reduce the possibility of physical or emotional injury to youth. Managing risks will increase safety and security, and reduce liability for youth program leaders, workers, and volunteers. Effectively managing risks preserves a youth program's reputation in the community and reduces the overall liability of the youth development

program. Working to provide a safe environment increases the ability of the youth to focus on the purpose of the program.

Steps to Risk Management

1. **Identify the risks.** Observe youth and adult interactions and study the indoor and outdoor physical environment to identify risks. To provide a fresh perspective, invite parents, volunteers, or other youth development professionals to serve on a risk management committee for your youth program.
2. **Assess and evaluate.** What is the probability of occurrence? What is the seriousness of the risks? Youth workers, staff, and volunteers may need additional training to reduce risks, and policies may need to be revised.
3. **Manage the risks.** Develop and implement a plan to manage risks. Decide if you will retain, reduce, share, or avoid the risks. Whether risks are minimal or greater, youth development program leaders and professionals must take the time to manage risks.
4. **Monitor and evaluate.** Managing risk is a continuous process. Re-evaluate risk management plans regularly and revise as needed.

>> Factors to Consider in Managing Risks

The list of potential risks in youth programs can be extensive. There are food safety risks, risks related to house-keeping and transportation, as well as environmental concerns, to name a few. Managing these risks will help provide an overall safe experience for all youth involved. Consider the following:

>> Adult-to-Youth Ratios

Balance the number of youth program participants with an appropriate number of adult sponsors to contribute to a safe program and well-supervised youth. A large percentage of legal cases involving youth program situations allege the lack of supervision or improper supervision (Olsen & Kowalski, 2010). The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services requires school-age-only child care centers to maintain a ratio of 1:15 — one staff member for up to 15 school-aged children. It's always

best to plan for a minimum of two adults to be present and to avoid situations in which an adult may be left alone with individual youth program participants.

>> Background Checks

For youth protection, the hiring process for youth workers and volunteers should include a pre-employment criminal history background record check or screening, and additional verification from the State and National Sex Offender Registry. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services maintains a list of convictions that may temporarily or permanently disqualify individuals from working as a staff member or volunteer in a child care center (http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/reg_t391.aspx, page 19).

>> Child Abuse and Neglect

By law, Nebraska youth program workers and volunteers who witness or suspect child abuse or neglect must report the situation (Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). The Child Abuse and Neglect 24-hour, statewide hotline number is 1-800-652-1999.

>> Youth Safety

To reduce risk and the chance of injuries, youth activities should be appropriate and safe for the age of the youth involved. As you observe your program, you should see adults intervening when necessary to keep youth emotionally and physically safe. Having a first aid kit on-site, as well as a staff member or volunteer at each program who could administer first aid or CPR, is recommended. When working with youth, it's always best to plan for the unexpected.

>> Release / Permission Forms

Many youth programs have implemented youth program policies regarding the release of youth to authorized persons. Be sure to include in your policies how parents can make changes to their permissions (e.g., can they call to make changes or will you need it in writing?) and what youth workers will do in cases of tense parental custody situations. Ask families to sign photo releases, permission slips for transportation, and permission forms for off-site activities to help share and manage potential risks.

>> **Indoor and Outdoor Environment**

Examine the indoor and outdoor program environment to ensure the safety and security of youth participants. Is the playground equipment safe? Are there any sharp points or edges in equipment or tripping hazards? A playground safety checklist is available from the Consumer Product Safety Commission at www.cpsc.gov. Is the indoor room arrangement safe for youth participants and program activities? If applicable, licensing safety measures should be followed. Consider other potential risks from outside sources or parties who may enter the youth program environment.

>> **Emergency Preparedness**

Proper preparation and training for weather-related risks, fires, bomb threats, or other unexpected situations should be included in a risk management plan. Identify a designated outside meeting area as well as a safe location or room within the building.

>> **Risk Management Strategies**

As a risk management plan is developed, use common sense, have good decision-making skills, and focus on strategies that will ensure a safe, healthy, and fun experience for youth. Consider the following risk management strategies (Beich D., et al., University of Wisconsin Extension, 2012):

- **Retain the Risk.** Accept the risks and prepare for the possibility of loss. This strategy is normally used when the consequences are minor.
- **Reduce the Risk.** Change the activity or conditions to reduce risks. Examples of reducing the risk: increasing adult supervision, providing additional training, or assuring that age-appropriate activities are being conducted.
- **Share the Risk.** Find someone else to share or assume the risks of the youth activity. This can be achieved by having another organization sponsor the program, by purchasing insurance, requiring parental permission forms (for photos, travel, etc.), or requesting waivers of liability.
- **Avoid the Risk.** If you are unable to minimize risks to a degree that is satisfactory, avoiding the risk altogether may be the best option. You may consider cancelling the program or activity to avoid the risks.

Conclusion

There will always be some level of risk involved with youth activities and programs. Youth program participants should always be protected, safe, and in an environment where they can learn and grow. A risk management plan will assist in providing a safe, educational program that builds trust and confidence among youth members, parents, and community stakeholders.

Resources

Beich, D. et al. (2012). University of Wisconsin-Extension. *Risk Management for 4-H Youth Development Work*. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/resources/mgt/risk.cfm>

Iowa State University (2012). *4-H Risk Management Checklist for Meetings and Events 4H-3039A*. <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/johnson/content/4-h-club-risk-management-resources-leaders>

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (2013), *Title 391, Children's Services Licensing*. http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/reg_t391.aspx

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, *Child Abuse and Neglect*. http://dhhs.ne.gov/children_family_services/Pages/cha_chaindex.aspx

Nonprofit Risk Management Center, *Basic Risk Management*. <http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/tools/overview.asp>

Olsen, H., Kowalski, C. (2010). *Enhancing Program Quality and Care Through Supervision*. http://www.niost.org/pdf/afterschoolmatters/asm_2010_10_spring/asm_2010_10_spring-6.pdf