

When to Ask for Parent Consent In Evaluating Your 4-H Program

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Most parents or guardians depend on 4-H leaders to keep track of each child's progress and 4-H experience. 4-H leaders observe, interview, or survey 4-H youth or judge projects to show what youth learn, apply, or share together in 4-H. These evaluation experiences can be great times for listening and encouraging children and teens. Sometimes, though, young people become anxious or uneasy with certain questions or ways of asking about them. Parents expect to receive personal reports but prefer to protect privacy in public reports. Similar concerns about research studies led to federal laws requiring parent consent for children's participation. In some cases, these laws may apply to 4-H evaluations. Tips on seeking parent consent are described below.

When Parent Consent is Required

Parent consent is required for 4-H evaluation and research studies when data will be presented to groups *outside the state*. A proposal to evaluate Long-Range Focus Area activities and state-level events has been approved by the NC State University Human Subjects Review Board. Typically, parents and youth will be asked to read these descriptions and consent to participate (or not) when they enroll in 4-H or register for a state event. New projects that will eventually be shared with a national audience require an amendment to the current proposal.

When Parent Consent is Not Required

Parent consent is not required for 4-H evaluation when data will be used by program staff, reported to funding agencies, or shared with colleagues *within the state*. Parents and youth are always free not to participate in evaluation activities.

Doing the Right Thing in Evaluation

Whenever 4-H leaders observe, judge, or otherwise assess youth, the following rules of courtesy and privacy apply:

- Explain in simple terms how and why evaluation will be completed
- Avoid questions or procedures that may stress or confuse youth
- Insure that youth know that they are free not to participate, without penalty
- Describe the risks and benefits clearly and honestly
- Provide assurance of confidentiality and follow through with security
- Use valid instruments and procedures to gather the highest quality
- Avoid undue stress on participants during evaluation procedures
- Treat others as you would like to be treated

Evaluations of adult leaders or parents often receive waivers from the NC State University Human Subjects Review Board. However, projects seeking input from or about adults should complete a project proposal and follow the rules noted above. In all cases, each 4-H professional or volunteer is responsible for obtaining parent consent and complying with legal and ethical guidelines for projects in which they are involved.