Shooting Sports Newsletter Q&A

Q  I have heard that 4-H members can now enroll when they are in third grade. I am concerned about the maturity level of third graders. Are they ready for shooting sports? Do we have to let them participate in our program?

A  The State 4-H Shooting Sports Advisory Committee recommends that each county shooting sports instructor team meet to discuss this issue and decide how they want to handle it. The county shooting sports coordinator should call the meeting. You are not required to let all 4-Hers participate in shooting sports if the team feels that the maturity level required for their program is higher than is normally found in third graders. On the other hand, if the younger 4-Hers are ready and interested it would be unfortunate to exclude them. Some options for the younger 4-Hers could include having all younger members take a year, or two, of the hunting and wildlife discipline (if you don’t have a certified instructor for this discipline please consider sending someone to the Spring Workshop - it is an excellent class). Air pistol or air rifle could be the next discipline offered for the younger 4-Her.

There are always exceptions, of course, to these generalities: some younger youth may have the maturity to participate where others do not; and some older youth may need additional training before they are ready for certain responsibilities. With these thoughts in mind your county instructor committee should decide what policy they feel most comfortable with and then make exceptions on a case-by-case basis. The overall safety of the youth and adult instructors must be the paramount consideration. From the legal side your decisions and actions must be viewed as “reasonable and prudent”.

Q  I received certification 15 years ago and have been active in our county program since that time (with just a few years off). My county team suggested that I attend a certification workshop but is difficult for me to get the time off work. Am I required to attend a certification workshop?

A  We strongly recommend that you try to make the time to attend a workshop since many things have changed since you were certified. Your attendance is not mandatory at this point but re-certification will be required in the future (once we have a re-certification program in place). The prudent action would be to find the time and resources to be re-certified now if you are active in your county program. (Our risk management personnel says that in case of an accident, it could be argued that, without re-certification, the leadership would appear to be guilty of gross negligence.) Therefore, without re-certification you take an additional risk by being the primary shooting sports instructor. Perhaps you could co-teach with another, recently certified, instructor. I am sure that the experience that you have gained over the years of your leadership is of great value to your club and we hope that continues.

Q  This summer we had a 4-Her in our shooting sports program with special needs. I was worried about my ability to help this boy since I have no training in working with Special Needs Youth but his mother came to every meeting and range
practice and everything went well. In fact the boy made great progress and it was a very rewarding experience. This experience made me wonder, however, if the mother had not been available to help what I should do. Must I accept this youth into our classes?

A You must include Special Needs Youth to the best of your ability. It be would appropriate to ask the parents for extra help and for suggestions of who might be able to give extra assistance if it is required. Sometimes there are teachers or aides that work with these youth in school who might be willing to help. Another option is to ask for some additional help from shooting sports instructors from other disciplines or from another county. It would be appropriate/reasonable in some “Special Needs Cases” to ask the parent or guardian to be present and involved with the student as the student advances through the curriculum sessions.

Q One of the youth in our 4-H shooting sports club attempted suicide last winter. Luckily he did not succeed. His parents and the school are working to get him the extra help that he needs. Our shooting sports instructor team is concerned, however, about the maturity and stability of this young man and concerned about the negative implications to the program if he were to try suicide again.

A This issue highlights another type of Special Needs Youth than we were discussing in the previous question. Generally these young people are at great risk and can really benefit from the ongoing contact with a responsible, caring adult. You need to pay extra attention, however, to make sure this youth is not endangering himself or anyone else. Note it is imperative that he is following all established rules for safe firearm handling, and while the student is participating in the classes that the parent(s) are present and actively involved as is reasonable for this situation. The parent’s relationship with the youth and the youth’s medical doctor and/or psychologist will play a key role in this situation. It is advisable to ask the parents what the youth’s health care specialist advises. Your local County Extension Office has various references that may give you additional support (New 4-H Health Curriculum: Level C - Teens Talk, Activities 4A & 5C which address depression and suicide. Other publications: 4-H 694: Helping Friends in Trouble: Stress, Depression, and Suicide; 4-H 695: Supporting Distressed Young People; 4-H 691: Teens on the Go!)

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Q Can Exploring 4-H members participate in a Shooting sports program using air rifles and pistols?

A No – Exploring 4-H members may not handle firearms – Purdue’s liability coverage does NOT extend to that age group. If they want to do something with the younger members we highly recommend the Hunting discipline games and educational activities. Perhaps you could send someone to the Spring Workshop to get certified in Hunting (Fulton Co. does not have anyone in that discipline). We recommend it for the 3rd & 4th graders, too.
Q  If a leader comes to Purdue for training in one discipline and they are NRA certified or become NRA certified in another discipline can they teach the NRA certified one. (They take shotgun through Purdue University and then they become Black powder certified with the NRA, are they legal to teach?)

A  The volunteer leaders can only teach 4-H kids in the disciplines that they were certified by 4-H in. So, to answer your question, No – a 4-H certified shotgun leader could not teach 4-H kids in muzzle regardless of other certifications. They must be certified in the discipline that they are working with our kids.

Q  I need a quick refresher as to the rules for having a field trip with 4-H shooters (kids) ... I am planning on taking a group of 5 kids 7 adults (2 instructors) to a local gun club for a sporting clays course. I am a little confused as to transportation and insurance !!!!!

A  You need to contact the Extension Office and let them know that you are taking a field trip. There is a permission form that you can get for parents to complete (Sherri should be able to make that available to you). If you already purchase a blanket insurance policy for shooting sports (or the county has a policy -- again Sherri should know), you would be covered for this activity. If you don't have the blanket policy, you can take out the policy for a single day to cover the activity. The Extension Office should always be informed when you're doing an activity, that way the educator knows that it is a legitimate event. We have a new transportation guideline that takes effect March 1. Even if your trip is yet this month, I would recommend it be followed. Since the number of adults in your message outnumbers youth you may have it covered. Parents should make arrangements for their own child's transportation. If you are in a position of "arranging" transportation, we need to be certain the requested drivers have a valid license and proof of insurance (you should see that they get it on file with the extension office). I would STRONGLY encourage you to not have individual children riding with an individual adult unless it is their own parent/guardian. And remember, you must have a certified instructor, in the appropriate discipline, along if the youth will be shooting.

Q  What can we do about “no shows” that the county paid to attend the certification workshop?

A  Many counties ask volunteers to pay for the workshop and then reimburse (all or part) of the costs after the volunteer has helped with the county program. Some counties will reimburse half the cost after one year of service and the other half after another year of service. This helps to make sure the people who show an interest will actually attend the workshop.