



Child Abuse and Reporting Protocol for 4-H Volunteers

Overview

Michigan State University strives to offer safe and supportive learning and working environments for all individuals. In support of that goal, the university has established reporting protocols for its employees and volunteers to promote the safety and security of children.

As an MSU Extension volunteer it's important to know and understand MSU's protocol for reporting suspected child abuse and other harm to children. While you may already be familiar with this protocol, MSU's policy extends beyond what is required by state law.

Introduction and Policy

As a volunteer you are required to report any perceived, disclosed, or observed harm to a child, as defined by Michigan law to MSU Police and Public Safety at 517-355-2221. This reporting is required whether the harm is committed by a parent or teacher or someone else. This is a requirement, not just for MSU volunteers, but also for MSU faculty, staff, and student employees.

MSU does not require employees or volunteer to complete the formal training that is required for mandated reporters. The term "mandated reporter" refers to a specific list of professionals who are required by law to file reports of suspected child abuse or child neglect directly with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), Child Protective Services.

MSU volunteers are considered to be mandatory reporters and are obligated to promptly report perceived, disclosed or observed harm to a child or incidents of sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexual misconduct, stalking and relationship violence that:

- Are observed or learned about in their volunteer role.
- Involve a member of the university community, including MSU Extension participants, volunteers or staff.
- Occur at a university or MSU Extension sponsored event or on university property.

We do not expect MSU Extension volunteers to investigate behavior that causes them concern—when in doubt, we urge you to make a report and allow the experts to investigate. If employees and volunteers act in good faith in the performance of their work for the University, they are covered under the [university's indemnification policy](#). Please review MSU's website for [Mandatory Reporting](#).

To contact an expert in your area, visit extension.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)

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What to do if a Child Discloses

If a child discloses abuse to you, there are some very helpful things to keep in mind. You should:

- Believe them. Thank them for telling you and trusting that you'll know how to help them.
- Listen and let the child speak on their own terms. Avoid finishing their thoughts or putting words into their mouths.
- Refrain from investigating or interrogating.
- Staying calm. Don't respond with anger, shock, or disgust.
- Do not make a promise to keep their disclosure a secret.
- Reassure the child that they are not in trouble, and they didn't do anything wrong.
- Tell the child that their safety is important to you.

It's vitally important that information is collected by the proper individuals who are trained to investigate child abuse and harm situations.

How to Report

There are a few actions that an MSU Extension volunteer is expected to take when a child discloses abuse, you suspect abuse to be taking place, or you observe non-accidental harm to a child. If you cannot quickly find this information, an MSU Extension professional can assist you.

If the situation is an emergency or someone is in immediate danger, there are four steps you will need to complete:

- **Step 1:** Call 911 or local authorities
- **Step 2:** Contact MSU Police and Public Safety at 517-355-2221. Let them know you already informed local authorities.
- **Step 3:** In cases of domestic violence, sexual misconduct, or stalking, complete a [Public Incident Report](#). In this report you will make mention that you filed the Police Report.
- **Step 4:** As stated in the Michigan State University Extension [Volunteer Code of Conduct](#), whenever a volunteer has a concern, it is best practice to inform local MSU Extension professionals of the concern. This allows local staff to make adjustments that might need to be made immediately.

If the situation is a non-emergency, there are three steps you will need to complete:

- **Step 1:** Contact MSU Police and Public Safety at 517-355-2221.
- **Step 2:** In cases of domestic violence, sexual misconduct, or stalking, complete a [Public Incident Report](#).
- **Step 3:** As stated in the Michigan State University Extension [Volunteer Code of Conduct](#), whenever a volunteer has a concern, it is best practice to inform local MSU Extension professionals of the concern. This allows local staff to make adjustments that might need to be made immediately.



For additional information, visit extension.msu.edu

What to Expect When Filing a Report

It is normal to feel anxious or uncomfortable about making a report. You might worry that you misunderstood something you heard or saw. Trust in the investigation process—it is better to be safe than sorry.

When making a report with the police or completing a [Public Incident Report](#), you will be asked to:

- Give dates of the incident (if known)
- Give location of the incident (if known)
- Identify individuals involved
- Recall what occurred

Confidentiality

Remember that confidentiality in these situations is essential. Any reports of abuse or suspected abuse by a faculty, staff, or a volunteer are kept confidential. Likewise, any conversations that you have with a local MSU Extension professional are kept confidential, except for reporting to authorities as required by MSU policy. While you are not required to let a local MSU Extension professional know that you have reported child abuse or suspected child abuse, it is considered a best practice to make them aware. It can be helpful to talk with them about the procedures for reporting to ensure that all steps have been taken and make them aware so they can take appropriate actions that might need to be taken locally.

Creating Positive Environments

MSU Extension is dedicated to creating programming environments conducive for all participants, volunteers and staff. It is the responsibility of parents and caregivers, volunteers and staff to work together to create environments that help to strengthen and promote positive youth development. When youth are supported in this way, they are better prepared with the knowledge, tools and skills to become responsible citizens and agents of community change.

Michigan State University Extension's programs are representative of Michigan State University in communities across the state. As a volunteer, you are responsible for creating and supporting these important programming environments. One way that is done is by reporting any perceived, disclosed, or observed harm to a child.

Resources

MSU and MSU Extension offer volunteers a variety of resources and support materials around the topic of child abuse, youth safety and creating safe environments. Those resources include:

- Reporting Protocol: Child Abuse and Other Harm to Children
https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/reporting_protocols.html
- University Reporting Protocol: Child Abuse and Other Harm to Children Frequently Asked Questions:
<https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/documents/UniversityReportingProtocolFAQ.pdf>

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- Public Incident Report Form:
<https://msu.publicincidentreporting.com/>
- MSU Extension Creating Safe Environments for Youth: Tools and resources for parents, caregivers, volunteers and staff interested in creating safe environments that promote positive youth development.
<https://www.canr.msu.edu/creating-safe-environments/index>