4-H Youth Artificial Intelligence Guidelines

Purpose

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are becoming part of everyday life, from school and hobbies to future careers. When used responsibly and in moderation, AI can spark and **support** creativity, boost learning, and help youth explore new skills, such as problem-solving, design and innovation. These guidelines help youth, and adults who work with youth, understand how to use AI safely, ethically, and appropriately in NDSU Extension and 4-H programs, while protecting privacy, honoring intellectual property, and following the law.

Making AI a Positive Tool for Youth

AI can be a powerful partner for:

- **Creativity:** brainstorming projects, designing visuals, developing stories or ideas
- **Learning:** building step-by-step problem-solving skills, tutoring hard subjects, and expanding vocabulary and knowledge
- **Career Skills:** preparing youth for future workforce demands in agriculture, STEM, business, communications, and more
- **Efficiency:** helping organize information, summarize content, and support time management
- **Innovation:** encouraging curiosity, experimentation, and discovery, core strengths of the 4-H program

4-H believes young people should have safe opportunities to explore new technologies that will shape tomorrow's world, while learning how to evaluate tools critically and use them for good.

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1. Safety & Privacy First

- Information shared in AI is not private. **Never share personal information** (full name, address, phone number, email, school name, photos of yourself or others) in any AI tool.
- **COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) compliance:**
    - Youth under 13 cannot create accounts or provide personal data to online services without **verifiable parental or guardian consent**.
    - Adults working with youth must ensure any AI tool used in programs is **COPPA-compliant** or accessed under adult supervision with parent or guardian permission.

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- **FERPA Considerations (if youth are in school-linked 4-H programs)** - even though 4-H is not always school-based, many clubs/activities intersect with education systems. As such:
  - AI should not be fed schoolwork that includes identifying information, grades, teacher names, etc.
  - 4-H staff should avoid uploading materials that identify school or student performance.

- **Images & Biometrics (faces, voice, etc.):** Do not upload faces, voice recordings, or identifiable images of youth into AI tools unless written permission is obtained and privacy laws are followed.
- AI should never be used in place of a trusted adult or qualified professional when medical, mental health, legal or other expert guidance is needed.

2. Appropriate AI Uses

AI can be a powerful tool to help youth learn, but youth must always be the learner. When using AI, **youth should ALWAYS**:

- **Protect** their **privacy**.
- **Be honest** about when and how AI is used.
- **Think critically** about AI products.
- **Ask questions** about AI products.

These are examples of ways that youth can use AI as a learner:

- Brainstorming ideas and finding resources for projects or presentations.
- Check spelling, grammar, or clarity.
- Generate practice questions a judge or interviewer might ask.
- Create practice questions or study guides for competitions (be sure AI is using the same resources as the competition is using).
- Summarizie approved, research-based content into simpler language.
- Practice career skills (resume, interview prep, communication) **without using personally identifiable information**.

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3. Inappropriate AI Uses

AI should never be used to cheat, harm, mislead, replace learning, or violate privacy.

This is not an exhaustive list of inappropriate uses of AI:

- Creating accounts or logging onto AI platforms without parent or guardian consent
    - Using AI when under 13 years old without parental or guardian permission (COPPA)
- Submitting AI-generated projects, essays, speeches, or art as original work (see next section for how to cite AI sources).
- Using AI to replace learning, skill development, or original thinking.
- Uploading personal photos, face images, voice recordings, or sensitive information.
- Creating realistic or altered images, videos, or text that could mislead, deceive or harm others.
- Using AI outputs without checking the information that AI generates for accuracy, credibility, or quality using credible, independent sources.
- Generating content that is harmful, misleading, discriminatory, unsafe, or inappropriate.
- Using AI to engage in bullying, targeting, harassment, or personal attacks.

Inappropriate use of AI may result in consequences consistent with applicable NDSU, NDSU Extension, county or other local policies, procedures and expectations.

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4. Transparency

- **County Fair / Achievement Day / Exhibits / Competitions:** AI-assisted work must follow 4-H exhibit and competition rules. When youth use AI as part of a project, exhibit, competition or activity, they should **always acknowledge how they used it**. Transparency helps youth recognize and take pride in their own thinking, effort, and creativity.
    - Example: "Created with assistance from AI" or *"I used [AI Tool Name] to brainstorm project ideas, but the final design and writing are my own."*
- Youth should be able to explain how they used AI, what decisions they made themselves, and how AI helped or hindered their learning during judging or interviews.
- AI should be used as a support tool, not to misrepresent someone else's or AI-generated work as the youth's own. Youth should include AI citations in project books, exhibits, or presentations when AI contributed to the work. When citing AI, youth may ask the AI to provide a citation they can include.

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Citations should include:

- Name of the AI tool and version, if known
- Date it was used
- Original prompt used (what the AI was asked to do)

Sample AI Citations:
ChatGPT (GPT-5.6), OpenAI. Used September 6, 2026. Prompt: "Help me brainstorm three ways I could test which type of insulation keeps water cold the longest for my 4-H science project."

Google Gemini (Gemini 1.5 Pro), Google. Used September 6, 2026. Prompt: "I want to paint a North Dakota sunset for my 4-H project. What painting techniques can I use to make the sky and prairie look more realistic?"

Microsoft Copilot (GPT-5), Microsoft. Used September 6, 2026. Prompt: "For my 4-H photography project, give me five tips for taking better wildlife photos outdoors and explain how to use natural light effectively."

5. Critical Thinking

AI can "hallucinate", meaning AI is not always correct and may provide inaccurate, outdated, or biased information. Youth should **examine AI output critically** by questioning answers/outputs, comparing information with trusted sources, and asking an adult when unsure.

- AI can make mistakes or show bias. Double-check facts with trusted sources.
- Youth should not simply use AI-generated content word-for-word. Critical thinking means reviewing AI output, deciding what is useful or accurate, and using their own knowledge, ideas, and judgment to make it their own.
- Use AI as a helper, not a replacement for creativity and judgment.

In 4-H, learning matters more than the final product. Youth should be able to explain what they learned and how they used *critical thinking* while interacting with AI.

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6. Volunteer & Leader Responsibilities

Volunteers and adult leaders play an important role in modeling and supporting responsible AI use to help youth become Beyond Ready for future learning, careers, and opportunities.

Adults should:

- Guide youth in using AI as a learning support, not as a replacement for original work, creativity, or skill development.
- Ensure responsible AI use to help prepare youth to be Beyond Ready for the future
- With youth, review their projects for transparency, originality, and appropriate acknowledgments.
- Confirm that AI use is **COPPA-compliant**.
- **NOT** upload youth names, photos, or identifiable information into AI tools.
- Use questions about the youth's process to understand how AI contributed to the work and how the youth used their own thinking, creativity, and judgment.

Adults do not need to be AI experts or AI detectives. AI use may not be apparent from the final product. The focus should be on the youth's learning, using questions to explore their process, decisions and use of AI.

- Tell me about how you created this project.
- What tools or resources did you use?
- Did AI help with any part of your project? How?
- What did you change from what AI suggested? Why?
- How did you decide whether the information AI gave you was accurate?
- What did you learn through this project?

These guidelines help youth use AI safely, responsibly, and creatively while developing critical thinking, protecting privacy, and building the skills they need to be Beyond Ready for future learning, careers, and opportunities.

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For questions or suggested revisions, contact Margo Bowerman, Extension Specialist – 4-H STEM, at margo.bowerman@ndsu.edu.

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Resources

- ChatGPT (GPT-5.2), OpenAI. Used January 2, 2026.
  - Prompt: "Referencing the NDSU Extension AI Guidelines conversation, let's create a Youth guidelines document that also includes COPPA requirements. Put this in a document I can download."
- Gemini 3 Flash. Used: January 2, 2026
  - Prompt: "Play the role of an NDSU Extension Artificial Intelligence Task Force member. Develop guidelines for NDSU Extension staff based on provided documents, then create a version specific to youth guidelines for AI use that includes COPPA requirements."
- Gunder, A., Farmakis, H., Johnson, N., Herron, J., Weber, N., Chelf, C., & Ford, C. (2026). Dimensions of AI literacies for learners. Opened Culture. https://openedculture.com/projects/dimensions-of-ai-literacies/
- Mensah, E. A., & Osman, N. (2024). Integrating Generative AI Tools into Extension Program Planning and Evaluation (Publication 4061). Mississippi State University Extension. https://extension.msstate.edu/publications/integrating-generative-ai-tools-extension-program-planning-and-evaluation
- Microsoft Copilot (GPT-5). Used: January 2, 2026.
  - Prompt: "Create a document that is specific to youth guidelines for AI use that includes COPPA requirements."
- Michigan State University Extension. (2025, July). MSU Extension Guidance for Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). https://www.canr.msu.edu/od/educational-technology/uploads/MSU%20Extension%20AI%20Guidance%20Document.pdf
- Michigan State University Extension. (2025, September). AI Guidance for 4-H Volunteers. https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/ai-guidance-for-4-h-volunteers
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- North Dakota State University. (n.d.). Guidebook: Using AI Effectively and Responsibly. NDSU. https://www.ndsu.edu/otl/instructor_resources
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- Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. (2025, February). Artificial intelligence procedures (29.01.05.A0.01). Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. https://agrilifeas.tamu.edu/documents/290105x001.pdf/
- University of Maine Cooperative Extension. (2025, July 15). University of Maine Cooperative Extension Generative AI Guidelines (Version 1.0). https://extension.umaine.edu/plugged-in/policies-guidelines/ai/#generative-ai-guidelines
- Virginia Cooperative Extension. (2025, February 26). Virginia Cooperative Extension Guidance for Use of Generative AI. Virginia Tech and Virginia State University. https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/VCE/VCE-1213/VCE-1213.html
- Weibe, A., Warren, D., Patel, D., & Locklear, M. (2025). 2025 Extension Foundation National AI Report. Extension Foundation. https://extension.org/portfolio-item/2025-extension-foundation-national-ai-report/

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