

## **Involving Extension Council Youth Members in Confidential Discussions and Closed Meetings**

**September 2016**

The purpose of this handout is to offer County Extension Councils guidance with involving non-voting youth members in confidential discussions and closed meetings, including support in maintaining confidentiality outside of meetings.

**Non-voting youth members** are young people ages 14-17 who have been formally selected or appointed to serve a term on their County Extension Council.

Since 2005, MU Extension has identified youth as a strategic stakeholder group for councils to engage both now and for the future.

**Research on ages and stages of youth development** demonstrates that young people ages 14-17 are becoming developmentally ready to take on leadership roles in their communities. They are developing the cognitive skills (community consciousness, abstract thinking, and problem solving) and maturity, which, with the support of adults, make them capable of serving on councils.

Young people who are appointed as members of County Extension Councils serve in order to learn what is going on in their communities and to contribute to discussions and decisions councils make.

**According to Missouri State Statutes**, youth members under age 18 cannot have a binding vote on council matters. However, youth members can and are encouraged to voice their ideas and opinions which may influence the votes of adult council members.

In council decisions involving personnel, budgets, policy, or other matters that may raise sensitive or confidential information, councils are encouraged to involve youth members in the same manner as adult council members. Excluding youth members from council proceedings on the basis of their age, lack of experience, or non-voting status is discouraged, and may in fact be viewed as discriminatory.

### **Involving non-voting youth members**

Councils can take measures to ensure youth (and all council members) are prepared to participate in sensitive/confidential proceedings. Recommended steps:

1. Ensure council proceedings involving confidential discussions or closed meetings are conducted in compliance with [Missouri Sunshine Law](#).
2. Inform all council members beforehand of the sensitive or confidential nature of discussions, and remind them of their responsibilities.

3. Prior to serving on council, have youth members read and sign the [Extension Council Youth Leadership \(ECYL\) Code of Conduct](#). The code of conduct includes a commitment to be trustworthy and reliable in carrying out the responsibilities they have accepted. This includes handling sensitive or confidential information with responsibility.
4. Ensure youth members receive [ECYL Youth Orientation Materials](#) and understand their role as council members. The orientation informs youth that some council discussions may be sensitive or confidential, and will require them to handle information they may learn with discretion.
5. Follow up with youth members after sensitive or confidential discussions to ask if they have questions, and to clarify expectations for all council members.

By supporting youth members in exercising good judgment, councils grow the qualities of true leaders and prepare young people to continue leadership with MU Extension, their communities, and the world.

For more information on council leadership development, see the [Council Leadership Training](#) site and [Council Resource Toolbox](#).

## Sources:

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Williams, Mary Jo. "Ages & Stages of 4-H Youth Development." Missouri 4-H Center for Youth Development. MU Extension Publication LG782, Oct. 1999 (Rev. 2012).  
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