

Creating Inclusive 4-H Programs: Supporting Participation for Youth with Disabilities

4-H is built on the belief that **every young person deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and belong**. Our programs are strongest when youth of all abilities are able to participate to the fullest extent possible.

Sometimes, participants may need additional support or adjustments to take part in 4-H activities. These additional supports or adjustments are called accommodations. When accommodations may be needed, our role is to **work collaboratively with families and USU support professionals to reduce barriers**, while keeping program goals and safety in mind.

Why Accommodations Matter

As a program of Utah State University, USU 4-H must follow **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**, which require us to provide equal access and reasonable accommodations so individuals with disabilities can participate in our programs.

In practice, this means:

- Focusing on participation, not exclusion, or disability
- Clearly communicating how participants may request accommodations
- Considering accommodations on an individualized and **case-by-case basis**
- Connecting with support when questions arise

Notes on accommodations:

1. **No Cost:** We cannot charge a family extra because their child needs an accommodation.
 2. **No "No" without the DRC:** You have the power to say "Yes" to simple supports. You **do not** have the authority to deny a request or turn a child away without consulting the **USU Disability Resource Center (DRC)** first.
 3. **Fundamental Change:** We aren't required to change the *core* of the program (e.g., we don't have to make a "hiking club" a "city walk club"), but we must do everything possible to help the youth participate in the hike.
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What Is a Disability?

The term disability is much broader than many people think. A disability includes any physical, mental, cognitive, or health-related condition that affects how someone moves, communicates, learns, sees, hears, thinks, or performs daily activities. Some disabilities are visible, but most are not.

You may learn about a participant's disability:

- When it is physically visible
- Directly from a parent/guardian
- On a registration form
- When an accommodation is requested

You do **not** need to determine whether someone “qualifies” as having a disability. Your role is to listen, respond supportively, and connect with the Disability Resource Center for help if needed.

Accessibility Statement for All Programs and Events

To promote inclusion and ensure families know how to request support, every 4-H program and/or event should have someone assigned to receive accommodation requests and all advertisements and registration forms should include the following statement:

Accessibility Statement

To ask questions about accessibility or to request accommodations, please reach out at (email, phone number)

How to Respond When a Participant May Need an Accommodation

When a participant (or a parent/guardian) shares a disability-related concern, follow these steps:

Step 1: Affirm Inclusion and Ask About Participation

Begin by affirming 4-H's commitment to inclusion. For example:

“We want everyone to be able to participate in 4-H to the extent that they are able, and we're happy to talk through what might be helpful.”

Step 2: Consider Whether Barriers Exist

If the participant or parent indicates that the disability may impact participation:

- Do **not** assume participation is impossible
- Do **not** deny participation or dismiss the concern

Then, ask in plain language how the disability might affect participation:

- “Are there ways the disability will impact participation?”
- “Are there any barriers in our current setup that we can help remove?”

This conversation should be respectful, supportive, and focused on participation—not on diagnosis or proof.

Step 3: Talk Through Possible Supports

Ask whether there are adjustments or supports that could help the participant take part.

- “What would allow you to participate?”
- “Are there supports or adjustments that have helped in similar programs?”

Examples of possible adjustments or accommodations:

- Adjusting schedules or activity formats
- Modifying equipment or materials
- Providing communication or sensory supports
- Making physical spaces more accessible
- Allowing parental involvement beyond what is typical

This step is exploratory. You are not expected to have all the answers.

Step 4: Implement the Accommodation or Contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC)

If you can provide the requested accommodation easily without fundamentally altering the program, creating too much additional work, or creating a safety risk—you may proceed with the accommodation.

If you have questions or concerns regarding the accommodation, contact the Disability Resource Center. You are not expected to make these decisions on your own.

DRC Contact Information:

- **Email:** DRC@usu.edu
- **Phone:** (435) 797-2444

Important:

A potential participant **may not be turned away**, and/or an accommodation request **may not be denied**, without consulting the Disability Resource Center.

Safety Considerations

If there are concerns that participation—even with supports—may pose a health or safety risk to the participant or others, those concerns should be discussed with supervisors and the Disability Resource Center.

Confidentiality and Respect

Information about a participant’s disability or medical condition is private.

- Share details only with those who need the information to support participation
- Do not share disability-related information with other participants or families

Respect and discretion are essential to maintaining trust.

Quick Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Focus on "How can we help you participate?"	Ask for a medical diagnosis or "proof."
Keep disability information strictly confidential.	Share a youth's needs with other parents/participants.
Contact the DRC before saying "no."	Deny a request because it seems "too difficult" or "expensive."
Include the Accessibility Statement on all advertisements.	Wait until the day of the event to discuss needs.