



Dear Parent,

Teen Conference is typically the first big “away from home” event for the youth who attend, so it’s very normal for a child attending for the first time to be a little nervous at first. We focus on giving them a safe and warm environment, providing opportunities to make a lot of new friends quickly, and keeping them very engaged with fun group activities. Teen Conference is developed and lead by the older teens of the State 4-H Council, under the guidance of myself and three other adult advisors. Most of these Council members vividly remember that feeling of coming to Teen Conference for the first time themselves! By the time your child goes to bed that night, they know their roommates very well and are tired out from all the activities. Homesickness is actually very rare at Teen Conference.

To give you a quick overview, youth arrive at the hotel with their parents and immediately go through the registration line, getting things like their nametags and t-shirts. After they pack away their t-shirt, one of the older State 4-H Council teens will take their luggage for them (which is stored in a locked room at the hotel). Parents typically depart at that point, but you are most welcome to go with your child(ren) to the large banquet room nearby, where there are energizer activities that help them meet many of the other youth in a fun and non-threatening way. It’s very normal for new arrivals to feel pretty shy at first, and our State 4-H Council Teens do a great job of helping everyone feel comfortable and welcome. During this time, everyone is brought into their group and gets to know their chaperone.

Soon the groups (including the chaperone) all board the bus together and head for the MU campus where they will have an opening assembly and attend fun & educational workshops. Their workshop assignment is on the back of their nametag, and everything takes place in a single building (Middlebush Hall). After they cycle through four workshops, each region meets together (youth and chaperones), and boards the bus back to the hotel. Awaiting them is supper and several evening activities to choose from (like a dance, computers, robotics, video games, or a movie). Finally it’s time to go to rooms and prepare for lights out. Their chaperone will do a room check to make sure everyone is where they’re supposed to be.

Sunday morning we have breakfast, some more activities, and a morning assembly featuring a special guest speaker. The delegates tend to be pretty loud and excited, and the State 4-H Council has fun keeping them that way! By 11 a.m., after the closing assembly, parents are typically there waiting and help their children pick up their luggage and head for home. You’ll probably find that they’re both excited and exhausted on the trip home, and that they have several new friends they look forward to seeing at future state 4-H events.



The top priority of Teen Conference is your child's safety. Education and fun are also very important, but safety comes first in everything we do. This is accomplished with a secure environment and strong accountability practices.

- 1) We create a secure environment by requiring (and verifying) that all adult chaperones are either 4-H faculty or 4-H volunteers who have received volunteer training and a background check. At our event sites – the Holliday Inn Executive Center and Middlebush hall on the MU Campus – we have strong chaperone coverage and youth stay together. During evening activities at the hotel, we only allow youth delegates and adult chaperones into Teen Conference activity areas. Chaperones are stationed the entrances, checking the name badges of everyone coming and going. Finally, we have collegiate 4-H'ers patrolling the hallways at night, to help any young person find their chaperone (or room!) if needed.
- 2) We maintain very strong “accountability” by limiting how many youth each chaperone can be in charge of, requiring the chaperone to be “keeper of the hotel keys” for their assigned youth, and requiring chaperones to verify that all their youth are with them before the bus can leave as we transition between the hotel and the MU campus. Room checks are done by the chaperones before “lights out” on Saturday evening.

Youth rate Teen Conference very highly each year (most give it a 9/10 or 10/10) and it's a great entry point to future state 4-H events when they are older. There are some photos from last year posted at our Missouri 4-H Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/missouri4h>) that you might wish to check out. I hope this information is helpful in your preparations, and we hope to see your family at Teen Conference.

Sincerely,



Bradd L. Anderson
State 4-H Youth Development Specialist