



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 many new friends quickly, and keeping them very engaged with fun group activities. Teen Conference is developed and led 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 Expo Center with their parents and immediately go through the registration line, getting things like their nametags. After they are registered, one of the older State 4-H Council teens will take their luggage for them (which is stored in a secured area at the hotel). Next, they move over to join the larger group, where there are energizer activities that help them meet many of the other youth in a fun and non-threatening way. Parents typically depart at that point, but you are most welcome to hang out and observe until you feel comfortable. 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 meeting new friends, and near the end they are brought into their chaperone groups for activities to help them become familiar with their chaperone and the other youth in that group.

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. We do not leave until each chaperone verifies that they have all of their assigned youth. Each child’s 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) to check in with everyone and make sure they are ready for the next transition.

From there, we will walk as a group to Plaza 900, a fabulous campus dining facility that offers a wide variety of foods and desserts. After the meal, we will board school busses by chaperone groups and return to the hotel, once every chaperone confirms that all of their youth are accounted for.



Back at the hotel, everyone receives their room keys and Teen Conference t-shirts from their chaperone. After some time to take up their luggage and check out their room, they return downstairs for the rest of the evening. There are several activities to choose from (like a dance, science activities, and a movie), all in rooms that are next to each other or across the hall. Most youth like to move among the activities, enjoying the experience of each and revisiting their favorites. Finally, it's time to prepare for lights out and we get together by regions to wind down with some quiet activities. After the youth are dismissed to their rooms, their chaperone will do room checks. This confirms that everyone is where they are supposed to be, with the correct bed assignment, and helps those who are having a little more difficulty settling down and going to sleep.

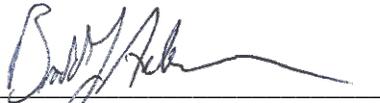
Sunday morning we have breakfast, some more activities, and a morning assembly featuring a special guest speaker. The delegates tend to be pretty loud and excited, and the State 4-H Council has fun keeping them that way! By 11 a.m., after the closing assembly, parents are typically there waiting and help their children pick up their luggage and head for home. You will probably find that they are excited, proud, 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 Holiday Inn Executive Center and 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, providing security and helping youth find their chaperone if needed.
- 2) We maintain very strong accountability by limiting how many youth each chaperone can be in charge of to 10, 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 we transition to the next location.

Youth rate Teen Conference very highly each year (most give it a 9/10 or 10/10) and it is a great entry point to future state 4-H events when they are older. I hope this information is helpful in your preparations, and we hope to see your family at Teen Conference!

Sincerely,



Bradd L. Anderson
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