



DISMISSING A VOLUNTEER

Preventive Action: The following actions can minimize problems.

- ✓ A formal screening and selection process (application forms, interviews, reference checks, and rating systems).
- ✓ A contract between the Volunteer and the Extension Educator or Program Leader.
- ✓ Volunteer job descriptions.
- ✓ Orientation of new volunteers.
- ✓ Volunteer handbook that describes behavior guidelines, expectations, and policies.
- ✓ Adequate supervision and coordination of volunteer programs.
- ✓ Clearly defined relationship between volunteers and staff.
- ✓ Special training for Extension personnel who work with volunteers.

Be prepared: Develop policies before a problem occurs.

- ✓ Establish policies under which a volunteer may be placed on probation, suspended, or dismissed.
- ✓ Develop a graduated system of punishment (e.g., warning, suspension, termination) and fair enforcement policies.

Alternatives to Dismissal: Dismiss a volunteer as a last resort. Many situations do not require such drastic action.

- ✓ Remind the volunteer that policies and procedures must be followed.
- ✓ Retrain a volunteer who needs a refresher course or more extensive training.
- ✓ Re-motivate a volunteer who is suffering from boredom or loss of enthusiasm.
- ✓ Reassign a volunteer who is mismatched to the job or to co-workers.
- ✓ Refer a volunteer to another agency to which he/she is more suited.
- ✓ Retire a volunteer with honor.

Before Dismissal: Never dismiss a volunteer on the spot. A formal system for dismissing volunteers is needed to ensure fairness.

- ✓ Give warning. Notify volunteers (in both verbal and written communication) when they violate policies.
- ✓ Investigate the alleged offense(s). This includes documenting the volunteer's side of the story and any proof of policy violation.
- ✓ Consider developing an action plan to correct the problem, depending on the seriousness of the offense(s). Each item of the action plan will have specific dates for accomplishment. Develop the plan with input from the volunteer.
- ✓ Allow the volunteer to appeal rulings.
- ✓ Consider using a committee of peer volunteers to aid in the process.

The Dismissal Interview: This should be done personally by the Extension Educator and/or Volunteer Coordinator.

- ✓ Be quick, direct, and absolute.
- ✓ Announce, don't argue. The trial has already been conducted.
- ✓ Do not attempt to counsel. If counseling were an alternative, it would have been done earlier in the process.
- ✓ Confirm termination with a written letter, and settle any unfinished business needed to end the volunteer's relationship with the agency.

References:

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- WSU Cooperative Extension. 1996. *A Valuable Partnership: Volunteers and the 4-H Youth Development Program (C1000)*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Cooperative Extension.

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