



Suits, Safety and Suitability: The Alabama 4-H Clothing Philosophy

Clothing choices are crucial aspects of Belonging, Independence, Generosity and Mastery. The most important purpose of the Dress Code is to ensure that young people dress safely. Although we can sometimes provide “teachable moments,” kids whose clothing may seem most extreme are often the ones who need 4-H the most.

Belonging: Nothing expresses group identity like what you wear. For example, religious identity is sometimes demonstrated by the length of a girl’s skirt or by an hijab, an Islamic head scarf. Cowboy boots or saggy pants may mark your group identity, and black clothes suggest that you want to be a rebel like Johnny Cash or a rebel like modern Goths. 4-H kids don’t think alike and often don’t dress alike, so we need to be prepared for diversity in fashion.

We should encourage young people to identify with 4-H. Clubs can develop opportunities to wear 4-H club t-shirts. Youth will also find it appropriate to “dress like you are in 4-H.” That is widely perceived to be neat and clean in appearance and to not be disruptive to the over-all educational experience.

Independence: It’s natural that young people push boundaries, developing their own personal identity. Clothing is the megaphone they use to say: “This is who I am.” And each generation is challenged by the generation behind it, a battle that no group of adults has ever won.

As young people develop independence, it is also important that they learn respect for others. Clothing choices should respect other participants and the 4-H institution. For example, social propriety indicates that it is not respectful for boys to wear hats during the Pledge of Allegiance.

Generosity: Acceptance and tolerance identify a generous spirit. Clothing choices are not always simple. There may be economic factors at work in a child’s clothing choices; perhaps a child has no guidance on propriety; or perhaps a plea for attention reflects larger personal issues. As with everything else in 4-H, kindness and compassion should be the basis for all interactions. Direction can easily be given without embarrassing or hurting a child.

Mastery: Learning to dress appropriately is an art to be mastered. Babies are not born knowing that they should dress differently for a job interview and a swim party; it’s something that is learned. 4-H may teach clothing propriety just as easily as we teach public speaking or pet care. Any group can discuss “What should we wear to the Senior Citizens’ Center?” or “What should we wear to 4-H club meetings?” And remember: rules and guidelines always work better when young people are involved in developing them.

Safety: Young people’s clothing choices should not jeopardize their health or safety. Examples would be the specific rules for safety around livestock or for learning to select appropriate clothing for an outdoor hike or when working around an open flame.



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Alabama 4-H Dress Code

Responsibility for grooming and the appearance of each 4-H participant rests with the individual 4-H'er, parents, volunteers, and Extension staff. It is the philosophy of the Alabama 4-H & Youth Development Program that proper dress and good grooming contribute to good citizenship.

It is the Alabama 4-H & Youth Development Program's responsibility to ensure that participants' appearance does not jeopardize individual health and safety, nor that of others, and does not interfere or create disruptions during 4-H activities and events. To ensure that health standards, safety conditions, and proper educational process are maintained, the following grooming guidelines apply to all state 4-H activities and events:

- Clothes are clean and in good repair, free of holes, tears, or slashes.
- Clothes are free from violent or drug-related material, sexual content or anything that alludes to violations of the 4-H Code of Conduct.
- Cover-ups are worn with swimsuits when not participating in water activities or sunbathing. Revealing suits will not be tolerated.
- All items designated as underwear are kept under cover.
- No tops that expose undergarments.
- No pants or shorts that expose undergarments.
- Hats, hoods, caps, and visors need to be removed for meeting, workshops, meals, flag-raising, pledges and when asked.
- Shoes must be worn at all times except at the pool.
- Closed-toed shoes are required at all times for livestock and equine events.

4-H Members should dress appropriately for the occasion. It is the responsibility of all 4-H Youth, Volunteers, and paid staff to hold 4-H Members accountable for appropriate dress. The following dress guidelines will be used and published in 4-H informational communications like meeting agendas and programs.

C – *casual*, examples: shorts, tee shirts, sandals, flip flops, jeans, and athletic shoes.

BC – *business casual*, examples: khaki slacks/skirts, button-down shirts/blouses, polo shirts/blouses, leather type shoes/boots.

D – *dress*, examples: shirt and tie for young men with a blazer or suit coat preferable or dress khaki slacks with socks and dress shoes/boots. Dressy dress or pantsuit or party dress for females.

These are general guidelines that should be observed at all state 4-H activities and events. Other guidelines for specific events may be issued if warranted.



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