

Orientation for New Scout Parents

Training Summary

The world of Scouting can seem strange and confusing to new parents, even those who have been involved in Cub Scouting or who were Scouts themselves. This orientation—a series of brief presentations that can be mixed and matched is designed to draw new parents into the troop experience and give them the information they need to enjoy the program and help their youth succeed.

Time Required

Approximately 45 minutes (not including time for questions). Although the orientation can be presented all at once in a single session, it is designed to be done in “bite-sized” pieces over a period of weeks or months, with segments repeated as appropriate. Troop leaders may have several opportunities to interact with parents of youth who are new to Scouting and, also, with Webelos Scouts through a joint troop/pack activity or a Scoutmaster appearance at a den or pack meeting. Orientation to Scouting should begin early as part of “selling” parents on Scouting. Once the youth are in the troop, it may be desirable to bring the new parents along slowly rather than dump a lot of information on them in one session. This orientation is divided into three main sessions—that should be no longer than 12–15 minutes: Why Scouting? The Scouting Program, and What You Need to Know About Our Troop—Each session should be followed by a short conclusion.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will be able to

- Introduce parents of Cub Scouts to the Scouts BSA program and how it differs from Cub Scouting.
- Show parents how Scouting gives youth what they want and offers what they, as parents, need from a program for their children.
- Introduce parents to how the troop works.
- Show parents that by participating in the troop, they can help their youth succeed, and that it can be personally rewarding for them as well.
- Introduce parents to some of the troop leaders.

Training Format

Discussion: This orientation is best presented to small groups in an informal setting: a new parent meeting around a table in a school cafeteria or around the campfire at a joint troop/Webelos den campout. This format allows the presenters to begin developing a personal connection to the parents while the parents, in turn, develop trust in the troop leaders.

Ideally, the orientation will include multiple presenters—e.g., the Scoutmaster, the senior patrol leader, the troop committee chair, an assistant Scoutmaster with one or two years of experience, or a Scout parent who serves as a committee member and occasionally drives to campouts or sits on boards of review. Each of them could handle one or two topics to reduce the burden on each presenter and give the parents different perspectives on the program. Presenters should know their material well and use only a few notes to maintain informality. A whiteboard or easel pad may be used occasionally to keep a few important points in front of the parents during the discussion.

Handout/PowerPoint: As an alternative, a few of the segments can be adapted into handouts or PowerPoint presentations. For example, if you have only 15 minutes, the presenters may choose

to do three live segments and cover two other segments with handouts that the parents can take home to read at their leisure or a PowerPoint presentation posted on the troop website. Or to add variety, the orientation could have a live segment followed by a PowerPoint show.

Required Materials

- Scout uniform shirt with troop numerals and some patches
- *Scouts BSA Handbook for Boys/Scouts BSA Handbook for Girls*
- Troop calendar
- Troop-created parent handbook or informational handout
- Youth applications
- Adult applications
- Note cards for presenter notes (optional)
- Easel and pad or whiteboard, markers (optional)
- Food and drink, napkins, plates, cups for cracker barrel (optional)

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Trainer Tip: If possible, the introduction should be done by an adult from the troop dressed in ordinary business attire or street clothes—what most of the parents will be wearing—rather than in uniform. This creates a connection with the parents and sends the message that you don't have to be one of those uniformed people to be involved in the troop.

Thank the parents for giving you this opportunity to meet with them and for taking the time to learn a little bit about this great program for youth. Deal with any preliminary issues—the length of the session, where the restrooms are, sign-in sheet, handouts, etc.

Introduce each presenter—their name, role in the troop, how long they have been in Scouts BSA or Cub Scouting. This part should be informal and fun. The introductions help to show the friendship, fun, and fellowship that awaits the parents in Scouting.

Tell the parents that you would like to talk to them for a few minutes about what the Scouts BSA program is and how it works.

Part 1:

Why Scouting?

Trainer Tip: *Practice, practice, practice. The presenter's hands will be occupied during this segment, so he or she won't be able to use notes. This segment should be smooth and conversational. If one of the troop adults likes putting on a show, this may be the segment for that person. Also, the presenter for this segment should be in full uniform.*

Presenter: Good evening. It's a pleasure meeting you all and getting this chance to tell you a little bit about our troop. I'd like to show you something. (*Hold up the uniform shirt.*) This is the Scout uniform shirt that the Scouts and adults in our troop wear. There are three points I'd like to make about it:

- First, the Scout uniform shirt is a traditional Scout item. Scouts have been wearing Scout uniforms for more than a hundred years. You shouldn't see anyone but Scouts wearing Scout uniforms.
- Second, each Scout shirt is a bit different. There is a standard starting place—a blank shirt that you can buy at any Scout shop—but then each Scout's shirt starts to look different. There are different sizes, different patches. All Scout shirts have the same basic shape but, beyond that, there is endless variety.
- Third, Scout shirts are generally decorated on just one side—the outside, the part you show off.

The Scouting program itself is a lot like the Scout shirt.

To start with, it is a traditional program. Scouts today enjoy many of the same activities that Scouts enjoyed when Scout's founder, Robert Baden-Powell created the Scouting movement more than a century ago. There are many other things about Scouting that haven't changed much over time, such as the Scout Law and the Scout Oath. The Scouting program has three aims, or purposes, that shape the program: character development, citizenship training, leadership, and mental and physical fitness.

However, Scouts and Scouting adults also have unique experiences. Everybody's time in Scouting is different. And just like the patches, Scouts and Scouting adults come in an almost endless variety of colors and shapes and personalities and skills and even political persuasions. *But they are all Scouts*, because they all strive toward those same four aims: character development, citizenship training, leadership, and mental and physical fitness.

Finally, Scouting is like a Scout shirt because it has a “showy” side and a plain side. The showy side of the program is what attracts youth—the fun and outdoor adventure. That is the fun stuff, the colorful stuff, the stuff you look at and point at and say, “That's cool—I want to do that.” But the adults like us are concerned about the other side. On that other side, our eyes are not distracted by the colors and designs, by the showy stuff. We look at what the Scout shirt—the Scouting program—is made of. We can feel the fabric. We see the four aims clearly—character development, citizenship training, leadership, and mental and physical fitness. We're glad that the youth are drawn to the colorful stuff on the outside, but what really matters to us is on the inside.

What's in It for My Youth?

Trainer Tip: *Practice, practice, practice. You'll be reading aloud to a group of parents, so you don't want to stumble and fumble over the words, and you want to get the emphasis right. You should also be familiar enough with the reading that you can seamlessly look up from the text and make eye contact while still speaking, and then look back at the right spot in the text.*

Presenter: This is the *Scouts BSA Handbook*. The book contains pretty much everything your Scout will need to know to become skilled in Scouting. I encourage you to get a copy, if you don't already have one, and dip into it with your Scout. This book will tell you what Scouting is all about: hiking, camping, cooking, first aid, citizenship, nutrition, health, and fitness.

All youth have an incredible number of activities they can pursue—all kinds of sports, music lessons, before-school activities, after-school activities, in-school activities. And they are great. But none of them have, in one place, the fun and challenge that Scouting offers.

Our kids also have an incredible number of distractions—video games, cell phones, instant messaging, movies, and hundreds of TV channels of television. We offer your Scout the chance to swap a few hours of that for a few hours of *this*. (*Presenter holds up the Scouts BSA Handbook.*)

What's in It for Me?

Trainer Tip: *This segment could be easily adapted into a PowerPoint presentation.*

Presenter: Have you ever asked yourself: “What would I like my youth to grow up to be?”

Maybe you think in terms of a career: a doctor, a big-league baseball player, a teacher, president of the United States.

Maybe you think in terms of what you want them to have: lots of money, a nice family, and happiness.

Those are all wonderful hopes for your youth. But have you ever thought about the kind of *person* you want them to be?

Imagine your youth walking down the street 30 years from now. When people see them, they'll say things like: “There goes so-and-so, who's really been a good friend to me.” Or, “There's so-and-so, who I can always be count on.” Or, “There's so-and-so; you'll never find a better person.”

I'd like to read a list of words. Please raise your hand if you would like one of these words to describe your youth when they're grown up:

- Trustworthy
- Loyal
- Helpful
- Friendly
- Courteous
- Kind

- Obedient
- Cheerful
- Thrifty
- Brave
- Clean
- Reverent

You've probably heard that list before. It is the Scout Law. If you are asking yourself, "Why should we get involved with Scouts?" think about what you'd like your youth to be when they grow up—and think about those 12 words.

Part 2:

The Scouting Program

Presenter: You may recall that the Scouting program has four aims or purposes: character development, citizenship training, leadership, and mental and physical fitness. What makes Scouting unique is that it has eight methods it uses to achieve those aims. Those eight methods define Scouting and show how it is different from other programs.

Ideals—The ideals of Scouting are spelled out in the Scout Oath, the Scout Law, the Scout motto, and the Scout slogan. Scouts measure themselves against these ideals and continually try to improve.

Patrol method—Patrols are small groups of Scouts who camp together, cook together, play together, and learn together. Patrols are where Scouts learn citizenship at the most basic level. They also take on responsibilities within the patrol and learn teamwork and leadership. Patrols sort of look like Cub Scout dens, but there is one big difference: Patrols elect their own leaders, and through these patrol leaders, Scouts have a voice in deciding what activities the troop will put on its calendar. Patrols are one component of what we call a youth-run or youth-led troop.

Outdoor programs—Scouting is designed to take place outdoors. We camp. We hike. We get dirty. We get up close and personal with bugs and spiders. There's no way around it. Our program is largely built around outdoor activities. So, we should expect to have more laundry after a campout and to hear some interesting stories about wild things.

Advancement—Scouting has a system of ranks in which Scouts learn progressively more difficult skills and take on progressively greater responsibilities. The highest of these ranks is Eagle Scout. Becoming an Eagle Scout is an important achievement that your child can be proud of throughout life. But turning out Eagle Scouts is not what the Scouting program is all about. Advancement is probably the most visible of the Scouting methods, and the easiest to understand, but it is only one of eight methods. We strongly encourage advancement, but we never force it—advancement is the Scout's choice, and they set their own pace. We don't do "lock-step" advancement. And many great Scouts never became Eagle Scouts.

Association with adults—Youth learn a great deal by watching how adults conduct themselves. Scout leaders can be positive role models for the members of the troop. In many cases, a Scoutmaster, a merit badge counselor, or one of the troop parents who is willing to listen to them, encourage them, and take a sincere interest in them can make a profound difference in their lives. Adult association is also part of what we call a youth-led troop.

Adults understand that their role is to create a safe place where Scouts can learn and grow and explore and play and take on responsibilities—and fail and get up and try again. If you were involved with Cub Scouting, this is a very different role that can take some time getting used to.

Personal growth—As Scouts plan their activities and progress toward their goals, they experience personal growth. The Good Turn concept is a major part of the personal growth method of Scouting. Youth grow as they participate in community service projects and do Good Turns for others. Probably no device is as successful in developing a basis for personal growth as the daily Good Turn. The religious emblems program also is a large part of the personal growth method. Frequent personal conferences with the Scoutmaster help each Scout to determine their growth toward Scouting’s aims.

Leadership Development—The Scouting program encourages youth to learn and practice leadership skills. Every Scout can lead in some way, whether as part of a team, or as the leader of the patrol or as the senior patrol leader of the troop. Leadership development is an important component of the youth-led troop.

Uniform—Like most sports teams, Scouts wear a uniform. Like most sports teams, we expect our Scouts to wear the uniform when they are doing Scouting, and to wear it properly. It is a symbol of who we are and what we do.

I’d like to come back a moment to the youth-led concept of Scouting. As I mentioned before, it is different than how Cub Scouting works, and it is different from the way a lot of youth activities are run, where the adults decide what to do and the youth do it. Scouting is different, and it is sometimes difficult for adults to realize that we have a different role and a different goal.

In Cub Scouting and in many other programs, our goal is to have fun activities and generate achievements. Our role is to make sure that the activities happen, that the achievements take place. But in Scouting, the role of the Scout is to have fun activities and generate achievements. The role of the adults is not the destination, but the journey. That is, our responsibility as adults is to promote the “process” of Scouting. What is important for us is

- Not the food on the campout, but that the Scouts cooked it.
- Not a sharp-looking flag ceremony, but that the Scouts put it together.
- Not who would make the best patrol leader, but that the Scouts elect one.
- Not that the Scout learns first aid, but that another Scout teaches it.
- Not that we cover everything on the meeting agenda, but that the senior patrol leader is in charge.

Our goal is not to get things done, but to create a safe and healthy environment with the training and resources that the Scouts need, and then let them do it. It can be a very messy business, and painful to watch. Meetings where the youth leaders are in charge can be very chaotic. And it can be very tempting for adults to jump in and sort things out, because that is what adults do. But we must remember that is the process of Scouting. That is how they learn—even from disorganization and failure. We must remember that our business as adults is not the same

as the business of the youth. It is up to them to get things done. It is up to us to make sure they have what they need, but—within the bounds of health and safety—we should never dictate what they do with it.

Now, a word about youth protection. The Boy Scouts of America has had a very strong program in place for many years to protect our youth from abuse of all kinds. We require all our leaders to be trained in youth protection and to refresh that training at regular intervals. There are some rules we follow that you will hear about, such as two-deep leadership and no one-on-ones. That means that there should not be a situation where a Scout leader is alone with a single Scout. There are other rules and policies as well, and we encourage you to take the training and learn about youth protection.

Part 3:

What You Need to Know About Our Troop

Trainer Tip: *In this segment, troop adults should take about 10 minutes to cover matters specifically relating to their troop: how to register, how much to pay, where to get uniforms and gear, what to get first, the troop calendar, meetings and upcoming activities, summer camp, how the troop does this, and how it does that. No need to get into a lot of detail or try to cover every little thing. Instead, focus on an overview of the troop and what the parents need to know right now, not what they will need to know six months from now. The troop should have a handout or handbook that has contact information for the troop leaders and other essential information. Make sure that if something is important, it is on a handout in the parents' hands. It is recommended that you hand out the "Welcome to Our Troop" pages at the end of this presentation. You may wish to build in time for questions.*

Settling into The Troop

Trainer Tip: *This segment could be easily adapted into a PowerPoint presentation. This segment could be given by multiple presenters, each doing a paragraph as a sort of mini-testimonial about Scouting.*

Presenter: You may wonder—and even feel a little nervous—about what your role is in Scouting. Well, your first role in Scouting is simply to continue what you are doing: Be a parent. Help your Scout succeed. Be supportive. Follow through. You're here because you see value in the Scouting program. Help that value to come through. There will always be times when your Scout doesn't want to go the weekly meeting or seems to be losing interest in advancing and doing their best in Scouting. That's when they need a parent's encouragement. Scouting works best when the whole family is behind it.

And you're probably dreading the standard call for volunteers that you hear from school and every other organization you are associated with. Well, don't get me wrong—Scouting operates only because we have great volunteers. And yes, we hope that you will offer to help the troop in some way. We have volunteer roles of every size and every type. Even if you only have a few minutes a month to help us out, we can use you.

But being a Scouting volunteer isn't just another chore you take on because you must. Let's hear about some typical experiences of Scouting volunteers:

Presenter reads the following:

“When I first got into Scouting, it was because of my child. I thought it would be a great program. What I didn’t realize then was what a great program Scouting has been for me. I have met so many great people in Scouting and have made some great friends. It is something I wasn’t looking for and didn’t expect. I know I’ll always be with friends at a Scout meeting or event.”

“When I first got into Scouting, I expected to just drive my child to meetings and just do a drop-off. I’m not an outdoor person. I work in an office all day. But when the committee chair announced that they were looking for a new treasurer, I figured that would be a small way that I could contribute, so I put my hand up. Well, I was surprised to find that even *my* skills were needed by the troop. Everyone really appreciates what I do, and I’ve even started taking an interest in the outdoor stuff—I went on my first campout last month, and it was a blast!”

“With my job, I don’t really have a lot of free time, and I don’t have a regular schedule, so I can’t really go to Scout meetings or on campouts. But they told me that as a merit badge counselor, I could meet with Scouts whenever it was convenient for me. This way I get a chance to share my woodworking hobby with these great youth, and I can do it on my schedule.”

“One of the things that surprised me, after I had been an assistant Scoutmaster for a year or so, was that I had started applying things to my job that I learned in Scouting. The training for Scouting adults is excellent and has a lot of practical applications. It’s a lot more than learning to tie knots.”

“I don’t have a lot of time I can contribute to the troop. But one thing I did sign up for is to be a troop committee member, so I can sit on boards of review. Boards of review are like little job interviews, where adult committee members ask the Scouts about their experiences in the troop and what they have learned. It is so rewarding to have a real conversation with those Scouts.”

Regardless of your skills or interests, there is something you share with all Scouting volunteers that makes your involvement priceless: your interest in having your youth in the best possible Scouting program.

One of the most rewarding things in my life is to be there when needed, not just for my own child, but more often for other youth who need the help and friendship of an adult from time to time. We invite each of you to share that experience because you have something to contribute.

Conclusion

Thank the presenters and thank the parents for coming. Invite them to take part in the cracker barrel (if you are having one) and to future troop meetings and activities.

Immediately following the orientation session, presenters should introduce themselves to the parents and make friendly conversation. A cracker barrel following the session is an opportunity for parents to linger, get to know the troop leaders, and ask questions.

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