

Youth Protection in Scouting

How does the BSA prevent child abuse in Scouting?

The Boy Scouts of America has adopted a number of policies aimed at eliminating opportunities for abuse within the Scouting program. These policies focus on leadership selection and on placing barriers to abuse within the program.

Leadership

The Boy Scouts of America takes great pride in the quality of our adult leadership. Being a leader in the BSA is a privilege, not a right. The quality of the program and the safety of our youth members call for high-quality adult leaders. We work closely with our chartered organizations to help recruit the best possible leaders for their units.

The adult application requests background information that should be checked by the unit committee or the chartered organization before accepting an applicant for unit leadership. While no current screening techniques exist that can identify every potential child molester, we can reduce the risk of accepting a child molester by learning all we can about an applicant for a leadership position—his or her experience with children, why he or she wants to be a Scout leader, and what discipline techniques he or she would use.

Barriers to Abuse Within Scouting

The BSA has adopted the following policies to provide additional security for our members. These policies are primarily for the protection of our youth members; however, they also serve to protect our adult leaders from false accusations of abuse.

- **Two-deep leadership.**
Two registered adult leaders or one registered leader and a parent of a participant, one of whom must be 21 years of age or older, are required on all trips and outings. The chartered organization is responsible for ensuring that sufficient leadership is provided for all activities.
- **No one-on-one contact.**
One-on-one contact between adults and youth members is not permitted. In situations that require personal conferences, such as a Scoutmaster's conference, the meeting is to be conducted in view of other adults and youths.
- **Respect of privacy.**
Adult leaders must respect the privacy of youth members in situations such as changing clothes and taking showers at camp, and intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. Adults must protect their own privacy in similar situations.
- **Separate accommodations.**
When camping, no youth is permitted to sleep in the tent of an adult other than his own parent or guardian. Councils are strongly encouraged to have separate shower and latrine facilities for females. When separate facilities are not available, separate times for male and female use should be scheduled and posted for showers.
- **Proper preparation for high-adventure activities.**
Activities with elements of risk should never be undertaken without proper preparation, equipment, clothing, supervision, and safety measures.
- **No secret organizations.**
The Boy Scouts of America does not recognize any secret organizations as part of its program. All aspects of the Scouting program are open to observation by parents and leaders.
- **Appropriate attire.**
Proper clothing for activities is required. For example, skinny-dipping is not appropriate as part of Scouting.

- **Constructive discipline.**
Discipline used in Scouting should be constructive and reflect Scouting's values. Corporal punishment is never permitted.
- **Hazing prohibited.**
Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any Scouting activity.
- **Junior leader training and supervision.**
Adult leaders must monitor and guide the leadership techniques used by junior leaders and ensure that BSA policies are followed.

How can parents help protect their children?

Parents participate in the protection of their children in a variety of ways. We have already mentioned the need for open lines of communication so that children are encouraged to bring any troubles to their parents for advice and counsel. In addition, parents need to be involved in their sons' Scouting activities. All parents receive important information concerning the Scouting program as part of their sons' membership applications. This information is provided so that parents can detect any deviations from the BSA's approved program. If any deviations are noted, parents should call these to the attention of the chartered organization or the unit committee. If the problems persist, parents should contact the local council for assistance.

Parents also need to review the booklet, "How to Protect Your Children from Child Abuse and Drug Abuse: A Parent's Guide," inserted in every Boy Scout and Cub Scout handbook. The information in this booklet should be the subject of discussions between Scouts and their parents prior to joining a pack or troop.

Why do most child victims of sexual abuse keep the abuse secret?

A victim of child sexual abuse is under a great deal of pressure to keep the abuse secret. In many cases of child molestation, the molester has threatened to harm the child or a member of the child's family. The molester might have told the child that he would not be believed even if the child did tell. Another common situation is that the molester will tell the child that if the child tells about the abuse, he will get into trouble. The clear message is given to the child that if another person finds out, something bad will happen to the child. This pressure to maintain silence can often be successfully overcome by establishing open communication between children and adults through a proper educational program for children.

What should I do if a child tells me that he has been sexually abused?

How an adult responds to a child when he tries to disclose abuse can influence the outcome of the child's victimization. By maintaining an apparent calm, the adult can help reassure the child that everything is going to be okay. By not criticizing the child, we counteract any statements the molester made to the victim about the child getting into trouble. Reassure the child that you are concerned about what happened to him and that you would like to get him some help. **Allegations by a Scout concerning abuse in the program must be reported to the Scout executive.** Since these reports are required, the child should be told that you have to tell the proper authorities but that you will not tell anyone else. It is important that you not tell anyone other than the Scout executive or the child protective services agency about allegations of abuse—if the allegations cannot be substantiated, you could be sued for defamation of character.

How do I know what my reporting responsibilities are?

Every state, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories have different reporting requirements. As part of youth protection training, you will receive reporting instructions for your area and for your council. People are often concerned about being sued for reporting child abuse. You are not required to know for certain that a child has been abused. All that the law requires is that you have a reasonable suspicion and are reporting in "good faith." When these requirements are met, all states provide immunity from liability for child abuse reporters.

What youth protection educational materials does the BSA have for youth members?

"How to Protect Your Children from Child Abuse: A Parent's Guide" is a tear-out booklet bound in with BSA youth books. It is designed for parents or guardians and young people to use together for youth protection training. The BSA also has separate age-appropriate videos for Cub Scout-age and Boy Scout-age boys to address the problems of sexual abuse. The video for Cub Scouts, "It Happened to Me," should be used annually by packs or dens, but only for Cub Scouts accompanied by a parent or other adult family member. The video for Boy Scouts, "A Time to Tell" introduces the "three Rs" of Youth Protection, and should be viewed by troops annually.

The BSA recognizes that many of our leaders feel unprepared to talk to children about preventing sexual abuse. For this reason, the BSA has meeting guides for both of the videos produced to be viewed by youths. The guides address everything from scheduling the meeting, contacting the police or social services for assistance, and notifying parents (a sample letter is provided), to questions and answers for discussion after the video has been viewed.

What are the "three Rs" of Youth Protection?

The "three Rs" of Youth Protection convey a simple message that the BSA wants its youth members to learn:

- **Recognize** situations that place him at risk of being molested, how child molesters operate, and that anyone could be a molester.
- **Resist** unwanted and inappropriate attention. Resistance will stop most attempts at molestation.
- **Report** attempted or actual molestation to a parent or other trusted adult. This prevents further abuse of himself and helps to protect other children. Let the Scout know he will not be blamed for what occurred.

Youth Member Behavior Guidelines

The Boy Scouts of America is a values-based youth development organization that helps young people learn positive attributes of character, citizenship, and personal fitness. The BSA has the expectation that all participants in the Scouting program will relate to each other in accord with the principles embodied in the Scout Oath and Law.

One of the developmental tasks of childhood is to learn appropriate behavior. Children are not born with an innate sense of propriety and they need guidance and direction. The example set by positive adult role models is a powerful tool for shaping behavior and a tool that is stressed in Scouting.

Misbehavior by a single youth member in a Scouting unit may constitute a threat to the safety of the individual who misbehaves as well as to the safety of other unit members. Such misbehavior constitutes an unreasonable burden on a Scout unit and cannot be ignored.

Member Responsibilities

All members of the Boy Scouts of America are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the principles set forth in the Scout Oath and Law. Physical violence, hazing, bullying, theft, verbal insults, and drugs and alcohol have no place in the Scouting program and may result in the revocation of a Scout's membership in the unit.

If confronted by threats of violence or other forms of bullying from other youth members, Scouts should seek help from their unit leaders or parents

Unit Responsibilities

Adult leaders of Scouting units are responsible for monitoring the behavior of youth members and interceding when necessary. Parents of youth members who misbehave should be informed and asked for assistance in dealing with it.

The BSA does not permit the use of corporal punishment by unit leaders when disciplining youth members.

The unit committee should review repetitive or serious incidents of misbehavior in consultation with the parents of the child to determine a course of corrective action including possible revocation of the youth's membership in the unit.

If problem behavior persists, units may revoke a Scout's membership in that unit. When a unit revokes a Scout's membership, it should promptly notify the council of the action.

The unit should inform the Scout executive about all incidents that result in a physical injury or involve allegations of sexual misconduct by a youth member with another youth member.

Each Cub Scout den and Webelos Scout den and each chartered Cub Scout pack, Boy Scout troop, Varsity Scout team, and Venturing crew shall have one leader, 21 years of age or older, who shall be registered and serve as the unit or den leader. A unit leader may not serve simultaneously in any other position within the same unit. The head of the chartered organization or chartered organization representative and the local council must approve the registration of the unit or den leader on the appropriate form.

Primary reference: Rules and Regulations of the Boy Scouts of America

Leadership Requirements for Trips and Outings

1. Two-deep leadership:

Two registered adult leaders, or one registered adult and a parent of a participating Scout, one of whom must be at least 21 years of age or older, are required for all trips or outings. There are a few instances, such as patrol activities, when no adult leadership is required. Coed overnight activities require male and female adult leaders, both of whom must be 21 years of age or older, and one of whom must be a registered member of the BSA.

2. During transportation to and from planned Scout outings,

- a. Meet for departure at a designated area.
- b. Prearrange a schedule for periodic checkpoint stops as a group.
- c. Plan a daily destination point.

A common departure site and a daily destination point are a must. If you cannot provide two adults for each vehicle, the minimum required is one adult and two or more youth members—*never one on one*.

3. Safety rule of four:

No fewer than four individuals (always with the minimum of two adults) go on any backcountry expedition or campout. If an accident occurs, one person stays with the injured, and two go for help. Additional adult leadership requirements must reflect an awareness of such factors as size and skill level of the group, anticipated environmental conditions, and overall degree of challenge.

4. Male and female leaders must have separate sleeping facilities. Married couples may share the same quarters if appropriate facilities are available.

5. Male and female youth participants will not share the same sleeping facility.

6. Single-room or dormitory-type accommodations for Scouting units:

Adults and youth of the same gender may occupy dormitory or single-room accommodations, provided there is a minimum of two adults and four youth. A minimum of one of the adults is required to be youth-protection trained. Adults must establish separation barriers or privacy zones such as a temporary blanket or sheet walls in order to keep their sleeping area and dressing area separated from the youth area.

7. When staying in tents, no youth will stay in the tent of an adult other than his or her parent or guardian.
8. If separate shower and latrine facilities are not available, separate times for male and female use should be scheduled and posted for showers. The buddy system should be used for latrines by having one person wait outside the entrance, or provide Occupied and Unoccupied signs and/or inside door latches.

Adult leaders need to respect the privacy of youth members in situations where the youth are changing clothes or taking showers, and intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. Adults also need to protect their own privacy in similar situations.

Two-deep adult leadership is required for flying activities. *For basic orientation flights, the adult licensed pilot in control of the aircraft is sufficient for the flight*, while two-deep leadership is maintained on the ground.