

## **Parents' and New Leaders Guide to a Boy-Led Troop Introduction**

Welcome! Whether you have just crossed over with your son from Cub Scouts or just joined Boy Scouts, we appreciate your enthusiasm and encourage your participation in the troop. The three aims of Boy Scouting are character development, citizenship training, and mental and physical fitness. To accomplish these aims, Scouting employs eight methods: the ideals, the patrol method, the outdoors, advancement, association with adults, personal growth, leadership development, and the uniform. We encourage you to take the Boy Scout training offered on-line at [www.myscouting.org](http://www.myscouting.org) and by the District to find out what we are trying to accomplish and how you can help.

One of the major differences between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts is the very important method of leadership development. In order to teach leadership, you have to let the boys lead. In fact, one of the more vigorous debates you can have in Scouting is over the feasibility of a boy-led troop. Some adult leaders will argue that while a boy-led troop is the BSA ideal, it is not possible in their particular troop for any or all of the following reasons: the boys are too young, too lazy, too irresponsible, or just not interested. A boy-led troop is more work for the adult leadership, and therein is the problem, and our need for your cooperation and help. It is so much easier for the adults to just take charge themselves than to teach the necessary leadership skills to the boys.

All Scoutmasters and Assistant Scoutmasters are taught the basics of a boy-led troop and patrol in Scoutmaster Specifics. However putting that training into practice is often difficult without a mentor in the troop. This guide will hopefully bridge the gap between theory and practice. It covers some of the common pitfalls and offers suggestions for getting a working boy-led troop. The importance of a boy-led troop and patrol is emphasized in two chapters of the Scoutmaster's Handbook; chapter 3 "The Boy-Led Troop" starts with this strong statement:

*"Empowering boys to be leaders is the core of Scouting. Scouts learn by doing, and what they do is lead their patrols and their troop. The boys themselves develop a troop program, then take responsibility for figuring out how they will achieve the goals. One of our most important challenges is to train boy leaders to run the troop by providing direction, coaching and support. The boys will make mistakes now and then and will rely upon the adult leaders to guide*

*them. But only through real hands-on experience as leaders can boys learn to lead.”*

As mentioned before, perhaps the most common reason for the existence of adult-led troops is that it is easier for the experienced adult leaders to run things; teaching leadership to boys is not easy. A second common reason is that the adult leaders may be afraid of failure; they want a smooth running troop. A boy-led project will occasionally falter, and adults may feel it necessary to take over to ensure success. A third is that the troop may have adult leaders that do not delegate well, and do not wish to give up control. In fact, many consider that the main barriers to a boy-led troop come from the attitudes within the adult leadership.

### **Adult Leaders and parents work together – Always Rigidly Flexible**

This guide is meant more as guidelines than actual rules. Just as every troop, scout, adult leader, and parent is different, what works best is not always the same. Also what worked yesterday may not work tomorrow. We do not want change for the sake of change, but to meet the changing needs of the troop. Adults are there for the Boys

The adults need to keep in mind that we are here for the Scouts. In Scouting parents will meet others with similar values and goals for their children. Parents will build good friendships with the others and they can provide support and parenting suggestions. Scouting is a way to become a better parent through association with and the help of like-minded adults. However, adults should keep in mind that they are there for the boys and should try to not let socializing dominate.

### **The Scoutmaster is in charge of the Scouts of the Troop**

All parents should understand the structure of the troop. There is a “chain of command” within the youth leadership and also within the adult leadership. The Scoutmaster has to have a final say as the ultimate leader of the troop. He needs to work together with the parents and the other leaders toward the boy-led goal. The boys should understand that they have only as much authority as allowed by the adults, especially the Scoutmaster, and need to show the appropriate respect for the adults in their lives.

## **The Parent Involvement**

Parent support and involvement is essential. Unlike the full parent involvement in Cub Scouts, parents are asked to become much less involved with their own child and more within the structure of the troop as a committee member or assistant Scoutmaster. But few parents come in to Scouting with a good understanding of the program. To get all the parents on the same page and working toward the goals of Scouting, ask them to take the on-line Fast Start training. Parents coming on outings should work through the on-line Youth Protection training to understand the behavior that BSA asks of all adults. Committee members should take the on-line Troop Committee Challenge. It is useful for the Scoutmaster to occasionally meet with ALL parents to share his vision for a successful troop and to involve the parents in accomplishing the troop's goals.

## **The Troop Committee**

From Fast Start: "If you haven't been involved in Scouting, you may think that the whole organization is the Scoutmaster and the youth members. The truth is, the success of the troop depends on a lot of adult volunteers who work behind the scenes to make it all happen. The troop committee is like a steering committee—volunteers who actually handle the business end of running the troop." From the Scoutmaster Handbook: "The most important responsibility of a troop committee is recruiting qualified adult leaders for the troop."

"The Scoutmaster should be able to turn to the committee at any time for assistance, support, and encouragement." The troop committee must then step back and not try to run the troop. That is for the Scoutmaster to train the boys to do.

## **Adult-led symptoms and impacts Adults loudly asserting authority**

Adults yelling at the boys in front of the troop is one characteristic of an adult-led troop where the adults have not transferred authority to the youth. Yelling at the boys has a toxic effect on the supportive atmosphere we want to nurture in a troop. Scouting is a put-down free zone. We use the Scout hand sign as a silent way to bring the troop to order for this very reason.

Also, the boys never learn to lead if the adults dominate. The only time an adult should step in is if there is an immediate safety threat. Otherwise, there is

time to work through the youth leadership chain of command. The only way for boys to learn leadership is to actually hand them the reins of power, with plenty of instruction of course.

### **Adults jumping in with more enthusiasm than patience**

Volunteers who take charge are usually a good thing except when they preempt the boys' responsibilities. It is hard to wait for a boy to do something that you could do better in much less time. However if you do something for someone, they will not learn the skill. Adults already know how; boys still need to learn. Scout meetings and outings should provide a hassle-free environment in which to learn leadership.

### **Adults operating in Cub Pack mode**

Parents crossing over with their boys can often feel more comfortable modifying slightly the structure they know from Cub Scouts than to adopt the changes demanded by a boy-led Boy Scout program. They continue the parent-child authority structure and don't hand power over to the boys. This leads to an extension of the parent-child relationship into the teen years when the youth should be transitioning to independence.

### **Adults enabling codependency**

Parents of scouting age boys are often comfortable with the roles they have established with their young children. They organize the program and the boys follow along. But the boys remain in a dependent role. Very young Scouts may be comfortable with a dependent role for a while. Adults feel useful and boys don't have to put out much effort. The troop operates like an adult-run outing club. But as the boys grow older, their lack of control of the program begins to chafe.

### **Adults contributing to older boy attrition**

Boys can stay dependents only so long before they rebel from imposed adult authority. Adults giving the boys more control over outings can help solve an older boy attrition problem. Venture patrols or similar older boy patrols allow them to plan high adventure outings that increase retention.

### **Scouting trains boys in life skills.**

Removing “boy-led” from the program removes an extremely important aspect of Scouting: leadership and teamwork. Boys need to practice team leadership in the safe environment that Scouting provides. Without this practice, they are less prepared to enter the workforce, where mistakes have significant consequences.

### **Boy-led advantages Boys learn critical planning skills**

Adults should involve the boys in the process of planning an outing. Boys need to learn how to set achievable goals. For example, planning a canoe trip can start with “Safety Afloat” as an outline to make them aware of safety concerns. Including the boys in the process allows the adults to teach the logistics of planning: setting goals and objectives; breaking the project into smaller tasks and determine deadlines when they need to get done; assigning responsibilities to individual team members; putting the plan into action and tracking progress; evaluating the outcome and modifying the plan. There is always the need to check in with others on the project to see if all is going well.

### **Boys learn to lead in a safe environment**

Leadership is not only knowing what you need to do to succeed but also knowing what to do if things go wrong. Before each boy-led activity, an adult leader should sit down with the boy leadership and go over their plan, to make sure that the boys are not set up to fail. The adult leaders are responsible for maintaining a non-confrontational environment by letting the boys know the adults support them, and will be available if needed. Adults minimize the fear of failure by maintaining a supportive environment.

### **Boys learn from mistakes**

It is hard to watch a process get done poorly, but if a boy-led troop meeting does not go as planned, there is no great loss. If a meal on a camp-out does not work out, it becomes a learning experience, a teachable moment to show how one responds to mistakes and still shows respect for others. It is very important to meet after each activity with the boy leadership to help them conduct a Start, Stop, Continue evaluation (SPL Handbook p. 97). How could this activity have been done better? Good judgement comes from experience, and experience comes from learning from your mistakes.

## **Boys learn to lead others and work in teams**

Working well with others is perhaps the most important life skill that youth can learn. Boys gain confidence by being entrusted with power and in leading their peers. Section Six in the Senior Patrol Leader's Handbook talks about leadership styles and developing your team. The youth leader learns that their leadership style needs to change from Explaining, to Demonstrating, to Guiding, and finally to Enabling as the group develops into a working team (the Leading EDGE in SPL Handbook page 88-89)

## **Boys learn respect when treated with respect**

Adults should show respect by not interrupting or criticizing the youth leadership during a troop meeting, no matter how badly things may be going. Instead, the adults should praise youth leaders in public when they do well, which helps boost both their confidence and the troop's faith in them.

If the troop believes in their Senior Patrol Leader, they will treat him with respect and listen to him more readily, which in turn makes the troop run more smoothly. The time for critique is after the meeting, in private. Sadly, it is much more difficult to build up confidence in others than to tear it down. The adults will earn the respect of the boys by their actions and example, not by demand.

## **Role of the Adult Leaders in a Boy-led Troop**

Follow the lead of the Scoutmaster, Committee Chair.

Just as the Scouts need to know that their SPL is in charge, the adults need to know that the Scoutmaster is in charge of the Scouts! The Committee Chair is in charge of the Committee and overall organization. Scouts will follow the example of the adults, good or bad. Please criticize only when you can give a suggestion to correct the problem, otherwise it is nothing more than whining. This is crucial for the adults to follow as well as the Scouts.

## **Train patrol leader and assistant**

This is especially necessary if the troop does not participate in district or council youth training. The boys need to know what is expected of them. Often a troop will do BSA's Troop Leadership Training.

## **Mentor the patrol leader and assistant**

Leadership mentoring must continue beyond the initial training. An important rule to remember is to praise publicly and criticize privately. It is best to start with simple leadership tasks first, so the boys are not set up to fail. An adult should always meet with the Patrol Leader before the activity to go over preparation. The youth leadership should be able to rely on the adults to provide the skills and resources for them to succeed. The Senior Patrol Leader Handbook and the Patrol Leader Handbook are excellent resources. Robert Baden-Powell in the Scoutmaster Handbook said, "Training boy leaders to run their troop is the Scoutmaster's most important job."

## **Back up youth authority**

Your youth leaders will have to learn how to deal with problem people (SPL Handbook p. 95-96). Managing conflict is an extremely valuable skill for both youth and adults to master that is why it is included in both National Youth Leadership Training and Wood Badge. If the Patrol Leader can't resolve the issue then it goes to the Assistant Senior Patrol Leader and the Senior Patrol Leader. In a well-run boy-led troop, if the disciplinary problem has to be brought to the adult leadership, some feel that it is serious enough that the offending boy should go home.

All things are taught best by example. Just as there is a chain of command in the Scouts, there is a chain of command with adults. The better we follow this chain of command, the better example the boys have to follow. We cannot expect the boys to follow a chain of command if what they witness with adults is chaotic and controversial. The adult chain of command should be similar to the Scout chain of command. This is why it is crucial that the Senior Patrol Leader be the leader of the youth and the Scoutmaster and Committee Chairman be the leader of the adults.

## **Step back and delegate**

Often an adult will get asked a question from a boy in a patrol because the adult is viewed as the authority. It is best if the adult does not give the answer. One of the most important things a Patrol Advisor can say is "Did you ask your patrol leader?" By respecting the chain of command, you build the authority of your boy leaders. Some relevant quotes from Robert Baden-Powell in the

Scoutmaster Handbook are, “Train Scouts to do a job, then let them do it.” and “Never do anything a boy can do.”

### **Set the supportive tone**

Adults should not be yelling at kids, except in safety emergencies. A major part of creating a supportive environment is training the adults how to respond to the youth with patience and respect. The boys need to know that they will not be yelled at if they fail. Notice one way we set the tone is by silently raising the Scout sign and patiently waiting when we want order, rather than losing our patience and yelling for them to ‘shut up.’ Adult behavior should follow the Scout Oath and Law: teach good behavior by example. The adults need to know how to operate within themselves before they can function with the Scouts. Any adult should refer back to the Scout chain of command whenever possible. If the adults do not know how to operate within their own chain of command, they will not know how to respond to the boys appropriately.

### **Encourage the patrol method**

The Scoutmaster Handbook states, “Patrols are the building blocks of a Boy Scout troop.” It quotes Robert Baden-Powell: “The patrol method is not a way to operate a Boy Scout troop, it is the only way. Unless the patrol method is in operation you don’t really have a Boy Scout troop.” The patrol is the team that you train your patrol leader to build. This may be that Patrol Leader’s first leadership experience, so he will need plenty of training and coaching. Patrol spirit, respect, and cooperation will help build that team.

### **Make sure the rules and regulations are followed**

Safety is the primary adult responsibility. Adult leaders are responsible for the troop following the rules found in the Guide to Safe Scouting and in the Youth Protection training. The adult leadership trains the youth leadership to stay within the boundaries set by BSA, and is ultimately responsible to see the rules are followed. The better the youth understand the reasons for BSA’s safety rules the more likely they are to cooperate and comply. Explain that the safety rules apply to everyone, boys and adults alike.