

Orientation for New Boy Scout Parents

Training Summary

The world of Boy Scouting can seem strange and confusing to new parents, even those who have been involved in Cub Scouting or who were Boy Scouts themselves. This brief orientation—actually 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 sons succeed.

Time Required

Approximately 48 minutes (not including time for questions). Although the orientation can be presented all at once in a single session, it is designed to be used (and segments repeated, if appropriate) in bite-sized pieces over a period of weeks or months. Troop leaders may have several opportunities to interact with parents of Webelos Scouts (or non-Scouts) before they ever join the troop, such as a joint troop/pack activity or a Scoutmaster appearance at a den or pack meeting. Orientation to Boy Scouting should start early and is part of “selling” parents on Boy Scouting. Once the boys are part of 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 parts to reflect the extended time period over which parents and the troop get acquainted: initial contact with Boy Scouts, crossover and first troop meetings, and settling in.

Learning Objectives

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

- Introduce parents to the Boy Scouting program and how it differs from Cub Scouting.
- Show parents how Boy Scouting gives boys what they want and gives parents what they need from a program for their children.
- Introduce parents to how the troop works.
- Show parents how their participation in the troop can help their sons succeed and be personally rewarding for them as well.
- Introduce parents to some of the troop leaders they and their sons will be involved with.

Training Format

Discussion: This orientation is best presented to small groups in an informal setting: a new parents 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 and allows parents to begin developing trust in the troop leaders. Ideally, the orientation will include multiple presenters (Scoutmaster, senior patrol leader, troop committee chairman, an assistant Scoutmaster with just one or two years’ experience, a “mom” committee member who occasionally drives to campouts or sits on boards of review), each doing one or two topics to add variety, lessen the burden on each presenter, and give the parents different perspectives on the program. Presenters should know their material well and use just a few notes in order to maintain informality. A whiteboard or easel pad may be used occasionally as background to keep a few important points in front of the parents during the discussion.

Handout/PowerPoint: A few of the segments are readily adaptable to being presented as handouts or PowerPoint presentations. For example, if only 15 minutes are available, the presenters may choose to do three live segments and provide handouts covering two others—more information that the parents can take home to read at their leisure or a PowerPoint presentation on the troop Web site. Or, to add variety to the presentation, a live segment could be followed by a PowerPoint show.

Required Materials

- Scout uniform shirt with troop numerals and some patches
- Hiking stick
- *Boy Scout Handbook*
- Troop calendar
- Troop-created parent handbook or informational handout
- Boy Scout application forms
- Adult application forms
- 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 a troop adult dressed in ordinary business attire or street clothes—what most of the parents are 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 committed, uniformed people to be involved in the troop.*

Thank the parents for the opportunity to meet with them and for taking the time to learn a little bit about the best program for boys ever created. Deal with any administrative issues—the length of the session, where the restrooms are, sign-in sheet, handouts, etc.

Introduce each presenter—Name, their role in troop, how long in Boy Scouting or Cub Scouting (especially if associated with this pack). This should be informal and fun. With multiple presenters, the introductions help to show the friendship, fun, and fellowship of being an adult in Boy Scouting.

Explain to parents that you would like to talk to them for a few minutes about what the Boy Scout program is and how it works.

Why Boy Scouting?

Trainer Tip: *Practice, practice, practice. The presenter's hands will be occupied in 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 is a bit of a showman, this may be the segment for him or her.*

The presenter for this segment should be in full uniform.

Presenter: Good evening. It is a pleasure meeting you all and having the opportunity 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 Boy Scout item. Boy Scouts have been wearing Scout uniforms for nearly a hundred years. You don'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 boy'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 Boy Scouting program itself is a lot like the Scout shirt.

First, it is a traditional program. Boy Scouts today enjoy many of the same activities that Boy Scouts enjoyed when Baden-Powell first created the program a century ago. There are many other things about Boy Scouting that haven't changed much over time, including things like the Scout Law and the Scout Oath. The Scouting program has three aims or purposes that shape the program: character development, citizenship training, and physical and mental fitness.

Second, Boy Scouts and Scouting adults each have unique experiences. Everybody's time in Scouting is different. Also, just like patches, Boy Scouts and Scouting adults come in an almost endless variety of colors and shapes and personalities and skills and intelligence and even political persuasions. They aren't all "red." There's lots of "blue." And lots of purple and green and polka dots and stripes. But they are all Boy Scouts, because they all strive toward those same three aims: character development, citizenship training, and physical and mental fitness.

Third, Boy 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 boys—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 Boy Scouting program—is made of. We can feel the fabric. We see the three points clearly— character development, citizenship training, and physical and mental fitness. We're glad that the boys 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 Son?

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

I'd like to read for you a little summary. We call it "the promise of Scouting." It is right there up front, on page 1 of the *Boy Scout Handbook*.

Presenter reads aloud page 1 of the Boy Scout Handbook, "Welcome to the Boy Scouts of America."

Our kids 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, a hundred channels of mindless, tasteless television. We offer your son the chance to swap a few hours of that for a few hours of *this*. (*Presenter holds up Boy Scout 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 son to grow up to be?"

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

Maybe you think in terms of what you want him to have: lots of money, a nice wife and beautiful children, happiness.

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

Imagine your son walking down the street 30 years from now. When people see him, they say things like: "There goes Andy—he's really been a good friend"; "There's James—you can always count on him"; "There's Bill—you'll never find a better man."

I'd like to read a list of words. Please raise your hand if you would like a particular word to describe your son when he grows up:

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

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

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

The Boy Scouting Program

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

Ideals—The ideals of Boy Scouting are spelled out in the Scout Oath, the Scout Law, the Scout motto, and the Scout slogan. The Boy Scout measures himself against these ideals and continually tries 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 youth-run, or youth-led, troop.

Outdoor Programs—Boy 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, expect to have more laundry after a campout and to hear some interesting stories about wild things.

Advancement—Boy 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 son can be proud of his entire life. But turning out Eagle Scouts is not what the Boy Scouting program is all about. Advancement is probably the most visible of the Boy 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 he sets his own pace. We don't do "lock-step" advancement. And many great Scouts, and great men, never became Eagle Scouts.

Associations With Adults—Boys 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 boys, 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 boys 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 Boy 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 Boy Scouting. Boys 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 his Scoutmaster help each Boy Scout to determine his growth toward Scouting’s aims.

Leadership Development—The Boy Scout program encourages boys to learn and practice leadership skills. Every Boy Scout has the opportunity to lead in some way, whether as part of a team, or as the leader of his patrol or as the senior patrol leader of the troop. Leadership development is another component of the youth-led troop.

Uniform—Like most sports teams, Boy 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 Boy 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. Boy 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.

Boy Scouting is different. In Boy Scouting, the role of the boys 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 boys cooked it.
- Not a sharp-looking flag ceremony, but that the boys put it together.
- Not who would make the best patrol leader, but that the boys elect one.
- Not that Johnny learns first aid, but that Billy teaches him.
- 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 boy 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 have to remember that that is the process of Scouting. That is how they learn—even from disorganization and failure. We just have to remember that our business as adults is not the same

as the business of the boys. 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) not 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 of 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 Boy Scout Youth Protection.

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; 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 it is important, it is on a handout in the parents' hands. 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 be wondering—even a little nervous—about what your role is in Boy Scouting. Well, your first role in Scouting is simply to continue what you are doing: Be a parent. Help your son succeed. Be supportive. Follow through. You're here because you see value in the Scouting program. Help that value come through. There will always be times when your son doesn't want to go the weekly meeting or seems to be losing interest in advancing and doing his best in Scouting. That's when he needs 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 out 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 have to. Let's hear some typical experiences of Scouting volunteers:

Presenter reads the following:

“When I first got into Scouting, it was because of my son. I thought it would be a great program for him. 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 son to meetings and drop him off. I’m not an outdoor person. I work in an office all day. But when the committee chairman 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 boys, and 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 starting 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 boys.”

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 son in the best possible Scouting program.

The Hiking Stick

Trainer Tip: *Practice, practice, practice. The presenter’s hands will be occupied in 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 is a bit of a showman, this may be the segment for him or her.*

You may wish to bring a few hiking sticks for the parents to pass around so they can handle them and see them up close. The presenter should be in full or activity uniform, with a hiking stick.

Presenter: I’d like to introduce you to an item that is a good friend to many hikers—the hiking stick. Hiking sticks come in many different styles, from the plain dead branch you just found in the woods to carved and decorated staffs to high-tech aluminum models with spring-loaded tips.

A good hiking stick can be a pretty handy thing to have with you when you're out walking in the country. Regardless of the type of stick or what they look like, they all do pretty much the same three things.

When you are going uphill, particularly if it is steep and rocky, the hiking stick can be a big help. You plant that stick in front of you, and you can use your arms to help pull you up the hill—you don't have to rely on just your legs.

When you are going downhill, particularly if it is steep and rocky, the hiking stick can really help you. You plant that stick in front of you, and it helps you keep your balance, takes a little of the weight off your knees, and gives you that little bit of extra support you need.

And when you're walking on the flat, well, the hiking stick is just a welcome companion on the trail.

Yep, many good Scouts have a hiking stick.

And just a Scout should have a hiking stick to help support him on his journey, he must have adults who support him on his journey through Scouting.

When he is on his way up, advancing, taking in new experiences, facing new challenges, it's nice to have something sturdy he can grab onto to help pull himself up, and the encouragement of those who have gone before him to help him along.

When he is on a bit of a downhill, trying to keep his balance and stay upright, he needs that extra support and stability.

And when he has a smooth, flat trail in front of him, it's just nice to have a companion to talk to, or just to share the silence with.

One of the most rewarding things in my life is to be a "hiking stick" for Scouts, to be there when needed, not just for my own sons, but more often for other boys who need the help and friendship of an adult from time to time. We invite each of you to share that experience—whether you think of yourself as a shiny, spring-loaded model or an old dead branch, you have something to contribute.

Conclusion

Thank presenters, thank parents for coming, and invite them to partake of cracker barrel (if having one) and to future troop meetings and activities.

Immediately following orientation session, presenters should introduce themselves to 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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