

What Adults Do on Campouts

Troop 518 Training

Here is some information we try to give parents on their first campout with the troop.

Camping is the heart of Boy Scouting, so please take a few minutes to read this sheet. Boy Scouting is absolutely different from Cub Scouting or Webelos! And while parents (and sometimes whole families) often accompany the Scouts on campouts, the Scouts camp with their patrol and not with their parents and family members.

Policy Summary

Here is a summary of our troop (and BSA) policies, followed by the reasoning for the policies. There are exceptions, but these policies are in effect on most outings.

Scout Tenting & Meals—Scouts tent with their patrol in a patrol site separate from the other patrols. Patrols plan their own menus, and cook and eat together as a team. In general, adults do not eat or tent with a boy patrol.

Adult Tenting & Meals—Adults tent with the adult patrol in a patrol site separate from the other patrols. We plan our own menu, and cook and eat together as a team. In general, adults do not eat or tent with a boy patrol.

Adult/Boy Tenting—BSA youth protection policies forbid an adult and a boy sharing the same tent. While youth protection policies may not apply to a father and son tenting together, it is troop policy that boys tent with boys and adults with adults. If a father tents with his son, it has been our experience that the boy will lose out on many opportunities to make decisions and be part of the patrol team! [Yes, you are probably the rare exception, but it wouldn't be fair to the other adults to single you out.]

Smoking/Drinking—Drivers may not smoke while Scouts are in the car. Adults may not smoke or use tobacco products, nor drink alcoholic beverages during a Scout activity. Adults who must smoke or chew must do so discretely out of sight of the Scouts.

Boy Leadership—Adults should not interfere with the functioning of boy leaders, even if they make mistakes (we all learn best from our mistakes). Step in only if it is a matter of immediate safety or if the mistake will be immediately costly. If possible, involve a uniformed adult leader first.

Boy Growth—Never do anything for a boy he can do himself. Let him make decisions without adult interference, and let him make non-costly mistakes.

Adult Training & Resources—The Boy Scouts of America provides an outstanding handbook for adults, and an excellent training course to help us understand the goals of Scouting and how to attain them. The adult manual is called the *Scoutmaster Handbook*, and it's worth your time to read it. The training is called *Adult Leader Training* (ALT), and is offered in our area once a year. It's also a good investment of your time. Troop 518 gives our uniformed adult leaders a copy of the *Scoutmaster Handbook*, and requires that they complete ALT. We encourage other adults to follow suit.

Rationale

Boy Scout camping activities center on the patrol, where boys learn teamwork, leadership, and most camping skills. It is important that adults not be in the middle of patrol activities such as site selection, tent pitching, meal preparation, and anything else where boys get to practice decision-making.

A key difference between Boy Scouting and Cub Scouting/Webelos is leadership. Look for the word "leader" in a job title, and you will begin to appreciate the difference. The responsible person for a Cub/Webelos den is the adult Den Leader. The responsible person for a Boy Scout patrol is the boy Patrol Leader.

This isn't token leadership (like a Denner). A Patrol Leader has real authority and genuine responsibilities. Much of the success, safety, and happiness of six to ten other boys depends directly on him.

Boy Scouting teaches leadership. And boys learn leadership by practicing it, not by watching adults lead.

So what do we adults do, now that we've surrendered so much direct authority to boys? Here are our troop's guidelines on the indirect, advisory role you now enjoy (no kidding, you should enjoy watching your son take progressively more mature and significant responsibilities as he zooms toward adulthood).

The underlying principle is never do anything for a boy that he can do himself. We allow boys to grow by practicing leadership and by learning from their mistakes. And while Scout skills are an important part of the program, what ultimately matters when our Scouts become adults is not whether they can use a map & compass, but whether they can offer leadership to others in tough situations; and can live by a code that centers on honest, honorable, and ethical behavior.

Boys need to learn to make decisions without adult intervention (except when it's a matter of immediate safety). Boys are in a patrol so they can learn leadership and teamwork without adult interference.

Being an adult advisor is a difficult role, especially when we are advising kids (even worse, our own sons). Once each year, the Boy Scouts of America offers special training on how to do this, which we expect our uniformed adults to take. And any adult is welcome—and encouraged—to take the training (see the Scoutmaster; dates are in the annual calendar).

If a parent goes on a campout, you are an automatic member of our "Geezers" (adult) patrol. This patrol has several purposes—good food and camaraderie (of course), but more important is providing an example the boy patrols can follow without our telling them what to do (we teach by example). Since a patrol should camp as a group, we expect the "Geezers" to do so also; that way, adults don't tent in or right next to a boy patrol where your mere presence could disrupt the learning process.

Quite simply, our troop policy requires adults to cook, eat, and tent separately from the Scouts (even dads & sons). We are safely nearby, but not smotheringly close. Sure, go ahead and visit the patrol sites (not just your son's), talk to your son (and the other Scouts), ask what's going on or how things are going. But give the guys room to grow while you enjoy the view. Show a Scout how to do something, but don't do it for him. Avoid the temptation to give advice, and don't jump in just to prevent a mistake from happening (unless it's serious). We all learn best from our mistakes. And let the patrol leader lead.

Your job is tough, challenging, and ultimately rewarding, because your son will be a man the day after tomorrow.