**CUB SCOUT INTEREST TOPIC**

Use the Scout Oath and Scout Law as models for behaving as Scouts. Adherence to ideals is one of the methods of Scouting. The text below is adapted from “Making Good Boys Better,” an article by Cathleen Ann Steg in *Scouting* magazine (January–February, 1998).

**MANAGING BOY BEHAVIOR**

A well-planned meeting keeps the boys focused and happy. Make sure your materials are prepared in advance and that you have successfully pretested any craft ideas. This includes small details. Don’t forget the Scout leader’s ever-relevant bit of advice: KISMIF (“keep it simple; make it fun”). If you spend half the meeting explaining how to do something, it’s probably not worth doing. Remember: The best hourlong den meetings involve about one minute of leader explanation and 59 minutes of boy activity.

**PLAN, PREPARE, AND PRETEST**

Unfortunately, discipline issues will still occur no matter how thoroughly you plan your program and keep the program lively (the two best ways to avoid discipline issues). These discipline issues will need to be addressed in an ongoing and timely manner. Experienced leaders agree that a den code of conduct can help instill self-discipline in the boys.

**CODES OF CONDUCT**

Have the boys develop their own code at an early meeting. Stick to the code once it has been developed. All of the boys sign the code as a “contract” in which they remind themselves and each other of their willingness to agree to the terms they each had a part in writing.

Tell the boys that you will remind them once for untolerated behavior; the second time, their parents will be called to come and get them. Usually the boys monitor each other.

What’s the most important element of den discipline? You cannot issue idle threats. You must really do what you say. If the boys figure out that you won’t call them on anything, the plan is lost.

Den doodles are another way to help reinforce the code. Each boy has a long leather thong on which he puts beads earned at each meeting: blue for uniform, red for attendance, yellow for bringing his book. The den also has a leather thong for behavior. When the boys arrive they are each given a behavior bead. If a boy breaks one of the codes of conduct, he must give back his bead. At the end of the meeting, all of the behavior beads the boys have kept by good discipline are placed on the den lanyard. When a predetermined number of beads have been placed on the lanyard, the boys as a group receive a predetermined prize or treat (such as popsicles or ice cream).

What goes into these codes? Many dens base their specific list on the Scout Oath and Scout Law. “A Scout is Friendly,” for example, includes the concepts of being a good sport in games and respecting each other as individuals. The den meeting is no place for foul language, discriminatory remarks about others’ religious backgrounds or appearance, or mean-spirited behavior. By stating rules clearly and in a friendly manner at the beginning, you will find that most boys are quite willing to abide by rules.

**CLEAR AND FRIENDLY**

Even after a code of conduct is established, the best way to deal with disciplining the boys is to help them avoid the issue in the first place. Prevention is much easier than a cure.

**AVOIDANCE IS A BETTER WAY**

For example, let’s say you want the boys to remove their shoes when they enter your house. Instead of yelling, “Take off your muddy shoes!” lay out a special “shoe-eating” beach towel at the first meeting, explaining that this towel needs to eat shoes during den meetings. At least one boy will remember when he sees the towel, and soon they’ll all catch on—without a word of reminder from you.

The “Talking Feather” is another popular way to keep down the decibel level at a meeting. If each boy needs to share his experiences with the den, whether it’s his bird-watching report or the adventures of his summer vacation, bring a big red feather to the meeting. Whoever holds the feather gets to talk, and everyone else has to be completely silent. The boys love to abide by this rule—and particularly like to catch the den leader speaking out of turn.

Den leaders can make a big difference in discipline by showing the boys that Cub Scouts come first. Distractions can spell disaster in a meeting; let your voicemail take messages for the hour and let the other parents know that, if they arrive early to pick up their sons, they should stay away from the meeting area unless they’re planning to help the boys.

**CUB SCOUTS COME FIRST**

Focusing the leader’s attention on each boy can improve the behavior of all the boys. Challenge the Cub Scouts with new skills, but be available to help each boy succeed. Involve parents as volunteers at each meeting and secure a den chief to help with the various activities.

Good spirits are contagious; if the boys see the smile on a leader’s face, they’re sure to join in. And if you’re all having a good time, good behavior is guaranteed.

**REMEMBER**

What if you’ve tried everything and still have a discipline problem? Consider the following: If all the boys are misbehaving, ask your Cubmaster to attend a meeting. It’s extremely rare to have a whole den full of incorrigibles; ask an experienced Scouter to watch the den in action and suggest ways you could run the meeting a bit differently. Sometimes all you need is an objective observer to get the den back on track.

**HELP!**

If one boy’s behavior keeps causing trouble for the whole den, go to the parent without delay. Explain exactly the behaviors that present a challenge, and make sure the parent understands your expectations for change.

Sometimes the parent cannot or will not help to solve the problem. What’s best for the boy? If his behavior is silly but his attitude is positive, you might try to keep working with him, hoping that the good influence of the rest of the den and the ideals of the Scouting program itself will effect change over time. Give him positive reinforcement for every little bit of progress. But test yourself often: Are you able to keep calm and cheerful around this boy? Is the den meeting able to function smoothly with his behavior? Make sure the rest of the den is not jeopardized while you work to rein in one boy. If everything you have tried does not seem to be working, it may be time to contact the Cubmaster and your committee chair to remove the boy from the den—at least until your unit commissioner can advise your pack on the best course to follow. One of the toughest things a den leader can do is make the decision to remove a boy, permanently, from the den. But remember: Each boy has an obligation to live up to the ideals of Scouting, and you have an obligation to ensure that those ideals are not compromised by the behavior of one boy. Removing a serious offender from your den may even serve as a wakeup call to the boy and his parents; in the long run, your insistence on good behavior could help that boy get back on the right track.