



Managing Boys

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.

UNIT RESPONSIBILITIES

Misbehavior by a single member in a Scouting unit may become an unreasonable burden on that unit and constitute a threat to the safety of those who misbehave as well as to other unit members. Adult leaders of Scouting units are responsible for monitoring the behavior of the youth members and interceding when necessary. Parents of youth members who misbehave should be informed of the problem 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 pack 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 pack.

DEN DISCIPLINE

Young boys tend to be noisy, active, and full of energy. But you can keep your Cub Scouts under control and handle the noise they create.

The first step is to accept the fact that they will be noisy and active and to find a meeting location where that's not an issue. Beyond that, effective discipline is 90 percent preparation.

Part of that preparation is the awareness of what boys are like at various ages. Make assets out of their abilities and interests. Then as they mature, so do you—right along with them.

The other element of preparation is planning appropriate activities and having enough physical and human resources on hand to keep the group going for the entire meeting. Some people think that the best kind of control is inner control, but Cub Scouts are a long way from reaching such a goal. This does not mean that they are too young to try. You can put first- and second-graders' interest in fairness to work to create some operating rules that the group members agree to follow.

You can encourage positive behavior in many ways, including

- ▶ Expressing clear expectations of good behavior to the boy and his family
- ▶ Developing a den code of conduct with the boys
- ▶ Using two-deep leadership, especially on trips and outings
- ▶ Having trained den chiefs help with den activities
- ▶ Following the suggested Cub Scout den meeting structure outlined in BSA resources
- ▶ Using positive recognition or reinforcement aids such as good conduct candles, marble jars, and stickers

DEN CODE OF CONDUCT

The den leader and the boys in the den should develop a den code of conduct—or set of group rules. Introduce the subject of a den code of conduct during an open discussion of how friends act toward one another. Boys will often contribute

proposals that relate to safety, to respect for property, and to relationships with others. You can make suggestions along these lines if the boys don't bring them up.

A few rules are enough for a start, but the boys might need to add others from time to time. They also might want to write out their den rules and sign on a line at the end of the list. This is a way of sharing with parents and guardians the expectations of their sons.

Although groups of boys of this age will have their good days and bad days, they are most likely to try to live up to rules that they helped develop themselves. Boys need to learn to judge their behavior in terms of more than conformity to rules. They need to learn about caring, too. Just as they can make up rules, they can decide on some of the caring values that they want to represent their den.

GUIDANCE USING VALUES

The ideas of fairness, helpfulness, and cooperation are all found in the Scout Oath and Scout Law. These important values can be a good start for discussions about conduct. With guidance, even young Cub Scouts can discuss their actions and decide how they fit with the den's chosen values. Such exchanges not only reinforce these values but also help boys develop critical thinking skills.

Webelos Scouts are much more adept at developing rules and can generally be depended on to adopt reasonable ones for their group. They might want to change rules from time to time as circumstances change. By age 10, boys are beginning to understand that even public laws are made by people and that people can change them. They are ready to discuss rules in a fairly businesslike manner and will engage in a lot of bargaining with peers and adults.

Webelos Scouts also need active encouragement if they are to continue developing a caring orientation in their lives. They are ready to begin exploring the meaning of responsibility for the welfare of others. You can use their growing ability to see the perspective of others as a tool in your guidance. For example, encourage them to talk about the "whys" of the Scouting for Food Good Turn in terms of real human needs in their communities.

Give boys responsibility to help them think more deeply about positive attitudes, beliefs, values, norms, and actions. Teach boys how to learn from experience and how to gain some mastery over the events in their lives. This approach will take effort at the beginning but will soon begin to take hold as the boys learn to discipline themselves.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR DEN DISCIPLINE

1. **Use the Cub Scout sign to get attention.** When boys and adults see the sign, each should stop talking and raise his or her arm in the sign. Eventually, the room will be quiet. Don't shout or yell for attention. Wait until everyone is quiet before speaking.
2. **Keep den and pack meetings fast-paced, and have many interesting activities.** Have activities for early arrivals, and alternate boisterous and more quiet activities. Keep in mind that you don't have to crowd everything into a single meeting. There's always the next meeting.
3. **Try to get to know each boy.** Find out what he likes and dislikes. Don't be afraid to let the boy know something about yourself. Stay in contact with his family and be responsive to what might be going on in other aspects of his life.
4. **Behave toward boys impartially, regardless of race, social class, religion, and any other difference.** Boys expect fair treatment, and the example of all leaders becomes their model. If you make promises as a leader, you must make every attempt to keep them; at the same time, point out that at times, promises must be broken for good reasons. Knowing that young boys don't have a clear idea of "maybe," you need to offer as much guidance as possible concerning indefinites.
5. **Listen attentively and try to understand what is written or spoken.** If you have trouble understanding a boy, ask him to clarify. If possible, try to look at the situation from his point of view. Encourage him to tell how he feels, but resist the temptation to tell him how he should feel. Remember that boys are boys, and they do not yet have the maturity of an adult.
6. **Don't criticize a boy in front of his den or pack; he will feel betrayed and humiliated.** Wait until you can talk with him alone (yet in view of other adults, in accordance with Youth Protection policies). Get him to tell you what went wrong from his perspective, and then explain how you interpret the situation. Make an effort to find some common

ground and begin once more.

7. **Focus on the positives and minimize the negatives.** Help boys to look for good in every situation. Remember to give praise when it is earned and even when it's not expected. Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, said, "A pat on the back is a stronger stimulus than a prick with a pin. Expect a great deal from boys and you will generally get it."
8. **Give boys opportunities to make choices.** Provide real options and involve them in the planning of group activities. Sharing the power as well as the fun gives boys a feeling of ownership of the group's success and responsibility for things that do not go well.
9. **Provide boys with appropriate challenges.** What is exciting to a 7-year-old might bore a 10-year-old. What is exciting to a 10-year-old might frighten a younger child. Focus on the strengths of each developmental stage, and develop the program with the boys. Remember that the youngster who tests your patience the most might need Cub Scouting the most.
10. **Take some extra time to reflect on each meeting and learn from your own experience.** Start with what went particularly well. What made it go? What part did you play? What parts did the boys and/or other adults play? How can this combination work again? Also focus on what didn't work well. What aspects of the meeting needed more planning, resources, and leadership? What could have been done to prevent problems? Could these ideas be put into action earlier the next time a problem comes up?

Not all areas of behavior can be treated as subjects for discussion, particularly when dangerous, intentionally hurtful, or offensive behaviors are involved. On some occasions, leaders must insist on obedience and save the dialogue for later. Boys sense when some behaviors or events are getting out of control. In these instances, they expect adult leaders to protect them and to restore order.

The best time to confront a crisis is when it occurs. Don't wait for it to resolve by itself. Afterward, the entire group might need time to calm down. If only one or two boys are involved, take them aside and talk to them tactfully. Recognize that some boys have difficulties that are too great to be solved in a Cub Scout den. Share your concerns with and seek assistance from the boy's parent or guardian or your pack committee or unit commissioner.

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

Be positive. Figure out what is not working quite right. Is it the meeting? Is it the meeting place? Is it the activity? Is it the Cub Scouts, or a particular Cub Scout? Now is a good time to work with the boys on building group responsibilities and leadership skills.

Use group problem-solving skills, which could help the Cub Scout throughout his life. Some boys have difficulty learning positive group skills. Try to support them by guiding them through some simple group decisions. If a plan or activity is not working, guide the Cub Scouts to use their ingenuity to create a different plan. As the boys become more accustomed to making group plans, they will also become better able to handle conflict with others.

Steps for Solving Problems

1. Define the problem.
2. Determine the difficulties the problem is causing.
3. Determine the kinds of solutions that could fix the problem or make it better.
4. Try a solution. If the solution doesn't work, try a different one.
5. Evaluate the solution. How did it work?

Having a defined way of working out difficulties or changes is a good skill to build in any boy. This method also allows development of leadership skills through discussion and decision-making among the Cub Scouts.