

## **An Open Letter to Our Parents**

### **What is Scouting? And what is the program all about?**

Over the past few years I myself have asked and been asked, “What is the purpose of Scouting and what is it really about?” I have been given a variety of answers, some of which seemed perfectly reasonable, and some not so much so. Now a year into this position, I would like to share with everyone what I have found Scouting is, and what it is not.

*The Boy Scouts of America is one of the nations largest and most prominent values-based youth development organizations. The BSA provides a program for young people that builds character, trains them in the responsibilities of participating citizenship, and develops personal fitness.*

*For nearly a century, the BSA has helped build the future leaders of this country by combining educational activities and lifelong values with fun. The Boy Scouts of America believes — and, through nearly a century of experience, knows — that helping youth is a key to building a more conscientious, responsible, and productive society.*

This is what is posted on the official BSA website, and pretty much lays it out in its most general terms. That is great, but I think we owe it to ourselves to delve into this a little bit further. A statement I once overheard in regard to this went something like this. “Boy Scouts takes boys and puts them on the path to becoming responsible well rounded men.” Still, pretty good, but why the heck do we need to learn Knots then?

Since it seems like a big old sticking point for some, let's start with the uniform and why it is important.

The Boy Scout uniform is important in many ways. First, in presenting oneself in the proper uniform, the Scout is reinforcing that he belongs

to a group and exhibits pride in that membership. By wearing it properly, clean, all patches in their proper place and neckerchief worn correctly, he is taking care and pride in his appearance. He makes a conscious decision to care for it, making sure it is clean and ready to go when he needs it, and thus should be taking on responsibility for it. By doing so he is possibly taking his first adult step in caring for his appearance as well as reinforcing the same in his peers. He should expect nothing less than a properly uniformed scout from himself as well as his troop mates.

Scout skills vary in intensity and application, but each represents a commitment to mastering a skill that will enrich the scout for the rest of his life. In his path from Scout to Tenderfoot, each boy is expected to learn and master to a sufficient degree a set of abilities that would enable him to be self sufficient within the troop and its activities. By learning and mastering these skills, the Scout is now enabled to expand his experiences within troop meetings as well as outings and campouts. Just as in life, as we gather the ability to take on new tasks and responsibilities, we are granted new freedoms. We become enabled to deal with greater challenges and thus have the ability to earn greater rewards. This can be said of the skills in the scouting program. We train each of our young men to eagerly accept challenges in life in order to enjoy greater responsibilities and rewards in the future.

By achieving the rank of First Class, we acknowledge the Scouts ability to not only master these abilities, but now he has the responsibility and honor to teach them to those Scouts below him in rank, and to sign off on their achieving them once he has taught them. This also teaches him to have pride in a job well done as well as in assisting others. It makes him responsible to the others in his unit and to their growth in Scouting. In effect, we are teaching him to master those skills he will need to be a productive contributing member of any society on an interpersonal level and to take on the responsibility of improving the situations of those around him.

In working toward and achieving the ranks of Star, Life, and Eagle, the Scout learns to take on greater and greater challenges. With

each ensuing rank, the requirements put upon him for leadership, duty and diligence increase, thus rewarding him with advancement as he yet learns even greater life habits as well as attaining knowledge in himself (via personal management, personal fitness), his community (the citizenship badges), and personal challenges (swimming, cycling, hiking). He is challenged at each step to improve himself in order to attain rank advancement, and at each level takes yet another step in becoming a better man and member of his community. The skills that he learns are important, but so are the lessons learned in attaining them. By completing each step in this stage of his Scouting career, our now young men are learning the type of life skills, such as mastering the involved steps of a process to attain a specified goal, that future employers and educators will find invaluable and set him apart from the rest when being considered for academics, career positions, or when searching for leaders for tasks.

Service hours and projects are the way we teach our young future leaders to give back to their communities, and to teach them that each one of them can be a positive force while making a difference for the community at large, a group of people, or maybe even just one person. They learn the personal benefits of caring for the world around them and hopefully create the habit of doing so themselves, and transfer that onto others.

So, I guess, Scouting is a teaching method of creating responsible well rounded men that any community would be benefited to know and call a member.

But there is another point that we cannot ever forget!

Scouting also teaches Pride and self reliance. The Scouting program should be fun and challenging. We all remember those teachers in our lives that made an impact on us in a positive way. They were the ones that we couldn't wait to get to their classes. They made learning fun. They rewarded us when we did well with our lessons, and instructed us when we needed to learn them again or we needed reinforcement. They respected us, and earned our respect

in return. They taught us to take pride in our work, not through intimidation and fear, but by instilling in us a sense of pride in accomplishment. This is also what Scouting is about. It is here where we hope to teach our young men the value of compassion and understanding while reinforcing the needs of responsibility and commitment. We teach them communication skills that involve open speech and the exchange of ideas without resorting to yelling or degrading speech. By providing the proper examples, we hope to create the type of young leaders within the community at large that can not only master themselves positively, but those around them as well. A Scout is a leader that others will follow, not out of fear but out of willingness and respect, because our Scouts respect themselves as well as everyone else.

Wow, so I guess it's not all about knots then, is it!

Now, let's take a look at what Scouting is not.

Scouting is not an exclusive club, but a group that is open to all boys (and girls in regard to Venturing) regardless of race, religion, or social standing. Scouting encourages diversity and acceptance, and as such is intolerant of bigotry in any form. As such, hazing, ethnic or religious teasing or other similar forms of behavior are not tolerated. We will also not favor one religion or group over another and will work to give each the respect and deference they deserve. We work in an open forum with each of our scouts to discuss the differences they encounter in an effort to elevate understanding and break down barriers, and as such ask that each parent respect and reinforce this policy.

Scouting is not here to take care of each and every boy's every need. We hope to teach our Scouts to be self-reliant, and thus be able to take care of themselves as well as those around them. We instill in them self-sufficiency, and hope that the parent will work with the program in making the Scout follow the scout law. I know we all want to cater to our children in one way or another, but in Scouts we are prohibited from doing so. It is counter productive to the program. Our Scouts will learn as much from their missteps as their successes,

so oft times we are implored to make them fend for themselves, and sometimes come up short. It is a learning experience. Trust in the Troop and the leadership to not allow the Scout to suffer, but if they need to be inconvenienced to learn, then that is exactly what will happen. Trust me, from what I have seen, it is a something that happens to all Scouts at one time or another (and more than the occasional Scouter as well!).

Scouting is also not a child care service. While your Scout troop is very much in tune to each boy, at least as much as we can be at any given time, neither the troop, the leaders, nor the program is intended to be utilized for anything other than what it is designed for. In order for that to work, each parent must realize that participation in troop activities and rank advancement requires a commitment from the Scout as well as the family to support them. This also means that each Scout is expected to come to meetings with what is required of them, primarily properly uniformed and in possession of his scouting handbook. Anything else that the troop or Scoutmaster has deemed necessary must also be on his person during scouting times, and exceptions cannot be made. Each Scout is an example for the others within the troop, and as such exceptions are discouraged.

This also means that one is expected to drop off and pick up their Scout in a timely manner. It is unfair to expect the troop and its leaders to delay the troops program either for outings or meetings, or to stay later because one cannot behave in a responsible timely manner. Continued lateness can and will result in a curtailing of a Scouts ability to participate in events, campouts, or meetings. We all understand that extenuating circumstances can arise, but habitual offenders may find that their Scouts suffer because of their actions. A Scout is also expected to be on his best behavior while attending all troop functions and outings, and exceptions to this will usually be met with consequences. We expect the parents of each of our Scouts to support the decisions of the troop when dealing with any and all issues, and endeavor to remain fair and impartial in all situations. If a Scout continues to exhibit behavioral issues, a parent

or guardian may be required to remain at the meetings to ensure proper behavior.

Scouting is not a political tool, nor should it ever be used as one. While we teach our Scouts to be good citizens, our troop is never to be used to indicate support of a particular candidate or platform over another. Each individual Scout is encouraged to explore his own political ideals, learn how to debate them in a civilized manner, and even attempt to sway others to his way of thinking. However, while we may ask local politicians for donations of time or other things, we cannot ask the troop to endorse one side or the other. Each person, Scout, Scouter or otherwise is free to endorse whom he or she wishes.

Scouting is also not to be used for the personal advancement of any of the adults involved within the program. It is unconscionable to utilize the efforts and resources of the troop for personal enrichment over and above the satisfaction we all receive from working with our youth. Conversely, using the troop for the enrichment of a single Scout by any of the leadership is similarly discouraged. This of course does not apply to service or rank advancement projects where we encourage our Scouts to enlist the others within the troop, and thus exhibit leadership qualities necessary for growth and advancement in Scouting.

Lastly, Scouting is not in any way meant to supplant the family unit, the school or the Scout's religious affiliation. We realize that in a Scout's duty to his nation, his first responsibility is to gain a proper education. Scouting should in no way interfere with that. His duty to God is between himself, his family, and the leader of his religious belief. Scouting should in no way interfere with that as well. The twelfth point of the Scout law reads "A Scout is reverent and respectful of the beliefs of others". While we encourage our Scouts to be active in their faith, we cannot tell them how to worship. The family is the basis of our way of life, and we know that it can come in all shapes and sizes. (Some large, some small, some traditional, and some not so) Scouting cannot interfere with the interaction of a parent or guardian and a child unless there is the belief that abuse is

involved. To that extent, the Scouts should never be told that the family, its rules, or requirements, come secondary to Scouting in any way.

And finally, in regard to **knots**: Knots are what a Scout uses to secure, bind or tie that which he must. A knot may be simple, and used commonly to secure things to each other, or to close that which is open and need not be. Then there are more complex knots, which can be used to tie something down or support something, or even used in series to make yokes to distribute weight or pull a heavy load. These are a bit more challenging to make, but not as much as others.

Finally, there are specialty knots. These are knots that are designed to solve a particular kind of need, move the heaviest of items with the least amount of effort, or to be used in rescue or salvage. The beauty of the knots used in Boy Scouts is this-- We instruct our scouts in how to weave these intricate ropes, or threads if you will, to help them secure a positive outcome in most any situation that they may be needed in, but we also teach them that they need to be able to be unraveled once they are no longer needed. This means that we have taught them that no restraint or bind need to be permanent unless it is deemed necessary, but that there is always the option of opening the knot, knowing that it can be retied in the future if the education on how to do so was done correctly and the need re-arises.

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