

How to Kill a Scout Troop

So, why do we have a story on how to do away with a Scout Troop? Pretty simple, actually — to help you avoid some of the more common program pitfalls that cause Scouts to leave for other activities. It doesn't apply to just Scout Troops, you know — these mistakes are made in the other age groups in scouting, too. We're lumping a bunch of them together so that you can apply them against what you are doing in your own Troop. You can get away with having one or two of these, but any more than that, and you are probably leaking far more Scouts away from the Movement than you should be.

There is only one reason that this page cannot be considered complete yet — and that is because we know we haven't remembered all of the different things that can go wrong in a Scouting program. That's where you come in! If you can think of another way to do damage to your Group, please let us know, so that we can include it on this page. We'll happily give you credit for your submission, if we choose to use it here.

We play the same game every week...

Games are fun, and so they should be. However, not everyone likes the same games, and there will always be at least one or two Scouts who don't really fancy the one you are playing tonight. They'll be the first to be wishing they were elsewhere if the same game is played meeting after meeting. Variety is the spice of life, in your choice of games as in everything else. If your Leadership team is at a loss for games to play, there are a lot of resources available on this site or on the Internet, print a few out and have your PLs' choose some to try.

We always work on badges; it's just like school...

Although there is a need for some "classroom" work when it comes time for working on badge requirements, too great an emphasis on earning those little bits of embroidered cloth in a school-type environment doesn't go a long way toward holding a Scout's interest. Instead, you should be trying to include activities that will cover a badge's requirements almost automatically. Leave the bookwork to an absolute minimum wherever possible. There is no teacher that does as good a job as hands-on experience.

Oh, no! Not again! We go to the same camp site every time...

- Camping is one of the highlights of the Scouting year. However, if you go to the same camp site every time, there will come a time when a Scout will not be looking forward to going "There" yet again. Of course, we recognise that there are Scout Associations campsites, which rely on the funds your Troop spend at their site to assist in their viability. Still, even under such conditions, there are ways...
- Go someplace different every camp. If you do repeat camps, try not to be at the same one more often than twice a year, so that your older Scouts will not stay away as a result of the "been there, done that" syndrome.
- If you are "expected" to use a particular Scout Association campsite in your home District, Region, reserve its use for your First Year Scouts. You will find that some of your older Scouts will be happy to come along to help provide the in-camp Leadership — especially if you design PL training into the week's programme to keep your more senior Scouts gainfully employed.

- Provide a more adventurous camp for your older Scouts. While this may involve some traveling, it gives the older Scouts something to work for and look forward to that will keep them in your programme. The more you involve them in the planning and logistics build-up for the camp, the more they will look forward to the camp itself. Some of these camps could be wilderness backpacking and canoeing trips. The preparation programme for some of these challenges can provide you with an easy route to a more adventurous programme for the older Scouts throughout the bulk of the entire year.

We always have to do the same thing as the new Scouts do, and it's not really much fun being around the "little kids" any more, either...

This is the danger sign that our older Scouts give us as they plunge headlong into adolescence. They need some separation from the younger Scouts, in part because their social needs are changing. Another reason for providing them a programme with a slightly different emphasis is that there are other very enticing things available for them to do as they begin loosening the ties that bind them to their parents and siblings. The challenge is in providing a dual-tracked programme to fit the needs of two developmental groups at the same time. This is a particularly challenging task for Leaders, since they are expected to provide a programme that fits a wide age range (11 - 15 years of age), with a yawning gulf between two of the major developmental age groups — the changes from late childhood to late adolescence...

There are some alternatives for Patrol structure to consider...

- **All ages mixed in the same Patrols** . — This is good for evening or weekend inter-Patrol competitions, and enables considerable levels of mentoring between younger and more experienced Scouts. This is perhaps the most productive type of Patrol structure, since it helps the younger Scouts to develop leadership and follower ship skills, while providing the older Scouts ample opportunity to learn teaching and communications skills in the process of training their younger Patrol members.
- **Patrols consisting of similar age/experience groupings**. — This structure can be easier for the adult Leaders to work with, but it becomes necessary to form teams outside the Patrol structure in order to hold balanced competitions. You also lose the built-in leadership/follower ship mentoring process that comes from within mixed-age Patrols.
- The younger group of Scouts receives more basic Scouting skills training, while the older Scouts progress into more advanced training that builds on the skills they have already learned. While you should use the older Scouts to provide some of the training the younger Scouts receive, they really need to have concentrated training in the skills they will need in the more challenging aspects of their program.
- The older Scouts become more involved in the development and operation of the Troop activities. They should also receive more advanced Leadership and related skills training. The aim is to help them become more independent of the adult Leadership — to the point where the adults move more into the background in order to allow the older Scouts the opportunity to manage their own affairs more or less completely. The adults remain to provide the needed safety net, in case things don't go as planned.
- PLs' provide more of the training and supervision that the younger Scouts need.

All of our camps are the same, no matter where we go...

- Many Troops fall into the mode of monthly camps. These take place at an established campground, where you drive to a car park next to the site and set up a weekend camp. The activity program takes place in and around the campsite. The solution here is to do something different just about every month. In some cases the younger and older Scouts should be camping in the same site and working on the same things. This would be a camp where the younger Scouts are learning and the older Scouts are providing leadership and training for everyone. In other cases, the programme may be parallel, but the older and younger Scouts are participating separately. Suggestions include:
- Everyone working in their Patrols (if your Patrols are of the mixed-age variety) at District Camp (Camporee). This is an opportunity for your Troop to show the rest of the District that you have it "together" by how well you perform.
- A backpacking weekend where the younger Scouts have a fairly easy loop trip (leaving from and returning to the same location), while the older Scouts are off on a more challenging route that brings them back to the same pick-up site as the younger Scouts. (Seeing their older friends coming in off the trail makes a BIG impression on the younger folks, motivating them to remain with the Troop long enough to be able to be part of the "big guy" crew.)
- Our Scouts like an occasional weekend where they go on a camping trip that has no plan, where they can do their own thing, cook individually whenever they happen to be hungry, and just lay back and enjoy life. We let them do it. It's a bit stressful on the adults who feel a need for a plan to everything, but the Scouts really enjoy doing this once in awhile.
- A base camp skills weekend. The focus can be on any number of activities. Perhaps you have a construction-training weekend where the younger Scouts work, while the more experienced Scouts work on the bumpier stuff. Maybe it's a survival-training weekend where the younger Scouts are receiving their basic skills and the older Scouts are getting more into the deep wilderness side of long-term survival technique.

We always meet in the same place, and it's really boring!

You **DON'T** have to meet in the same place week after week. You can have weeks where part of the Troop goes swimming while the rest learn fire defence skills at the local fire brigade. Perhaps one meeting a month where you go somewhere else and do something else from amongst the many Scouting skills?

We're supposed to run the Troop, but the adults never let us!

OK, folks... B-P said the Scouts are supposed to manage the Troop. We really need to let them do it, as advertised. The thing is, we all know that kids the age of our Scouts can't really provide all of the leadership that's needed, right? Ummmm, not true... Of course, you need to **TRAIN** your Scouts to provide that kind of leadership, eh? Letting go of much of what you may perceive as your leadership responsibility is hard to do, especially if your Troop has been adult-led for a long time. But, your Troop's best growth and strength will come when

you have a youth-led programme — and these young people can really surprise you with how well they can plan and run things, once they are properly trained.

Leadership training begins with a Scout's investiture into your Troop. It's a never-ending process that neither you nor any Scout will ever complete while you are together. When the day arrives that you think you know everything there is to know about being a Leader in Scouting, that's the day when you should leave the active side of Troop leadership and "retire" to another role.

- Leadership training begins with teaching a concept called "follower ship". Neither you nor the youth Leaders can **BE** Leaders unless you have followers, and every effective Leader knows how to be a good follower.

Leadership by example is the best type in the majority of situations. Good leadership is always from "out front", never through pushing from behind.

- The most effective formal leadership training program are those where older Scouts from a number of different Troops come together for a course put on by a group of adult Leaders, most of whom are not the Scouts' own Leaders. If your District / Region does not offer such training, you should gather a group of interested Scouters together, reach out for resources from your Scout Association, and build your course.

By now you will probably have noticed that most of these problem areas are put to you much as you would hear them from your own Scouts' lips — especially from the Scouts who have been with you for a couple of years. These are the Scouts many of us have trouble hanging onto over the long haul. By pointing out a few ways to do "turn them off" on the idea of Scouting, we hope that we have helped you find ways around a few of the problems you may be having within your own Scout Group. We need to work hard to design our program to fit their needs, too — so that we can grow them into new Leaders for tomorrow's Scouts. The more we can do for one another, the closer we bring ourselves as a Scouting family!