

JUNIOR LEADER RESOURCES

DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE SCOUTS

(Controlling the Group and Effective Teaching)

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We are influenced throughout our lives and especially as we grow up, by a variety of factors which may lead us towards, or away from, disruptive behavior. Through experiences in the family, at school, in the community and at leisure, Scouts can learn the benefits of being non-disruptive and the costs being disruptive. No one expects you to be a psychologist. If you see serious problems, report them to your adult leadership. Feel comfortable in asking for help when you feel you need it, initially from your senior Scout leadership, and then, the adult leadership. Situations that affect the safety of one or another Scout should be reported to the adult leadership. Adults are responsible for the safety of the troop.

OK, with that said, let's look at some helpful hints in how to deal with disruptive Scouts. Here are a few tips on leading a disruptive Scout. These suggestions are intended for leaders of Scout troops. Troops have young men between the ages of 11 and 18. Some suggestions will be obviously more appropriate for younger Scouts, others for older, but the unifying themes of structure, instruction, and encouragement pertain to all.

- Do not ignore disruptive Scouts the sooner you adjust the situation, the sooner the repeated disruptions will end.
- Bring disruptive Scouts into the activities. Ask them a question or have them perform a demonstration.
- Use firm eye contact. You can "bring back" a disruptive Scout with eye contact. A glance can retrieve a Scout from a daydream or give permission to ask a question or just give silent assurance. Do it often. Be like the conductor of a symphony. Get the orchestra's attention before beginning. (You may use silence, the Scout Sign, or the tapping of a pencil, to do this.) Keep the troop "in time," pointing to different parts of the room as you need their help. Some Scouts have a problem maintaining eye contact. For those Scouts, a gentle hand on the

shoulder does the trick. It can also act as a gentle pat on the back of support.

- Listen and respond to a Scouts' comments and ideas. Be on the lookout for how well you are communicating with them. A good technique is to repeat what they say and ask them if that is what they meant. Many Scouts need to feel engaged and connected. As long as they are involved, they will feel motivated and be less likely to tune you out.
- When giving instructions, ask the Scouts to repeat back to you what you have asked them to do. Many times Scouts misunderstand something, they "think" was said to them, rather than what was said to them. A good technique is to ask them to write down your instructions and read them back to you. Remember: Repeat directions -- Write down directions -- Speak directions -- Repeat directions. Many people need to hear things more than once.
- Address the Scouts by name. It helps when addressing someone to say their name at the beginning of the conversation, it will help to get their attention.
- Carry on a conversation with the troop. For example, use phrases like, "what can I do to help you?" And then listen to what they respond.
- Give disruptive Scouts boundaries and limits. Make this containing and soothing, not punitive. Do it consistently, predictably, promptly, and plainly. DON'T get into complicated, lawyer-like discussions of fairness. These long discussions are just a diversion. Take charge!
- Orient Scouts in the beginning of the Scout year. Let them know what you expect their behavior to be during the Scout year. Have the PLC decide upon, write down rules and expectations, and hand them out to the Scouts. This has been found a very effective preventative measure.
- Establish open lines of communication (eliminate the artificial barrier between Scouts and leader)
- Pay attention to how the Scouts are responding to you. Some Scouts are attention seeking and will play up more if he is the center of attention, and not play up when ignored. Remember that Scouting is a "safe haven" and that Scouting recognizes the differences in learning styles of each individual. Scouts have a very low self-esteem, and will take any attention they can get. If they can't get positive attention, they will disrupt, to get the attention they crave.
- Redirect Scouts' questions back to the troop as a whole.
- Teach Scouts the skills associated with being a successful Scout, and surviving in the outdoors.
- Remember that we all need structure especially the disruptive Scout. Make lists, we benefit greatly from having a list to refer back to when we

get lost in what we're doing. We need reminders, repetition and previews. We also need direction, limits and structure. Make sure your troop meetings are well organized and that you come to them fully prepared to fill the entire time. Especially if someone or something does not show up as planned. Always have an alternative plan in case something goes wrong. Always have more things to do than you have time. If you are organized, your Scouts will be as well.

- Have as predictable a schedule as possible and refer to it often. If you are going to vary it, as most interesting leaders do, give lots of warning and preparation. Transitions and unannounced changes are very difficult for many. Some people become discombobulated around them. Take special care to prepare for transitions well in advance. Announce what is going to happen, then give repeat warnings as the time approaches.
- Treat Scouts with respect and foster mutual respect in all Scout activities.
- Separate disruptive groups. Split pairs and trios, whole patrols even, that don't do well together. Don't despair if after dividing them you find that the new groups don't work either. You might have to try many arrangements.
- Move around the meeting place. Don't be afraid to get out from in front of the troop.
- Talk less and have more hands-on activities. Scouts sit around all day in school, they don't want to have to sit around listening to lectures at Scout meetings as well.
- Examine the location of the meeting place and enhance this space (e.g., play music, dim lights when appropriate, move outside for some activities). Also try changing the orientation and order of the meeting place (e.g., from a circle with the chairs, sit on the floor, etc.) Solemn ceremonies could be done in subdued lighting, or under candlelight. Noisy activities are suitable for large areas and areas where the Scouts are use to exercising (e.g., a gym). However, gyms and cafeterias are normally not a good place to schedule a meeting where you wish the Scouts to be quieter. A library or classroom may be a much better location for such a meeting.
- Make it a habit to ask a short question on a regular basis. For example, "Where can we use this knot?" "What part of building a monkey bridge is giving you trouble?"
- Break down large tasks into small tasks. This is one of the most crucial of all teaching techniques. Large tasks quickly overwhelm Scouts and they draw back with an emotional "I'll-NEVER-be-able-to-do-THAT". By

breaking a task down into manageable parts, each component looking small enough to be do-able, you are empowering the Scout to sidestep the feeling of being overwhelmed. Scouts can do a lot more than they think they can. By breaking tasks down, the leader can let the Scout prove this to himself. It can help them avoid that defeatist attitude that so often gets in their way. You should do it all the time. This is one of the fundamental techniques of Scout training.

- Let yourself be playful, have fun, be different, and be extravagant. Introduce novelty into the meeting or activity. Scouts love novelty. They respond to it with enthusiasm. It helps keep attention -- the Scouts' attention and yours as well. Scouts are full of life -- they love to play. Above all, they hate being bored. So much of their day involves boring stuff like structure, schedules, lists, and rules, you want to show them that those things do not have to go hand in hand with being a boring person, a boring leader, or running a boring troop. Every once in a while, if you can let yourself be a little bit silly, that will help a lot. Remember: Keep it simple, make it fun (KISMIF)!
- Watch out for over stimulation. Like a pot on the fire, disruption can boil over. You need to be able to reduce the heat in a hurry. The best way of dealing with disorder in the troop meeting is to prevent it in the first place.
- Seek out and underscore success as much as possible. Scouts often live with so much failure, they need all the positive handling they can get. This point cannot be overemphasized: Scouts need and benefit from praise. They love encouragement. They drink it up and grow from it. And without it, they shrink and wither. Often the most devastating aspect of disruptive activity is not the intent to disrupt itself, but the secondary damage done to self-esteem. So water these Scouts well with encouragement and praise. Praise, stroke, approve, encourage, and nourish.
- Give responsibility when possible back to the Scout. Remember the old adage: "Don't do anything for a Scout, they can do for themselves."
- Role models work very well. A Troop Guide or Patrol Advisor assigned to a rowdy patrol not only gets them interested but helps them to advance and prove themselves as well.
- With older Scouts, have them write little notes to themselves to remind them of their questions. In essence, they take notes not only on what is being said to them, but what they are thinking as well. This will help them listen better.
- Exercise. One of the best treatments for disruptive Scouts is exercise, preferably strenuous exercise. Exercise helps work off excess energy, it

helps focus attention, it stimulates certain hormones and neurochemicals that are beneficial, and it is fun! Make sure the exercise IS fun, so the Scout will continue to do it for the time allotted.

- Never embarrass a Scout in front of the troop. When you talk with a disruptive Scout, do so after the troop meeting or if they leave, talk with them before the next troop meeting begins. If you have to discipline a Scout, do so in private (see discipline at the end of this list).
- Ensure that the Scouts understand that the troop meeting lasts the entire period and their behavior needs to be under control during that time. This goes for the campouts and other activities as well.
- Report major problems to senior Scout leadership. If they cannot handle it, they can bring it up to the adult leadership or a troop disciplinary committee, made up of the Senior Patrol Leader, Assistant Scoutmasters, Scoutmaster, and/or some committee members for further action. This should be looked at as a last resort.
- Write down major Scout problems and report them to your senior Scout and adult leadership. Don't expect the leaders to immediately respond by discipline. They are very likely to ask you to change your behavior to better respond to the situation. The goal is to get each individual in the group to function to their fullest potential, not to cut off an individual who is disrupting. Another goal they have is to teach you how to be an effective leader. NOTE: Situations that may affect the safety of one or another Scout should be reported immediately to the adult leadership. Adults are responsible for the safety of the troop.
- Know your limits. Don't be afraid to ask for help. You, as a leader, cannot be expected to be an expert on psychology. You should feel comfortable in asking your senior leadership for help when you feel you need it.
- If you respond to a disruption with discipline, do so progressively. Begin with a low-level response and choose the timing of the discipline with care. This is probably a very good time to consult an older Scout or an adult. Here are some alternative disciplinary activities used in different troops:
 - Some Patrol Leaders Councils have decided to call the Scouts parents to come and pick the Scout up. The SPL and Scoutmaster, or just the Scoutmaster will then discuss with the parent and Scout what happened (soon after) and an agreement is made as to how to correct this and become players again. When this is done the boy comes back to the troop, nothing is said to others.

- Some Patrol Leaders Councils have decided to institute a Judicial Board made up of senior Scouts with the Scoutmaster an ex-officio (and generally mute) member. Youth leaders carry colored cards that are presented (without fanfare, silently) to Scouts who are misbehaving. The card requests the Scout's attendance at the Judicial Board which is held immediately following the regular Troop meeting. The youth leaders counsel the Scout on the reasons to maintain decorum, the cost of time loss to the program (shortened game segment, skills training, outing planning,...) and appropriate points of the Scout Law. A second infraction leads to a letter from the Scoutmaster to the parents. The third, a meeting with the parents. A potent aspect of the Judicial Board is the ride home with parents who've been kept waiting while their Scout is "boarded"!
- Always be on the lookout for the special moments. Disruptive Scouts are far more talented and gifted than they often seem. They are full of creativity, play, sudden inspiration and happiness. They tend to be impervious, always bouncing back. They are often generous of spirit, and happy to be of service. If you look for it, they often have that "special something" that enhances the setting they're in. Remember that there is a melody inside that noise, a symphony yet to be written.

Resources and References:

SCOUTING FOR YOUTH WITH EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES BSA Publication, No. 33008 1994, ISBN 0-8395-3008-0

A SCOUTMASTER'S GUIDE TO WORKING WITH SCOUTS WITH DISABILITIES, BSA Publication, NO. 33056 ISBN 0-8395-3056-0

UNDERSTANDING CUB SCOUTS WITH DISABILITIES BSA Publication, No. 33839 1995, ISBN 0-8395-3839-

EXPLORERS WITH DISABILITIES PROGRAM HELPS BSA Publication, No. 33674 1996, ISBN 0-8395-3674-7

ADD Resources at Health Line: <http://www.healthline.com/channel/add-adhd.html>

"Dealing with Disruptive Students", by Lori Gaskin, Dean of Instruction, Lake Tahoe Community College, English Department; 10/97

"50 Tips on the Classroom Management of Attention Deficit Disorder" by Edward M. Hallowell, MD and John J. Ratey MD (c) 1992

Supporting Scouts With AD/HD [PPT DOC](#)

From the BSA: The aims and methods of the Scouting program make it an outstanding opportunity for those with AD/HD characteristics to develop and enhance the skills that can lead to success in school, in relationships with other, and in life.