

## **Den Discipline- Character DOES Matter! (Or How to mold little minds without losing yours!)**

**Positive behavior** is essential for creating a den environment where each boy can benefit fully from the Cub Scouting program. It's also essential for creating an environment where the leader and parents can enjoy the time they spend with the boys in the den. Maintaining positive behavior can sometimes be a challenge. It isn't easy– but it's not impossible either. And it's worth the effort!

### Learning Objectives

- Describe the reasons for promoting positive behavior in dens and packs
- Describe the needs of boys and how these needs can influence behavior
- Explain how the relationship between boys and the leader can affect behavior
- Describe some specific tools that can be utilized to help maintain positive behavior in the den meeting

Why is positive behavior important?

### Cub Scout Promise:

I promise to do my best  
to do my duty to God and my country  
To help other people and  
To obey the Law of the Pack

### Law of the Pack

The Cub Scout follows Akela  
The Cub Scout helps the pack go  
The Pack helps the Cub Scout grow  
The Cub Scout gives good will

Teach the concept of Akela early and reinforce it often! You are Akela- and they *promise* to follow your direction.

Character Development is one of the 3 aims of Scouting (along with Citizenship and Personal Fitness). It is our responsibility to create a den and pack program for the boys that teaches character development. Included in teaching character are such things as teaching respect, courtesy, kindness, and responsibility. If we allow boys to speak out of turn, arrive late, “pick on” other boys, and not participate in activities, we are missing an opportunity to make a difference in their lives.

Not only does poor behavior impair the leader's ability to provide a quality program for the boys who misbehave, but it also detracts from the program that the other boys receive. A den with no direction and poor behavior has a higher probability of losing boys. The boys don't have fun and the adults don't see the benefit of membership. When families leave Scouting, they will not benefit from future years of membership. How tragic!

Another important reason to maintain positive behavior in a den is that the den leader and parents will have fun and feel rewarded by their efforts. This cannot be over emphasized! If the adults have fun, they will remain in leadership longer. The longer adults stay involved, the more they learn about

Scouting and about the boys, and the better they become at providing a great program for the boys. When parents enjoy helping, they develop adult friendships and that creates an environment where more parents are more supportive of Scouting. When kids are out of control and the leader has no idea what to do about it- the leader often quits out of frustration. Cub Scouting is a family program. A strong den and pack program benefit the whole family.

#### Needs of Boys

- To be loved
- To be accepted
- To be noticed
- To belong & be praised and encouraged
- To let off steam
- To be safe & secure
- To express themselves
- To experiment (and make mistakes sometimes)
- To have fun

Remember that each boy has emotional needs that need to be fulfilled.

How each boy tries to fulfill these needs is what makes him unique. One boy may be very timid and quiet and another may be loud and rowdy, but both are afraid they won't be loved. The den leader must plan ahead to deal with misbehavior and be prepared to maintain discipline in the den in order to make Cub Scouting a positive experience for every boy and his family.

#### Achieving Positive Behavior

- Expectations
- Den code of conduct
- Den meeting structure
- Leader/boy relationship

#### Den Code of Conduct–

A Code of Conduct is a list of behavioral expectations and consequences if it is broken. The boys, with help of den leader create it.

The code of conduct should be only 3 or 4 items.

Positive words (not “no” or “Don’t”)

Example: “Speak when it is your turn” instead of “Don’t speak when someone else is speaking.

Last rule is “Have Fun”

Possible code would be 3 r’s– Respect for others, responsibility for yourself and your things, reasonable behavior. But remember to work with the boys so that *they* develop the rules. It will mean more to them this way.

Boys sign code of conduct

#### Den Meeting Structure-

- Follow the den meeting structure as outlined in the CSLB, TC Handbook, and CS Program Helps. These resources are the best friend a den leader ever had!!! CS Program Helps have detailed meeting plans for each month. Practical ideas and support can be found at Roundtable

each month. A well-planned, fun and exciting program leaves little time and opportunity for the boys to dream up “their own fun”.

- Definite beginning and end and not too long. Always involve boys in every part of the meeting. Don’t “perform” for them. It’s *their* meeting. If they are busy, they will have less idle time to find ways to misbehave. Example: Don’t lead them in the Pledge of Allegiance. Have one of the boys take the lead, with your help.
- Seating arrangements. There are no firm rules here, as each home or meeting place is different. Consideration should be given to which boys sit next to each other, distractions in the room, and placement of adults in the room.
- Leader/Boy relationship. A successful relationship between any 2 people is based on respect. The leader must deserve (but may not have) the respect of the boy and the leader must respect the boy. When a boy has serious behavior issues and treats adults disrespectfully, this can be difficult. The starting point is to find *something* about the boy that you like. You really *can* do this. Over time, the developing relationship will improve. Under no circumstances should the adult lose control and yell or speak unkindly to a Cub Scout! Setting a good example for proper behavior is a strong influence. Behave the way you want the Scouts to behave.
- If the DL is enjoying the meeting, the boys are, too. Boys model what they see so the DL should be a good model by being positive and having a good attitude.
- Consistent and fair in all dealings with the boys. Treat the boys the same when rules are broken
- Be a good listener. When a boys wants your attention, look him in the eye. If you are busy, look him in the eye when you ask him to wait a minute. Honor his patient waiting by turning to him with your FULL attention as soon as possible.
- Give the boy a chance to participate in discussions. When you notice a boy’s good behavior- COMMENT! Let him and the other boys in the den know exactly what you liked. The more specific you are, the more likely communication has taken place and the behavior will be repeated.

#### Tools for Maintaining Discipline

- Cub Scout sign. Wait until it gets results– wait them out– the sign needs to have real meaning.
- Gathering activity (and closing activity if needed). This can be one of the greatest tools you can have! When those first few boys arrive and start running around whole you are still setting up for the den meeting, you will have a difficult time getting them to settle down. If the first boy has something to do as soon as he arrives, the behavior will never get out of control in the first place. Consider delegating the task of preparing a gathering activity to your assistant den leader or to a parent who is willing to help. This way, if a parent wants to talk to you before the meeting starts, or if you have last minute preparations for the meeting, another adult will have the boys actively engaged. This is also a good task for a den chief, if you have one.
- Conduct Candle. A conduct candle is a reward system for positive behavior. At the opening of the meeting, the denner lights the candle. If the code of conduct is broken, the den leader simply blows out the candle. A few minutes later, the den leader invites the boy who was misbehaving to light the candle again. At the end of the meeting, the candle is extinguished. When the candle burns down, something good happens. It can be a field trip, a special treat, or a fun activity. The boys should help to select what happens when the candle burns down. Naturally, the candle will burn faster if it is lit for the entire time the den meets. Poor behavior lengthens the time before the reward takes place. The candle should be sized so that it burns

down every 6 weeks or so. If it takes too long, it doesn't seem attainable. If it burns too quickly, the reward seems less meaningful. When they do reach the point of reward, be sure to reinforce the reason for the reward and praise them for the way they keep their code of conduct.

- Marble Jar— Same concept as the conduct candle. Some facilities do not allow candles. Give each boy about 5 marbles (or pennies, or dried beans...) at the beginning of each meeting. If a boy breaks one of the rules, or refuses to do what an adult asks, ask him for one of his marbles. No yelling—just ask him for a marble. Throwing a marble or rolling it around is reason to lose it. Instruct the boys to keep the marbles in their pockets. At the end of the meeting, each boy places his remaining marbles (hopefully all of them!) in the marble jar. When the jar fills, the reward kicks in. As with the size of the candle, try to gage the number of marbles so that the jar will fill in about 6 weeks.
- Talking stick or talking feather. At appropriate times in a meeting, such as when the den is sitting in a circle or at a table talking, you may want to use a talking stick. You must have the talking stick in order to “have the floor”. If you want to speak, you raise your hand or otherwise indicate that you want the talking stick. One person speaks at a time—the person who is holding the talking stick. This not only keeps boys from speaking out of turn, but it also gives quieter boys an opportunity to speak. The talking stick can be fun—make it into a game that teaches a lesson. It isn't practical to use the talking stick for the entire meeting. It can be awkward at certain times. But it's a great tool to teach the concept of one speaker at a time. It works well to involve the boys in making the stick. Have them gather materials or add their own personal touches. It can be as simple as a small stick with their names on it, or a feather, or it can be a stick embellished with feathers and beads.

#### Pack Meetings:

Don't let your hard work go out the window when you get to pack meetings! Teach the boys in your den that their code of conduct applies to pack meetings as well. Ideally, the Cubmaster will develop a code of conduct for pack meetings that is similar to your den code of conduct. It might involve following the rules of the facility (school or church), and showing respect for anyone who is up front during the pack meeting. Many of the ideas for den behavior can also be used in pack meetings. Gathering activities and giving each den a responsibility (such as setting up chairs, opening flag, etc) helps. Seating arrangements are also important.

#### ADD/ADHD

A note about boys who are hyperactive or who have attention deficit disorder: This class was originally a class on disabilities. When we taught about disabilities, we discovered that feedback was poor, because participants didn't want to know what to do with hearing or sight impaired boys. What they really wanted to know was what to do about behavior problems. All the participants wanted to talk about was kids with ADHD. It's important to note that we are NOT talking about ADHD. We are talking about behavior. A boy who is not obedient, not courteous, and is out of control may or may not have a true disability (ADHD). In reality, most challenges are not disabilities. They are simply boys who have no direction and don't believe they are expected to behave. We aren't teaching how to deal with ADHD in this class. We are talking about behavior in this class. We are not doctors, therapists, child psychologists, or educators (most of us). We are Scout leaders. We have no authority to diagnose something like ADHD and it is not our place to give advice to parents who have the challenge of raising a child with a disability. Take care not to judge or diagnose. It isn't our place to

do either. It IS our place to address the issue– the simple issue of a boy who is not following the rules. If a parent confides in us that he or she has challenges with a boy that relate to a disability, our only responsibility is to listen, encourage, and support.

If you do have youth in a unit who are challenged with issues such as ADHA, ODD, or other similar disorders, it would be wise to inform yourself. There are many good books and resources on the subject. Knowledge is power. But take care not to overstep your boundaries with the family. Remember– your greatest tool is showing respect. Young people with ADHD are not used to being shown respect. And their parents are not used to being told they are a “good mom” or a “good dad”. The kindest thing you can do for a harried mom of a Tiger Cub who is climbing the walls is to tell her you can see how hard she is trying and how much she loves her son. The most unkind thing you can do is to frown and scowl and show her with your body language that you are disgusted with his behavior– implying that she isn’t keeping her son under control. There is most likely a lot you don’t know about the family and the challenges the parent faces. The behavior must be addressed. But do it while showing respect and kindness.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The parents don’t always know what to do with a child who has behavior problems. Treat them as you would want to be treated if you were in their situation. In some small way, try to be part of the solution. And remember– there is always something that you can find to praise.

Final thought:

When an adult is in the presence of a young person, he or she is influencing that young person. Whether you choose to or not- you are influencing others all the time. They watch your actions and they react to your words. You ARE influencing them. It is your choice as to HOW you influence them. You can choose, by inaction, to show them that poor behavior is acceptable. You can choose, by lack of addressing their poor behavior, to send them the message that it isn’t really important to make good on what they promised in their oaths, pledges and promises. You can choose to show them by your actions, that you don’t think you deserve respect.

OR– you can choose to show them that character matters. You can show young people that you DO deserve respect, that they DO have an obligation to do their best to do what they promised to do. You can choose to look for every opportunity to model and explain to them why they promised to do things and how to make good on their promises.

**YOU ARE WONDERFUL** for volunteering to be a Cub Scout leader!