

Discipline

Taughannock District Cub Roundtable
November 2009

Discipline - from the Latin for “instruction” meaning an “activity, exercise, or a regimen that develops or improves a skill”

We decided to review this topic early in the year because it can be difficult to help our Cubs move together. Gathering and getting six-year old Tigers together is like, well, herding cats.

To start, notice that discipline means “instruction” not “punishment.” In reviewing resources available across Scouting websites, I was struck by how often the question of discipline is related back to the question of the instruction we give our Cubs - - our program. Discipline and program are inter-related. When Cubs misbehave, they need the discipline of good programming. Put another way, scouts who are inappropriately rowdy are sending you a message - “we’re not interested in what you are doing.” Planning is a part of discipline - rowdiness is a message as well as a behavior. (See http://usscouts.org/profbvr/pack_meetings/index.asp) How are you responding to that message? After all, Scouts is not school ... they do not “have to” learn what we are teaching. Ultimately, Cubs can vote with their feet and leave our program. Scouting recognizes that self-discipline is one of the things we are teaching. We do our teaching of discipline, in part, with how we conduct ourselves in a meeting:

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. The example set by positive adult role models is a powerful tool for shaping behavior and a tool that is stressed in Scouting.

From Guide to Safe Scouting: <http://www.scouting.org/scoutsources/HealthandSafety/GSS/gss01.aspx>

One of the best sources speaking to encouraging appropriate behavior among scouts is one of our first, Baden Powell himself. He said:

We have to realise there are two forms of discipline: one is the expression of loyalty through action, the other submission to orders through fear of punishment.”

Imposed discipline leads to reaction; discipline from within needs none.

In discussing appropriate behavior, there will be Cubs who test your patience above and beyond. Recognize that nearly all such Cubs have challenges in their lives: difficult home situations, learning challenges or mental health challenges. There are many resources to help you work with that Cub, starting with the parents and leading through this Roundtable into National resources. If you need that specialized help, ask for it.

This FAQ focuses instead on helping you encourage and maintain normal appropriate behavior in your meetings. Here are some tips:

From Baloo’s Bugle for September 2008 (<http://www.usscouts.org/bbugle/bb0809/bbtips.asp>)

Six essentials for a Cub Scout leader to get through their meeting or activity with a minimum of damage and tears. Here they are again in abbreviated form.

- Well planned programs - The first, and most critical, step toward controlling the behavior of the boys is to plan a good program. Boys, who are having a good time, rarely cause trouble.
- Get and hold their attention - You will get nowhere if you lose control of your meeting. Wearing your Scout uniform, ceremonies, the Cub Scout sign are all useful. Keep activities short, simple and fun.
- They know what’s expected of them - Boys often misbehave just because they are not sure how they are expected to act. They are imaginative and invent their own standards of behavior. You don’t want that. You will need a Code of Conduct - a set of rules that we all follow at our meetings. “A boy carries out suggestions more wholeheartedly when he understands their aim.” Robert Baden-Powell. (I note that the Cub Scout Promise and Law are good basic conduct codes if you bring them into the situation, as in “Johnny, can you explain how what you are doing is ‘helping our Den go?’”)
- Give each boy individual attention - Use each boy’s name a lot. Children crave attention and, the last time I priced it, attention was an inexpensive commodity.

- Build a team. - Build pride in your den. Use lots of standard team building gimmicks like den flags, doodles, cheers, secret codes etc. Uniform inspections instill pride in appearance and this spills over to pride in conduct.
- Empowerment Give each boy a chance to lead or star. There are opportunities in each of the boys' books for leadership roles. Use them in your den programs. Skits and ceremonies at pack meetings give boys opportunities to stand out. Make sure that each of your boys gets these chances. Use the denner, change denners regularly.

From Baloo's Bugle for September 2008 (<http://www.usscouts.org/bbugle/bb0311/bbtt.html>)

Den Code Of Conduct (www.PowWow-OnLine.net)

Surprisingly enough, most den leaders find that if their den has a Code of Conduct to follow, their home, their furniture, and their dignity remain intact throughout their Cub Scout experience. Boys need to know just how far they can go, and the Den Code of Conduct will tell them this.

Each den will want to develop their own code to fit those special boys. Don't make too many rules. Omit insignificant ones. The rules should be simple, clear, and concise so they can be understood by the boys. In fact, the boys should help set the rules.

Some dens use a good conduct candle. This is a large candle that burns during den meetings. When any boy breaks the conduct code the candle is extinguished for the remainder of the meeting. After several den meetings, the candle will be burned down, and a special treat or trip is planned for the den. The sooner the candle burns down, the sooner the boys receive their treat. In this way, the candle serves as an incentive for good behavior.

Suggestions for a Code of Conduct

- Enter by back door.
- Wipe feet before entering.
- Leave boots on porch.
- Go directly to den meeting room.
- No running or wrestling indoors.
- Show courtesy and respect for other den members, leaders, and the den meeting place.
- Bring den dues and handbook to each meeting.

Some Cubs answer to what the code should say:

- Don't interrupt
- No nasty jokes
- No cussing
- No punching or kicking
- Listen to Akela and don't talk back
- Don't stick your tongue out or spit
- No talking ugly about other people
- If a boy disobeys more than three times in one den meeting, he will phone his parents to pick him up immediately.
- Always go straight home after den meetings.

Friendly Reminders

- It is important to keep boys under control at all times, without smothering them.
- If you lose control, you need to know how to regain it. Don't try to out shout the boys. Stand where the boys can see you and raise your arm in the Cub Scout sign. Train your boys to respond to this signal. They should know that when the sign goes up, they get quiet.
- Don't say (and definitely don't shout), "When the sign goes up, the mouth goes shut." Or you've lost the advantage of the sign
- Alternate sitting, doing quiet activities, and doing less quiet activities.
- Know when the boys are getting restless and change the pace of the meeting. Go outside for an active game or contest. Give them a chance to blow off excess steam. I love cheers for this – give someone a cheer for something they did, make it a really active one. It provides "wiggle time."
- Balance is important. Know where to draw the line.