

# Group Parents' Evening



## Introduction

Parents evenings are not only social functions, although that is part of their value. They go deeper than that. Do we really know our Members parents as well as we should and do the parents know us? Are they made to feel part of the Group family? A Scout is often recent about Scouting activities at home and many parents have only a hazy idea of what goes on when their child goes to weekly meetings. A parents evening can help to make up this deficiency; it gives the parents some idea of what happens in the Group and helps to create a friendly feeling between parents and Scouters.

The parents must know what we are trying to achieve. They need to see the Group at work in its familiar surroundings and to have an opportunity of sharing in its life and activity. Scouting would be more successful if the co-operation of parents was more freely encouraged and seen to be appreciated.

Experience has shown that many parents will help if the opportunity is given and the right approach used. The training programme stands a greater chance of success if we have the backing of parents. Their interest and support can make all the difference. Group parents' evenings provide opportunities to enlist and strengthen their support.

## Purpose

A Group parents' evening is a must for inclusion in the Group's programme. Parents should be made to feel that this is an occasion not to be missed. They may have some idea about the work of the Group from what their children tell them but this is an opportunity to show the life of the Group. It is also a wonderful opportunity to explain our aims and principles and how they are put into action. Take care not to give the impression that we only hold parents' evenings in order to recruit help for the Group. Too often parents do not come to an event of this kind because they are afraid they will be asked to

give assistance and put in an embarrassing situation where they cannot refuse. Requests may well be made for assistance, but let them be a natural part of the programme. If you know your parents well you will know which ones to ask to do particular jobs and the personal approach is usually more successful than the public one.

## Planning

The evening needs to be planned well in advance by the Patrol Leaders' Council, Unit Executive Committee and Group Scouters, with Sections liaising and members of the Group Executive Committee being involved. Having decided the date it should be published well in advance so that parents, Scouters and supporters can put it in their diaries and avoid a clash of dates.

You should also decide the programme for the evening well in advance. Jobs should be allocated and everyone made aware of the part they are to play, so that there is good co-ordination and no duplication of responsibility. This is very important when arranging details of the Beaver Scout, Cub Scout, Scout, and Venture Scout contributions to the programme.

## Venue

If possible hold this event in your Group Headquarters, but take a critical look to see if it is in fact suitable for this sort of evening. Is it large enough? Has it sufficient seating? Does it lend itself to the atmosphere that you wish to create? Does it look inviting? Some headquarters do not lend themselves to a social occasion. If this is so in your case do not hesitate to arrange an alternative venue.

## Date

You may think of a Pack or Troop night as being convenient, but this may prove to be an inconvenient day for the parents. Some Groups like to use a Saturday but this can be a popular evening for family entertainment and may not be

suitable. The most popular day appears to be Friday. This suits the younger members i.e. Beaver Scouts and Cub Scouts, who will be staying up later than usual, as well as the younger brothers and sisters of Scouts

### **Invitations**

Make the invitations personal and attractive. A printed invitation is more effective than a duplicated sheet. This may be a little expensive but it is only once a year. If the invitation is by letter it should be addressed personally, Dear Mr. & Mrs. Smith, rather than Dear Parent, which is very impersonal. This can be done even with a duplicated letter. You should avoid the ending 'Yours in Scouting' or 'Yours faithfully'. If you know your parents well it should be 'Yours sincerely'. This is an important point, but it is not always followed.

Consider posting the invitation to the parents. If this is not possible, one of the Scout Patrols might be given the task of delivering them. Avoid distributing the invitations via the Beaver Scouts, Cub Scouts, or Scouts. Too often they get stuffed into pockets and there they stay until eventually they are thrown away. If time allows, follow up the invitation with a personal call on those parents who have never been to a parents' evening before. Visiting is an important part of our work which is often ignored. A forthcoming event for parents is a good excuse for a call.

### **Reception**

A good start is important. Don't just let the parents wander into the hall and look lost until something starts to happen. They won't come next time! It would be nice if on arrival they were met by the Group Scout Leader, Group Chairman, and the Scouters. You must ensure that all preparations for the evening are completed beforehand so that the Scouters are free at this moment and do not have to run around checking this and that. If there are any last minute arrangements to make these could be organised by the Venture Scouts and Patrol Leaders.

The Scouters cannot pay attention to all the parents at the same time, so have static displays around the hall which they can look at while they wait for the proceedings to begin. These displays can cover many subjects. Each Section of the Group could do one to cover its own

Sectional life and have displays dealing with the Group's activities. There is also the wider aspect of the Scout brotherhood - the District, County, World Scouting, and Jamborees. These displays must be produced well beforehand or they will not be up to standard. This could be an activity over the preceding months for the Colony, Pack, Troop, and Unit.

The Group Executive Committee will probably wish to put on a display showing how they provide support for the Scout Group. It may well be that within the Group Council the people responsible for activities such as fund raising will also wish to put on some sort of display.

### **Atmosphere**

The right atmosphere on arrival helps to put the parents at ease and in a receptive mood. Have some quiet background music rather than a silent hall. A single line of chairs around the edge of the hall looks very disheartening. You will need space where the Section displays are mounted and you may intend showing films, so try putting all the chairs in a block at one end of the hall. As the parents sit down they will start talking to each other and not feel isolated.

### **Visitors**

Consider inviting some official guests; your local Councillor, Youth Officer, District Commissioner, District Information Officer, the local Ranger Guide Leader, and perhaps former Queen's Scouts. A Group parents' evening is a very good opportunity to make contact with former Scouts who would like to come and see the old Group again. Do not forget to invite their partners. If the Group is sponsored, your sponsoring authority should always be included.

### **Start**

The programme should start with the Group Scout Leader bidding everyone welcome. The parents do not want to hear too much talking at this stage, but a quick outline for the evening is necessary, especially if you are going to deal with the continuity of the training programme.

### **Programme**

A lot of thought will have to be given to the programme. Many parents' evenings include

demonstrations of the activities of the Sections and attempt to show the parents the work of the Colony, Pack, Troop and Unit and the place of each in the life of the Group.

Always remember to rehearse thoroughly beforehand the individual items of the Colony, Pack, Troop, and Unit. Many a good display falls down through lack of practice, rather than lack of ideas

### **Beaver Scout Section**

It is probably a good idea to let the Beaver Scouts do their item early in the evening in case some of them have to go home before the meeting is finished .

Several Colony songs and a favourite game or activity would set the scene of the Colony. You do not need individuals to perform on their own, nor do you want an item which requires a lot of rehearsal and skill. At six and seven years of age the youngster will feel happiest as part of a group with Leader participation and support. The Beaver Scouts will enjoy watching the other Sections perform but young children do not sit still for long !

### **Cub Scout Section**

Demonstrate a game or two but make sure they have a purpose. They should be based on activities in the Cub Scout Section programme. A puppet play using the puppets made by the Pack can be used to demonstrate the training of Cub Scouts in home safety or the country code. The Pack could put on a shadow puppet play with a make-believe theme. Fabricated handcrafts and play making are also extremely popular, but must be well rehearsed and remember that the enthusiasm and vitality of Cub Scouts warms in an audience very quickly.

### **Scout Section**

Introduce the parents to next summers camp. Start by showing a short video of last year's camp with a commentary by one of the Patrol Leaders, who must be well briefed and should see the video shortly before the night. This can be followed by one of the Scouters or Patrol Leaders announcing details and dates for the coming year's camp. Before the evening, the Patrols could be given a project to prepare a

model of their suggested site layout having been given all the relevant details, or they could produce a mock campsite using Group equipment. Perhaps at this point you could ask all Patrol Leaders to explain the merits of their Patrol model. if you are showing slides of camp or other activities keep them short. Nothing is worse for the parents than sitting through lots of slides on the same subject.

Prefabricated bamboo pioneering is popular and is easy to prepare and demonstrate. Whatever you are demonstrating have a Patrol Leader telling the parents and friends what is happening. In this way you demonstrate the Patrol System at its best with the Patrol Leaders taking responsibility.

### **Venture Scout Section**

If it is possible, have a static display of equipment hike tents, maps, climbing gear, caving ladders - and a team dressed in the right activity clothing to demonstrate some of the activities they undertake. The items in the display should be labelled giving full descriptions and purchase prices, A Venture Scout could give a short talk on one of the Unit's activities using slides or videos, but be careful to choose a different subject from the one demonstrated by the Troop. Continuity being our theme, the speaker can mention that whilst undergoing these activities, Venture Scouts depend on the soundness of training received in the Troop. Community Service projects make interesting topics, and having Venture Scouts describe what they are doing in that field is very valuable. It should be stressed throughout the Venture Scout display that there are many activities that can be undertaken.

### **Local Venture Scout Units**

Where a Group has its own Venture Scout Unit it can assist with planning the evening, but many Troops pass their Scouts to local Units. The Venture Scouts in these Units should not be forgotten, but must be included in the programme for the Group parents' evening. In these cases the Group Scout Leader should contact the Venture Scout Leader of the local Unit early on, and ask whether all members of the Unit can take part in the parents' evening not just those from the Group holding the parents' evening.

The parents should be shown the complete training pattern that lies ahead of Beavers, Cubs, and Scouts.

When introducing this item in the programme, the Group Scout Leader, or whoever is acting as Master of Ceremonies, should emphasise the fact that when the Scouts leave the Scout Troop to join the Venture Scouts they join their local Unit and that members of that Unit are at the parents' evening to demonstrate some of their activities

### **Master of Ceremonies**

To knit the whole programme together, it is essential to have an MC. Perhaps this should not be the Group Scout Leader or one of the Section Leaders, as they should be free to mix with the parents. An Assistant Scouter or older Venture Scout could do this job.

Preface each Sectional activity by telling the parents details of the Section, its age range, and characteristics. This helps the new parents, who often know little or nothing about our Organisation. Always refer to the Scouters at the meeting formally, for example, Mr. Brown, our Scout Leader, not Grey Eagle or the VSL.

### **Refreshments**

Arrange to have some refreshments during the evening. This makes a useful break and gives the parents and Leaders a further chance to mix. Normally refreshments are prepared by members of the Group Council but should be handed around by the Venture Scouts, Patrol Leaders and older Scouts. Have several tables available with the biscuits and sugar on them as this encourages the Group Council, parents, Scouters and Scouts to mingle and talk to each other. If parents are served refreshments in their seats make sure that they have somewhere to put their cups and plates.

### **Speakers**

You may ask one of your guests to speak, or have an official speaker in the programme. It is important to ensure that the speaker's subject is relevant and of interest to the parents. The speaker will expect a brief from you in advance, so that he or she can do their best for you.

### **Conclusion of the evening**

If further events need to be mentioned, they can be introduced in passing at the end when the Group Scout Leader closes the evening.

The Group Scout Leader should thank the parents for attending and then close with prayers. On an occasion of this sort they could well be led by a Scout, Venture Scout, or a member of the Group Executive Committee. In a Church-sponsored group the sponsoring authority may wish to lead the prayers.

### **Summary**

The Group parents' evening described in this factsheet is one where parents see the whole life of the Group and in particular learn where their children fit into it. Do not confuse this kind of evening with the parents' social evenings, or Group cheese and wine parties. The latter are social events normally organised by the Group Executive Committee and are often held in order to raise funds. A Group parents' evening is an opportunity for parents to see what their offspring are doing and to understand our aims and methods. It gives them a chance to see their Group in action and to meet the men and women who give up so much of their time for their children. The benefits to the Group gained from the closer co-operation of the parents are beyond measure.

### **Group Scout Leader's twenty point check-list**

- 1 Has a Group parents' evening been included in your long term planning?
- 2 Has the Group Council been included?
- 3 Has the Venture Scout Leader of the Local Venture Scout Unit been brought in on your planning?
- 4 Has the date been agreed and circulated?
- 5 Is the venue correct?
- 6 Is the venue to be decorated?
- 7 Can the invitations be printed?

- 8 Have the invitations been sent out personally to parents?
- 9 Are any official guests being asked?
- 10 Are any static displays being prepared?
- 11 Have the handouts been duplicated?
- 12 Have the Sectional displays been coordinated?
- 13 Who is meeting the parents on arrival?
- 14 Is the atmosphere right?
- 15 Who is going to be Master of Ceremonies for the evening?
- 16 Is the Scout Section display being run by the Patrol Leaders' Council?
- 17 Have display items been rehearsed thoroughly?
- 18 Do all members of the Group know what time to attend?
- 19 Are refreshments being served?
- 20 Who is leading prayers?