

Letters on Scout Discipline

Four of us in my team at Novell just returned from Summer Camp with our troop. Each of us experienced discipline problems with a boy or two. My aunt just called me from Idaho and asked how to handle discipline problems in their troop, because she felt that the Scoutmaster was way out of line.

I would like to begin a discussion about discipline and find out what each of you do to handle boys who need it.

1. What do you do with a boy who won't do his share of the camp chores. We had a duty roster and one boy just wouldn't do the cleanup.
2. How do you handle bullies.
3. Who should be the policeman. The adults or the boys themselves.
4. What action would warrant sending a boy home from camp.
5. What punishments work.

Most of the time, I never have to worry about this because the boys are so involved in the experience that they don't have enough time to get in trouble. However, I have had challenging boys who seems to look for the chance to disrupt and even act inappropriately. Your comments would help us all.

Reply 1:

>1. What do you do with a boy who won't do his share of the camp

1. We with-hold awards given to the scouts based on camp inspections (Our scouts will do the work even if one will not join in.)
2. We sit them down and explain that we are all on the same team and that if that scout refuses to be part of the team then we can accommodate that decision.
3. For the most parts we leave this to the PLC except in dire cases as mentioned in 4.
4. When a scout has decided to not be part of the team (has never happened) or displays conduct unbecoming (this did happen when a scout threatened an adult leader from another troop with a sharp stick) then parents are called and informed that they must pick up their child.

5. We don't punish, we strive to enhance one's desire to be part of a co-operative team. Points are earned for attendance, uniform, and attitude at the weekly meeting. It takes so many points to go on an outing. Few for a day activity, more for an overnighner and a whole lot for our annual deep freeze in the sierra mountains.

Reply 2:

>1. What do you do with a boy who won't do his share of the camp chores. We had a duty roster and one boy just wouldn't do the cleanup.

Let the patrol, patrol leader, troop guide, or the SPL handle it. Monitor the situation. Part of developing leadership is learning how to deal with problems.

>2. How do you handle bullies.

This one is a safety situation. The boy is given a timeout and allowed to cool off. This followed by a "Scoutmaster's conference" to discuss his actions in light of the oath and promise and behaviour expectations are reemphasized. This conference is in full view, but private and done when the SM is CALM.

>3. Who should be the policeman. The adults or the boys themselves.

For most things, the boys should be the policemen.

>4. What action would warrant sending a boy home from camp.

I wasn't there to witness the event, but I understand that a boy who pulled a knife on another scout was sent home and asked to not return (several years ago).

>5. What punishments work.

I subscribe to the "natural consequences" theory. Try not to think in terms of punishment. Think in terms of appropriate consequences for the behaviour.

If the boy is out of control, he needs a cool down period to get back in control. Allow him a timeout to cool off. If the boy can't treat others with respect, counsel him by trying to get him to understand how he might feel if the roles were reversed.

Every unit has some boys who are at least sometimes a behaviour problem. One of the reasons I joined this troop (as an ASM) is that they subscribe to the same principles that I'm trying to use to parent my children. This approach doesn't yield instant results, but it seems to work over the long run. It takes patience and real concern and compassion for the boys.

I've heard how this has impacted some of the older boys in the troop. I've seen significant progress by one boy who was a major behaviour problem as a cub. His second campout he provoked a fight with another boy. The SM had 2 "heart-to-heart" conferences with the boy. I watched the conferences carefully (from an appropriate distance) to get a feel for how the SM would handle "discipline." The SM also had a session with the mother. The boy has made impressive progress in the 5 months since. He's still a problem at times, but he's much improved and he's starting to fit in.

Reply 3:

This is an excerpt from our Troop Manual. We also have a very defined area for what our rules are. This started as a response to our own problems and has been very successful. I can forward the entire manual if you desire.

Disciplinary Action

The Card System:

Troop 201 utilizes a two card system when confronting a discipline problem. **Yellow Warning Card:** Given to a Scout who's behaviour is a problem during the Troop Meeting or on an outing. Once given, the Scout has been warned that continuing this behaviour will result in a RED CARD being given. The Scout who receives a Yellow Card takes that card home with him and brings it back to the next function. He starts that function with a Yellow Card. If the Scout behaves, he starts the next meeting free of cards. **Red Ejection Card:** If a Scout receives this card it is because he has a Yellow Card and has misbehaved again. Once given a Red Card the Scout will be removed from the meeting or activity and his parents will be called to pick him up. Before a Scout thus ejected can return to the Troop he must request a meeting before the Troop Committee to explain his actions and ask for re-admittance. This appearance will be scheduled during a regular monthly Committee Meeting.

These cards may only be given out by the Senior Patrol and Junior Assistant Scoutmaster. Even though a Scout may clear a yellow card by behaving at the next meeting; if he receives another yellow card during the third week, he must appear before the Troop Committee.

Extreme Discipline Problems

The following procedure has been adopted for handling extreme discipline problems that endanger the safety or integrity of other Scouts. We will document the situation as it happens in writing with as many witnesses as possible. Every effort will be made to uncover the facts. Interview all parties separately away from the rest of the Troop. After the incident and subsequent interviews the parties involved will be pulled aside

by the Scoutmaster and one other adult. They will be away from but insight of the Troop.

This conference will be documented in writing and appropriate action will be taken.

Leaders involved will immediately notify the Committee Chair and the situation will be brought to the attention of all Committee members.

Notification will be made to the parents as to when the Committee will be discussing the situation. The parents of the Scout will be invited to attend without the boy. All charges will be aired and discussed. The parents will be asked to leave while the Committee votes or another meeting is scheduled for a vote on the Scouts status. If the situation was serious enough that the integrity of the Troop is at risk; a 6 month probation and/or probation is in order. The Committee's decision will be sent to the boy and parent in writing. Re-admittance to the Troop will be gained by application to the Committee. The boy must appear before the Committee to discuss any probationary requirements. The boy will leave the room while the Committee reviews and votes on the Scouts application.

Reply 4:

Discipline - How should it be handled?

I would prefer it be handled by the Scouts - but feel that it as dual effort of both Scouters and Scouts. I have generally asked the question when confronted with a problem, be it refusing to do work details or even fighting with a question to the SPL as to what he has done.

After that I might get involved depending on the SPL's request. If Scouters step in to quickly then it does not help the Scouts learn leadership.

In the past I have also been a supporter of using the rewards within Scouting to work as I think they were somewhat intended to do. Our present Scoutmasters son was a bit of a problem io being unruly and even fighting at times. He was spoken to by the SPL, his Dad and then by me. I told him that he had to pass Boards of Review to make advancement and that required a showing of Scout spirit and an adherence to the Scout Oath and Law. He also wanted to be elected to a leadership position but had trouble getting elected - I pointed out why this might be.

He improved enough to make rank and eventually was elected to a minor leadership role but could not get elected to what he really wanted - Senior Patrol Leader by the Scouts nor to Order of the Arrow because his father allowed the Troop Committee to

use the Scoutmaster veto on his eligibility. I took the time to explain why this might be when each occurred.

A bit of disappointment has worked wonders for this Scout who is now our SPL and an OA Member.

Different Scouts require different plans. We had another Scout whose Board of Review for Second Class, which in our Troop consists of Stars and above, refused to pass him due to his lack of cooperation, scout spirit, and not following the Oath and Law. They asked me for advice and I suggested that they come up with another alternative but if they really wanted to they could fail him but they should explain to him why.

They went back into a huddle, called the Scout back and ended up asking him to produce a contract of behaviour he would improve with the stipulation that if did not change he would not make First Class. He wrote the contract and has improved greatly until recently, making Star rank.

However at summer camp he was a REAL problem and the troop would not elect him to Order of the Arrow. He will not listen to the SPL and most of the Scouters as well. It appears that he will not be allowed to go on the 50 mile Trip because of his behaviour - fighting with younger boys, verbally abusing them and hitting them, not listening to Scouters or the SPL who had to physically stop him.

I see the decision not to take him on the 50 miler as an intelligent one, reducing liability for the Scouters going. 25 miles out in the middle of no where is not a place to have a Scout refuse to listen in what might be a dangerous situation.

I get to talk to him this Saturday and facilitate a meeting with the older Scouts on the trip. I have his contract. Wish me luck!

Reply 5:

When I was a scout many moons ago, I remember a discipline problem we had with a few scouts. The two situations I knew ago, the scouts were really disruptive, to the point of having their parents pick them up early from the scout meeting, and given one week off. The Committee decided that if the scout was to attend any activities such as camping trips or hikes, then one of the parents would have to accompany the scout. The parent attended about 3 trips and the scouts eventually faded away.

However, this also brought some parental responsibility for their child's action. I don't think the parents liked that very much.

I have not run into anything like that in years as a scout leader though.

Reply 6:

Our troop has tried requiring parents accompany their Scouts who are a problem on two occasions - once when the Scout was on Ritalin and was running off to hide on outings - but only hikes. The parent switched troops. Took care of our problem.

The other parent is still with us and comes regularly. This idea has worked well but I think has to be used as one of the later alternatives.

Reply 7:

>1. What do you do with a boy who won't do his share of the camp chores. We had a duty roster and one boy just wouldn't do the cleanup.

Talk to the SPL about the situation to make sure he understands the significance of it & invite him to talk to the PL and then the PL to the miscreant about the Scout Oath & Law and how they apply to the situation. If the situation does not correct itself, have the PL convey an invitation to the youth to appear before the PLC and let them decide what to do about discipline. If the youth fails to cooperate in the discipline, see 4.

>2. How do you handle bullies.

This is a safety issue & merits direct SM intervention to stop the conduct at the time. Counsel the youth on the Law. Then initiate 1 above.

>3. Who should be the policeman. The adults or the boys themselves.

The boys. One youth will accept the opinions of another youth a lot faster than the opinions of an adult, especially if the one being talked to is a rebellious youth.

>4. What action would warrant sending a boy home from camp.

Refusal to abide by the decisions of the PLC as items 1 & 2 above. Commission of a crime other than minor assault or battery dealt with under 2 above. (Every unwelcome touching is a battery, of course; so use discretion here as to what is serious vs. what is only excessive high jinks.) Theft, battery, incurable rebelliousness, home he goes.

>5. What punishments work.

PLC imposed punishments.

Reply 8:

A few comments on discipline, and a solicitation for comment on a couple of specific problems.

1. Unwillingness to help:

Let the boys work it out. This can be handled by setting up a duty roster. If a kid refuses to do what is called for on the duty roster, step in as SM--if asked. At Lenhok'sin, however, my crew chief did not want to set up a duty roster, saying that everyone hates whoever makes it out. I told him that if everyone is upset that's an indication that it's fair, but he still didn't want to do it, instead preferring to rely on volunteers. Hey, he was the crew chief, and I didn't think I should second-guess him.

2. Bullying:

This happened on my recent Lenhok'sin trip; I caught a rather muscular scout in my group deliberately trying to intimidate a couple of younger and smaller boys in another crew camped at our same outpost, apparently for no other reason than his own amusement. I put a stop to it immediately and sternly, needless to say. This was not a job for the crew chief.

3. Adult/youth policing:

It depends on what's involved. For serious (i.e., health and safety) problems, the adults should step in at once if they see it going on. For others, leave it to the scouts unless asked to step in.

4. When to send a boy home:

I'd send a boy home for any physical violence, or for open defiance. A repeated health/safety violation would merit a phone call home after one stern warning.

5. Punishments:

I handled cub infractions at camp last summer with an immediate and extra turn as waiter at the next meal, which worked amazingly well--I only had to use it a couple of times. Sending a kid home is the ultimate sanction, it seems to me.

As for specific problems--what about foul language and youth smoking? I had a problem at Lenhok'sin with a couple of older scouts regarding these matters. I admonished them so much about the language that I must have sounded like a prude about it, although after my three years in the infantry, they said nothing I hadn't heard before. Still, these were boy scouts, not Vietnam-era grunts, and I was concerned about it.

I will say that I did not consider the offence serious enough to send them home (maybe I should have?). Anyway, I probably could have handled the matter better by punishing the offence in some way, and I'm wondering what you folks out there have done in similar situations. Any ideas?

As far as cigarette smoking goes, we've talked about this issue vis a vis adult smoking, and I'm frankly not interested in getting into it s again. Scout policy is clear: if you (as an adult) must smoke, do it out of the presence of the youths.

But what about youth smoking? We haven't talked about that. Goshen camp policy is no youth smoking, according to one of the Lenhok'sin staff I spoke with. Also, possession or purchase of tobacco products by anyone under the age of 18 is illegal in Virginia. However, smoking is cool again among a lot of young people; I started smoking as a teenager myself and know how tempting it is (I quit smoking 14 years ago).

The scouts knew I had prohibited youth smoking on the trip, but a couple of them were sneaking them anyway (I didn't actually catch them at it--they were pretty discreet--but I knew). How do you keep scouts from doing it?

Keep in mind that I'm on a learning curve here as an adult leader myself, so I'm no doubt overlooking something obvious. Anyway, your thoughts or comments on these matters would be appreciated.

Reply 9:

There are a lot of methods for handling discipline problems within the Scout Group. I think the single most important thing to remember is that you have to have a flexible, yet consistent, approach in all areas. However, there are some ideas I'll pass along. They may or may not work for you, depending on how your Troop leadership system is structured, but they seem to have worked fairly well for me over the years.

>1. What do you do with a boy who won't do his share of the camp chores. We had a duty roster and one boy just wouldn't do the cleanup.

Perhaps you might approach this from a team approach. The Patrol is a team that does not function unless all of its members work together to share the load. If a Scout refuses to do camp chores, the most obvious choice is often to restrict the fun activities that he or she would prefer to be doing until the chores are completed. There may well be some reasons that go deeper than just plain laziness, so there may also be a need for some counselling to find out what is going on in his life that is behind this. Of course, this is not quite as easy, but it may build something in your relationship with him that will help him grow.

>2. How do you handle bullies.

Depends on the bully. Some are intractable, others are bullying because they do not know how to build friendship relationships unless they feel themselves to be in a position of power over others. This is a difficult subject that would be an excellent discussion thread on its own. There are kids for whom this is a symptom of fairly deep emotional problems that require counselling.

One key to handling bullies is to make certain that you do not allow a new Scout to bully others in any way. The earlier you begin working this out with a Scout, the better the chances of having the problem resolve. It's very difficult to reverse a bully's social position once he or she has become established as a bully within the group. We have an instance where a boy began bullying others, and we have a good handle on his behaviour now - although he has "latched on" to one of the Leaders as a parent-surrogate. There appear to be some family relationship problems at the root of his problems. (It helps to have a professional counsellor or two among you adult leadership team for problems of this magnitude...)

>3. Who should be the policeman. The adults or the boys themselves.

Both. The junior Leaders need to be trained in how to manage "problem people", with a very strong adult Leader backup and oversight to manage the more difficult problems. Don't let this go to the "Lord of the Flies" type judicial system, though...

>4. What action would warrant sending a boy home from camp.

Behaviour that endangers others, or inappropriate behaviour that significantly interferes with your being able to conduct a quality programme for your Scouts. We don't send Scouts home - we require their parents to come to wherever we happen to be and pick them up. This is put down on all of our permission slips in black and white, with the parents consenting to do so when they sign their permission for the Scout to go with us. This can be more than a little bit inconvenient/expensive (we went to Newfoundland this summer from the States)...

>5. What punishments work.

Restriction from any activity that the Scout enjoys works quite well. The Scout remains in camp (can't be taunted by the others). Of course, there has to be adult Leaders present...

We don't have to have parents come out to pick up their children very often. Once it happens the first time, and the Scouts realise that you aren't kidding about this particular standard, most of them reflect on what kind of personal impact on their



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lives that having their parents come to retrieve them for misbehaviour - and choose not to let things go to that point...