

Dealing With Common Problems

However meticulously planned your camp is, there are bound to be problems. It is very easy for leaders, having spent many months trying to cover every possible problem, to get dejected when a problem arises. Many problems are quite simply 'beyond our control' and as such should not be taken personally. When a problem arises, the leadership team will no doubt find a solution fairly rapidly, and as such will learn for next year. In all cases, 'thinking on your feet' is one of the unwritten Scout Leaders' Laws!

At the end of each day, it is very helpful for the leadership team to sit down, possibly round the dying embers of the fire after the Scouts have gone into their tents for the night, to chat about the day's events, and any suggestions and observations. This also provides a good opportunity for any 'last minute changes' to be made for the next day's programme.

Below are some common problems that happen on camp, and a possible solution for each of them. However, obviously, there are many different sets of circumstances that could cause a problem to occur, and if you come up with a novel idea of solving a problem, please feel free to make your suggestions.

Weather

Unless you are camping in the middle of the Sahara desert or the North Pole, the unpredictable nature of weather can cause havoc with your programme. Nobody will want to do a whole day hike in a downpour! It is very helpful to have a radio with you to listen to the daily weather reports, so you can make adjustments as necessary. If, for example, it is going to rain all day today but be nice again tomorrow, then simply by swapping activities from one day to the next and having 'indoor' activities today your problem can be overcome. Always make changes in conjunction with your PLs.

Many troops organise 'wet weather programmes' for their camp which range from two separate programmes depending on the weather, to 'as above but with coats on'. Remember that Scouts normally enjoy wet and mud, but this should not be to the detriment of their health. It is not always necessary to cut short activities as a shower is coming, unless for safety reasons you have to, ie rock climbing. If you are half way round a hike course, then it is not always practical to abandon immediately - why not shelter under a tree (unless it's a thunderstorm), and make a joke out of it. Do be careful to observe anyone getting moody in bad weather - although most Scouts will laugh off being wet, some do not like it at all and their discomfort can spoil it for others.

Sometimes the weather can be an advantage - why not get everyone to change into their swimming kit then have a game of football or volleyball in the rain? Make sure they are wearing old shoes though.

Traffic

Again, this is normally something that is beyond the leader's control. Always leave extra time to travel to somewhere from your site, especially if you have to use major roads. By having the radio on in the minibus, tuned to a local radio station, not only does this relieve some of the boredom of travelling, but also gives traffic reports which may save you a lot of hassle. Find out in advance if there is a big event coming to a local town (such as the Radio One Roadshow) during the time you are in the area, this can cause congestion and will enable you to plan a route to avoid it, unless you're going to it! Make sure you have a good atlas with you at all times, and a good navigator!

Programme Not Running To Time

As a general rule, this is not a major problem. If you have booked activities and need to be somewhere at a certain time, this could cause a problem, but by placing 'free time' or a games session before the activity, then if preceding activities overrun then they can just be cut short. If, for example, you are doing a pioneering session and the Scouts ask for another half an hour to complete a major project, then by cutting out something unimportant that follows is to their advantage. Although the programme can be cut down to some extent, don't cut out essentials such as 'getting the fire ready for lunch' or 'collecting wood for the fire'. If small activities need to be cut out, you can just put them to one side for later on when an activity finishes early. Good planning beforehand, with 'free time', games and similar that don't matter if they get cut short or abandoned before booked activities can save a lot of headache on the day.

The Site Was/Is Rubbish

Fortunately, this is a rare problem. One of the reasons that you should visit a site before you camp there is so that you can see first-hand that the facilities etc are adequate for what you want to do, and that your pitch is large enough for all your tentage and the activities that you want to do - or that space is available nearby. If, however, you have a very poor pitch on a site allocated to you, then it may be possible for you to move to another pitch - check with the warden, and if you explain your reasons then he will probably be able to help. Obviously, you can't have a 'perfect' site, but as long as water and the woodpile are close, drainage is OK and it is reasonably private then there should be no complaints.

The Activity Was Boring/Rubbish

Unfortunately, there is not much that can be done about this at the time, except to make a note to avoid it next time you go to that site! However, if you have done your research and got hold of leaflets from the nearest Tourist Information Centre for all the places you want to visit, and the Scouts have been involved in the programme planning and chose to do the activity, then you have done all you can to try and avoid the problem.

Cooking

Unless you are very lucky, when Scouts cook there are bound to be disasters! The biggest problem is usually the fire not wanting to get going. If the weather is terrible, then by taking gas cookers (one per patrol) may be seen as a cop-out but if it is obvious that a problem is going to occur then it can save problems with the programme running late. Make sure that the wood pile is big enough, and that it is covered when not required, as wet wood does not burn well!

Accidents

It is inevitable that some accidents will occur during your camp, however thankfully most will be minor things. The majority of accidents will be caused by people messing about or just being stupid. By keeping an eye out, and warning people where necessary, many can be avoided, such as being burnt whilst playing with the fire. However, you may be unlucky enough to have a major accident, such as someone being cut by an axe. If this happens, your first priority is to make the casualty safe, and administer first aid as necessary, then find out what happened afterwards. Thankfully major accidents requiring hospital treatment are few and far between.

Flooding

If there is a lot of rain, and your site begins to get flooded, there are a number of things that can be done to prevent disaster. The most important thing is to get all personal kit somewhere dry, which may be on tables in the mess tent, or even in the minibus. Tents etc will dry out but clothes and sleeping bags can be a problem when on camp. Some of the problems that cause flooding, especially if the site is known to have bad drainage, can be overcome with good site planning. If possible, a trench can be dug around the tents to help drain away surface water - it is in fact water collecting on the surface and running over the groundsheet that can cause the most damage at camp.

Games

Believe it or not, it is games sessions that often create the most accidents. Some are avoidable, some not. Those in the 'avoidable' category include things like temporary 'rope swings' (check knots and strength of the branch), and the 'unavoidable' ones from things like twisted ankles or cuts from stones on 'football pitches'. Contact games and 'chase in the woods' type games will probably generate the most accidents. There is not much you can do about these, except remind people to be careful!

Forgotten Equipment

If you suddenly find that a vital piece of equipment has been left on the floor of the QM's store, this need not be a disaster - bluff your way through and make out that it is a challenge for the Scouts to solve a problem by first finding suitable equipment - you may be surprised what they come up with!!!!

Food Runs Out

However carefully you plan, it is inevitable that at some time you will have to replenish some supplies, such as milk, during the week. Unless you are camping on the top of a mountain with no transport, this is not normally a problem (unless you can find a mountain goat and someone can milk it). One leader can simply shoot off to the nearest supermarket or village store to replenish supplies at a convenient moment. If it is an imminent disaster (ie no margarine for sandwiches being made now) then a neighbouring troop will probably be able to help you- but don't forget to replenish their stock.

Money Runs Out

With careful budgeting, this should not happen. However, it has always been my policy that if a camp is underfunded then troop funds cover the shortfall - as long as it is there in the first place! It is often easier for a willing leader with a credit card to deal with it at the time, then sort out the money on returning home.

Un-Cooperative Scouts

At some times, you will get tired or bored Scouts that will go out of their way to make life unpleasant for everyone else. This usually comes out first in refusal to pull their weight in the washing up or other 'boring but essential' activities, including badgework. This may be a result of homesickness, lack of sleep and over-activity, a 'hidden' problem such as bullying, or even something unavoidable such as 'teenage hormones'. In all cases, you should try and find out what the problem - or underlying problem - is, and take appropriate action. If they will not talk to you, ask their PL to find out what the problem is. If it is simply 'wanting to be awkward' or 'can't be bothered', then the peer-pressure within the Patrol system will often get the person involved. By the end of the week, tiredness or over-exposure to the sun can cause un-cooperation, so make sure that 'free/rest time' is abundant throughout your programme.