

A Code of Conduct – A Necessary Part of your Program

by Kelly Banks

Introduction

A Code of Conduct is something that every colony, pack, troop, company and crew should have in order that all participants get the maximum benefit from their Scouting program. An effective Code of Conduct will protect the quality of the youth's experience, and also ensures leaders are treated respectfully and properly by their section.

A Code of Conduct is a set of "rules" that everyone in a section agrees upon. It ensures that your meetings and activities run smoothly and fairly. It encourages youth to focus on how they work, both as individuals and in a section. Every section has priorities for what they want to accomplish and in Scouting, these priorities revolve around the Promise and Law that all youth and leaders make and follow. As you can see, a Code of Conduct is a useful tool that lists specific actions and ways to accomplish your section's and Scouting's priorities.

For a Code of Conduct to be successful, it needs to be presented to the youth in a participatory and inclusive way, rather than as a list of hard and fast rules. It is important for them to understand WHY a Code of Conduct is needed, as well as the reasons and concepts behind the items that it is made up of (i.e., respect for others, co-operation etc.). Having them actively participate in the making of the Code, as well as ensuring they have an understanding of why certain rules are in place, will determine your success in implementing one. In the next printing of each *Leader Handbook* we will add more information outlining the process for creating a Code of Conduct.

Drafting a Code of Conduct

Since a Code of Conduct represents the *section's* priorities, it should include everyone's input. You may wish to have the Court of Honour or Sixer's Council design a rough draft of a Code to bring to their patrols and sixes for discussion. Here are some considerations for your youth to consider before they draft their Code of Conduct:

- Who is the Code of Conduct for? Think about everyone in your section and consider who will be affected by the Code.
- What actions/behaviours would you like to prevent from happening?
- What are the typical problems that might occur?
- How can these problems be dealt with?

Once you've considered these things, the next step is drafting the Code of Conduct. Here are the steps to follow in creating your Code of Conduct:

1. Involve everyone: On-going discussion and everyone's input and agreement are needed for the Code to work.
2. Use the KISS principle (Keep It Simple Scouts!). Wording should be simple and sentences short and to the point.
3. Present the rules in a positive way. For example, instead of saying "You are not allowed to raise your voice, interrupt or talk back to a Scouter/other Scout," say "When talking to another Scout or Scouter, always use a respectful tone and level of voice. Respect other people's rights to speak without being interrupted."

4. Limit the number of rules: There is a danger of having so many rules, that they overlap and become hard to remember. Be aware of this and avoid it.

A Sample Code of Conduct for Scouts

1. Respect religious, cultural and personal beliefs.
2. Be helpful to each other and work as a team.
3. When talking to another Scout or Scouter, always use a respectful tone and level of voice. Respect other people's rights to speak without being interrupted.
4. Bullying another Scout or Scouter is absolutely prohibited.
5. Physical force or the use of violence against others is absolutely prohibited.
6. Verbal comments of a disrespectful nature and/or insults against other Scouts or Scouters are strictly prohibited.

Consequences for Breaking the Code of Conduct

Having a set of consequences for breaking the Code is important. A consequence that everyone understands encourages members to follow the Code and will maintain fair treatment of those who break the rules. You, as a leader, along with youth input, need to figure out what the procedure will be for someone who breaks the Code. Ensure that this procedure is followed in the same way for everyone. Here is an example:

When a Code is broken:

1. A verbal warning is issued the first time.
2. The second violation will result in the Scout "sitting out" an activity.
3. A third violation will result in the Scout appearing before the Court of Honour.
4. After a fourth warning, the leader will call the Scout's parents, to explain the recurring problem, and they will work together on fixing it.

Introducing the Code of Conduct to Members and Family

Some ideas for introducing your Code of Conduct could include:

- Designating a meeting early in the year to discuss the Code of Conduct with everyone. Follow the activities posted on our web site.
- Sending home a copy of the Code to youth's parents, which the youth read with their parents, sign and return.
- Creating a poster that will hang on the wall during your meeting and act as an easy reference to the Code.

Pick and choose from the following activities to help youth understand the importance of a Code of Conduct, and the abstract concepts behind the rules (i.e., respecting and treating people equally, sharing etc.).