



Helpful Hints For New Parents

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Welcome to Troop 648 – The Troop of the Eagle

Rest assured, you have joined a wonderful Troop, with tremendous Adult Leaders who are committed to making your son's Boy Scout experience the best it can be.

In 2013, our boys joined the Troop. The experience has been excellent, and our boys have had a great time participating in the Troop activities. We learned early on that being a parent of a Boy Scout is a lot different than being the parent of a Cub Scout/Webelos. For us, the experience was not unlike transitioning from high school to college; we went from being the experienced “seniors” of the Cub Scout pack to the new and clueless “freshmen” of the Boy Scout Troop.

Even though everyone was extremely helpful, answered all our questions, and quickly made us feel at home in the Troop, there were several occasions where we looked at each other and asked if some foreign language had just been spoken.

So, during our first year, we made mental notes of some of the things that we had questions about when we first joined the Troop. Our hope is that by putting these “Helpful Hints” together we could assist the next generation of “freshmen” parents get off to a smooth start.

That being said, there is lots of stuff to be learned about Boy Scouting, and our knowledge is far from complete. A good way to figure something out is to ask an Adult Leader or another parent. However, as Mr. Johnston will tell you, if you really want to know something about Scouting, look in the Handbook, it's all in there.

Yours in Scouting (YIS),

Joe & Bob

Basic Troop Structure

Unlike Cub Scouts, the Troop is run by the Scouts, with help from the Adult Leaders. The Troop is led by a Senior Patrol Leader (SPL), with an Assistant (ASPL) or two. Scouts are divided up into Patrols, led by a Patrol Leader, and an Assistant Patrol Leader. Patrols are put together by the Scouts. For a new Scout Patrol, an older Scout, the Troop Guide, assists the new Patrol until they get the hang of things (about 6 months).

The Troop's Adult Leadership consists of our Scoutmaster, Carey Johnston, and his Assistants, Joe Justice, Bob Howard, Craig Lisk, Jim Helm, Franklyn Cater, Fred Zeytoonjian, George Tahu, Mark Miller, Ben Maule, Paul Fiorino, and Bill Brougham. Adult Leaders are registered with BSA and complete hours of BSA required training.

Our Troop is "chartered" by the Arlington Forest United Methodist Church (AFUMC). The Church's pastor is Jae Haeng Choi. The Troop is in the Chain Bridge District, which is part of BSA's National Capital Area Council (NCAC).

What to Buy

When you join the Troop you don't need to buy a ton of stuff. Your son needs a brown BSA Class A shirt, a decent sleeping bag, and the Scout's 10 essentials that are listed in the Scout Handbook. The Troop owns tents, cookware, etc. that it uses on campouts. The Troop also sells Class B shirts that are worn to informal activities like Troop meetings, camping trips, service projects, Camp Rodney, etc. (but Scouts always travel in Class A's).

Rank Advancement – how does it work?

New Scouts learn the necessary skills from the older Scouts. The Scoutmaster and his Assistants help, where needed, but the goal is to have older Scouts train the younger ones. The Troop fits training in whenever it can, typically at Troop meetings and on campouts; so Scouts should bring their Scout Handbook to every event – we can't stress this enough.

Unlike Cub Scouts, parents can't sign off on requirements in the Scout's Handbook. Our Scoutmaster and his Assistants can and, pursuant to his discretion, our Scoutmaster allows our experienced Scouts to sign off on requirements through First Class.

Board of Review – you may get asked to help with a Scout's Board of Review as part of his rank advancement. Don't panic. A Board of Review is not a retest or an examination for the Scout. The Board of Review is a 10 – 15 minute meeting where you, and two other adults, ask the Scout about his experiences with the Troop. You are given a list of questions, specific to the rank the Scout is seeking, to use in your meeting with the Scout.

Merit Badges – What's the deal?

New Scouts are enamored with all the Merit Badge offerings. Boy Scout merit badges take more work than earning Webelos awards, and most Scouts are surprised that most require them to do actual work. Merit Badges are offered by Merit Badge Counselors who are approved for individual merit badges after submitting a BSA Application to our District for review and approval.

Lots of places offer Merit Badges. The Troop tries to offer one or two "Eagle required" badges each year so that Scouts can earn these badges in the Troop. Fairfax County offers Merit Badges through their parks department, and lots of outdoor camps have approved counselors on staff. There are also Merit Badge events sponsored by NCAC, which are discussed in Troop meetings.

"Blue Cards"

If you have not already heard it yet, you will hear the term "blue cards." These are literally, blue cards about the size of an index card that are used as the official record for Scouts earning merit badges. Scouts (Not Parents) get blue cards from the Scoutmaster before they begin or sign up for a Merit Badge. The Scoutmaster serves as a gatekeeper, helping Scouts find counselors and making sure that the Scout is ready for the Merit Badge. There is a whole direction sheet on completing Blue Cards on our Troop's web site.

Scouts turn in their completed Blue Cards to our Scoutmaster and receive their Merit Badge, and one part of the blue card back, during a Troop Court of Honor (COH) ceremony. We typically hold 3-4 COH's a year. It is important not to lose the part of the blue card that your Scout gets back with their Merit Badge. The tip we received was to use baseball card holders to store the completed blue cards. So far this has worked well for us.

Summer Camp

Summer Camp is a big part of getting your son started as a Boy Scout. Our Troop goes to Camp Rodney, in North East, Maryland. Scouts who attend camp typically come home with two merit badges, most of their requirements for Tenderfoot, more than half of their requirements for Second class, and a few requirements for First class completed. That and they are dirty.

From our Troop, probably 75% of the Scouts attend Camp. Parents do not need to attend Camp. In fact, typically only the Scoutmaster, some Assistants, and 2-3 other parents go (some for less than the full week). If your Scout is going to Camp there are a few things that you need to get done in advance.

First, schedule your doctor's physicals. All Scouts, and Adults staying more than 72 hours, need the BSA Medical Form (Parts A, B, & C) completed and signed by a doctor (Adults staying less than 72 hours only need Parts A & B – no doctor signature). <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/ahmr/>

Second, figure out if your son will be taking their gear in a backpack or a plastic foot locker. We strongly suggest a plastic foot locker, but it is not mandatory. Scouts carry their gear from where we park to our campsite.

Third, if your son takes medications regularly, make sure you have enough to send with him to Camp. Camp is not the time to take your son off their medications. The Camp has a fully staffed medical facility and can handle any kind of medication need.

Finally, Camp Rodney has a “What to Bring To Camp” form at: <http://www.delmarvacouncil.org/openrosters/docdownload.aspx?ID=37982> (The Troop has mosquito netting you can purchase).

Camping

Our Troop likes to camp. We try to have one excursion each month. Plan for a camping trip on most holiday weekends.

You do not need to buy a tent for your Scout; the Troop has several that Scouts can borrow. Adults do not need to go on every camping trip. Typically, the Scoutmaster, one or two Assistants, and a couple of parents go on camping trips. You are welcome to go, just don't feel like you have to.

Food. On camping trips the parents and Scouts eat separately. Each group assigns/gets volunteers to be the “Grubmaster.” The Adult Grubmaster takes care of the meals for the Adults. Depending on the number of Scouts attending, there will either be a Grubmaster for each Patrol or one for all the Scouts.

Grubmasters plan, shop for, prepare, and assign the clean-up duties for each of their assigned meals. The cost of the food is divided up and the Grubmaster is reimbursed for the food. Everyone takes their turn as Grubmaster, and Scouts need to be Grubmasters several times as part of meeting their advancement requirements.

The Troop owns cooking gear. It is in the Troop locker at the Church and is collected when the Troop takes a trip. The Grubmaster tells the Troop's Quartermaster what gear they will need and is responsible for making sure everything is clean and ready for our next campout. If, however, you have some special cooking gear that you like to use, bring it and show us how it works. We all like new toys.

All Scouts attending an event are expected to help load and unload the “Troop gear” from the Troop locker.

Troop Meetings

Scouts need to be in their Class A or Class B shirts. They don't need to wear their neckerchiefs. **They should bring their Scout Handbook to each Troop meeting.**

Troop Meetings are good places to hear about upcoming events, and is where your Scout will be signing up to attend events. It pays to be there periodically to keep tabs on what's coming up.

High Adventure Bases - (Philmont, Sea Base, The Summit, and Northern Tier)

High Adventure Bases are reserved for Scouts over 14 years old. Our Scouts that have participated in them say it is an experience of a lifetime. Think of these as coming attractions for now.

Troop Committee – The Troop Survives Because of Volunteers

The Troop Committee consists of parents who help with the “management” responsibilities for the Troop including: Finances, Fundraising, Chartering, Advancement monitoring, Program support, etc. All parents are encouraged to attend the Committee Meetings. The Troop Committee has a Chair, Andrew Cullen and a Treasurer, Vicki Justice. The Troop Committee is a good place for you to start helping. Generally our meetings take place once a month and are a forum for the Scoutmaster to let the parents know what kind of help he needs to maintain our quality program.

Youth Protection Training

Required for all parents on campouts, driving Scouts, or doing any other activity that puts them in “direct contact” with Scouts. It is done on-line at www.myscouting.org. You have to create an account to take the training, but it is free. When you complete the training, print out the certificate and give it to our Scoutmaster.

Service Projects

Our Troop conducts and participates in a number of service projects throughout the year. Past projects have included Scouting for Food, planting a food garden for the AFUMC, and numerous

Eagle projects. Troop Committee meetings are a great place to present your service project ideas.

Communication

The Troop has a Google group. When items are posted to the group, all group members are sent an e-mail. This is the primary way we communicate logistics about upcoming events. Our Troop's website is: <https://troopoftheeagle.com>. To subscribe to our group, send email to: tropoftheeagle+subscribe@googlegroups.com. If you have any questions regarding Troop communications, please contact Johnston.carey@verizon.net.

Calendar of Events

The Troop's website has a Google calendar that can be viewed at any time and will link up with most computer calendars.

All the Rest

As we said, there is lots of great stuff to learn about Boy Scouts and how our Troop operates. We could not, and did not try to cover everything. If you want to learn more, good places to start are our Troop's web site, the Boy Scout Handbook, the BSA web site, and the other parents.

Hope to see you at a campout soon.