

Why you should take Youth Protection Training today

By Chris Tucker

From the January-February 2013 issue of Scouting magazine

If you had one message, what would it be? Youth protection can be best achieved through the shared involvement of everyone in Scouting. This includes Scouting professionals who are expected to increase the awareness of Youth Protection policies, make training available to everyone, encourage all Scouting units to include personal safety awareness education in their programs, and ensure youth protection is considered in all council-sponsored activities; volunteers and leaders who must create a culture of awareness and safety within their units and councils, and ensure their units follow the BSA's Youth Protection policies; parents who should monitor and participate in their children's activities and teach them personal safety skills; and anyone who becomes aware of possible abuse within Scouting and must report any suspicion to the proper authorities for review and investigation.

Why is Youth Protection training so important? It communicates the values that Scouting takes seriously. Most people know very little about the dangers that confront children every day. This training helps make professionals, volunteers, and parents more aware, and it empowers them to help protect youth. It also communicates to parents that volunteers have basic knowledge of these dangers and gives them a little more confidence in the leadership and in the organization.

Who should undergo Youth Protection training? Everyone. All registered Scout leaders, any Scout parent who attends trips or campouts, merit badge counselors, and anyone with a connection to youth. If you're a past member, current member, parent, or volunteer, you should be Youth Protection trained.

What are some of the top dangers to youth? Ignorance-not knowing that child abuse exists and not knowing what to look for. Children may face some type of abuse at home-physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse. They may get bullied in school, or exposed to predators or illicit materials while online. Or the threat may come from neighbors or other parents and youth.

What are some recent steps the BSA has taken to protect youth? We've partnered with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to offer the NetSmartz Internet safety program (netsmartz.org) to Scouters and Scouts. The center derives a lot of information from the International Crimes Against Children Task Forces. They have police officers online pretending to be youth and identifying child predators. Information about NetSmartz goes into our training materials. We've updated our Youth Protection training, and we have started a national effort to work with other youth agencies.

What should parents do? Take the training! It's imperative that parents and volunteers know Scouting's Youth Protection policies, which include our barriers to abuse: the classic two-deep leadership and no one-on-one contact policies, as well as our mandatory reporting of child abuse and our social media guidelines.

What about the growing popularity of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)? We're preparing our Scouts for this emerging threat. The reality is that behaviors such as grooming victims and inappropriate contact with youth are happening more and more online. That's why last year we rolled out the Cyber Chip (scouting.org/cyberchip). It's our latest weapon in the arsenal of personal safety-helping kids recognize problematic issues, respond in the moment, and report problems to their parents without shame or embarrassment.



Learn more about the BSA's Youth Protection policies / take online training:
<http://www.scouting.org/Training/YouthProtection>