

Keys to Retaining Cub Scout Families

This is a critical time for Scouting America. Our national membership has declined consistently over the past few years to where it threatens our ability to support units and deliver quality programs. We must grow.

The number of new members recruited over the past few years is consistent but is exceeded by the number who leave the program. To grow, we need to add >30% new youth into our program each year and retain > 70%. Nationally, retention stands at 62% for all programs combined. The Scouts BSA program consistently retains 80+% each year. However, retention of our largest program (Cub Scouting) last year was 52%. This is where our organization must focus.

Surveys tell us that families who leave Scouting, do so in the first 30 days of joining. Typical reasons include 1) not feeling welcome, 2) leaders not organized and allowing chaos, or 3) promised activities weren't delivered. With a small amount of leader preparation, this can change.

Here are four keys to helping retain new families into the Cub Scout program:

1. BeAScout.org

- Have one of the pack Key 3 update the pack's pin on My.Scouting.
- Answer inquiries from prospective families promptly (<48 hrs.)

2. Calendar of Activities

- Create at least a calendar of at least the first 6 months to give to new and returning families.
- Include den/pack meetings plus activities like a hike or campout.

3. Recruiting

- Have a robust recruiting plan. (Schools if available, friends, community events)
- Consider holding a "normal friend activity" where families would have fun while getting to meet others in the pack. This could be done prior to the start of fall meetings. (Picnic, bowling, baseball game, swimming pool, etc.)

4. Onboarding

- Designate a friendly parent or two to be the "welcome committee" - to notice, greet, and engage new families into the den or pack activities.
- These welcoming parents would help new families understand how the pack works, answer questions, and actively help the parents navigate through the first few meetings.
- Have a fun activity early so the families start to feel connected to others.

While fall recruiting should be an "all hands" effort for every district and council, the ten thousand commissioners across the country have been tasked (redeployed) to increase overall retention to 70%. As stated above, the key to that is helping Cub leaders prepare for new families - In the next 30 - 60 days. That's the recruiting and retention window.

Specific ways for commissioners to help includes being a Greeter at a sign-up event, coaching a new den/pack leader for the first month, providing a sample calendar and suggested activities, offering to provide snacks, or engaging a new parent who hangs back away from the activity. Commissioners' primary role is to help units succeed. This is the best way to help this coming program year.

