

September 2026 — Welcome to Cub Scouts: We Really Hope You Stay

A family can register for Cub Scouts and still spend the next several weeks feeling like a guest.

Becoming part of the Pack takes a little longer. The Scout starts knowing other Scouts. The parent knows people well enough to ask questions. Meetings become familiar. An activity that first seemed intimidating becomes something the family can handle. Missing a meeting does not make coming back awkward.

Eventually, the language starts to change from *your Pack* to *our Pack*.

Scouting America's own research with former Cub Scout families points to several reasons families leave, including problems with unit leadership, a child losing interest, not feeling welcome, lack of communication, cost, and competing activities.[1] Research from other youth programs finds a similar mix of program, relationship, organizational, and ordinary family-life factors.[2]

There is no single retention problem to solve.

A useful goal is much simpler:

New families become part of a Pack by successfully participating in it.

They joined. Now make it easy to come back.

Keys to Retaining Cub Scout Families

Scouting America's **Keys to Retaining Cub Scout Families** gives Packs a practical starting point for the fall.

The resource focuses on four areas:

1. **BeAScout.org** — Keep the Pack's information current and respond promptly to inquiries.
2. **Calendar of Activities** — Give families at least six months of meetings and activities so they can see what is ahead.

3. **Recruiting** — Continue inviting families through schools, friends, community events, and normal activities where people can get to know the Pack.
4. **Onboarding** — Have friendly adults notice, greet, and engage new families, help them understand how the Pack works, answer questions, and help them through their first meetings.

It also recommends getting families into a fun activity early.

DOWNLOAD

[Keys to Retaining Cub Scout Families](#)

That is good guidance. The opportunity for us is to make sure the family experiences what we intend.

Friendly isn't the same as easy to join

Established families already know where to go, who to ask, how meetings work, and which Pack traditions need no explanation. New families do not.

First-year 4-H research found that some newcomers felt disconnected from other youth, did not feel welcomed, or felt left to figure out expectations that returning members already understood.[2]

Research outside Scouting adds an interesting wrinkle. A 2026 study of 49,378 food-bank volunteers found that experienced volunteers generally helped newcomers stay involved, but that benefit disappeared as familiarity among the experienced volunteers increased.[3]

That is not Cub Scout research, but it gives us a useful question:

Are our experienced families helping newcomers into the group, or mostly interacting with one another?

This does not require a formal buddy program.

A good introduction gives the new family somewhere to go next. Connect them with another family in the same den. Introduce them to somebody who remembers taking a young Scout camping for the first time. Make sure they know a person they can comfortably approach when they have a question.

One useful check is simply:

Does this family have somebody?

Friendly isn't the same as easy to join.

Let them do Cub Scouts before you explain Cub Scouts

The family joined because Cub Scouting promised something worth doing: Adventures, friends, outdoors, building, games, exploration, Pinewood Derby, camping, and experiences their Scout may not find somewhere else.

Our early meetings need to begin delivering that promise.

Scouting America calls the den meeting "the most important part of Cub Scouting." Its Den Leader resources give leaders Adventure plans, activities, safety information, preparation steps, and supplies needed for the meeting.[4]

A Den Leader does not have to invent Cub Scouting on Tuesday afternoon.

A good meeting does not need to be elaborate. Scouts should get to participate, interact with other Scouts and caring adults, and try, make, move, explore, practice, learn, or accomplish something.

Let them do Cub Scouts before you explain Cub Scouts.

The first meeting matters, but so do the next several. A great welcome cannot carry a program that never quite gets around to the Cub Scouting the child expected.

Good Cub Scouting is part of the welcome.

The next step beats the whole map

Clear logistics are only part of helping a new family find its way. The other part is deciding **when** information becomes useful.

A new parent may eventually need to understand advancement, uniforms, Pack and den structure, camping, Scoutbook, dues, event registration, volunteering, and plenty more.

They rarely need all of it at once.

The first-year 4-H study found newcomers who described "feeling lost" even when information existed. Returning members seemed to know expectations and details that new members were left to figure out for themselves.[2]

A useful question is:

What does this family need to know to successfully do the next thing we're asking them to do?

Keep the calendar, parent guide, camping information, and other reference material available. Lead with what matters now.

For the nuts and bolts of making meeting and event invitations easier for families to act on, see [August 2026 - Welcoming New Cub Scout Families](#).

The next step beats the whole map.

Solve the bathroom before you sell the campfire

First-time camping families may have questions experienced campers barely think about anymore:

- What equipment do we need?
- Who handles meals?
- What happens if it rains?
- What are the bathrooms like?
- What does bedtime look like?
- Do we have to stay overnight?

Those questions help a parent decide whether the family can actually participate in the adventure we are inviting them to.

Heart of Virginia already gives families several ways to experience outdoor Scouting without making every first experience an overnight. Cub Adventure Camp programs include Day Camp, a half-day Lion & Tiger Rally, and Weekend Experiences that can be a morning, afternoon, or full day. Overnight camping can be added to a Weekend Experience.[5]

Creepy Hollow gives us an especially useful option this fall. Families can camp overnight or visit for the day.[^6]

That makes a much easier first invitation possible:

“Come try it Saturday. You don’t have to spend the night.”

Solve the bathroom before you sell the campfire.

The important question is not whether we have answered every possible camping question. It is whether we have answered the question keeping this family from trying it.

Missing isn't quitting

Not every new family will settle immediately into perfect attendance.

Sports start. Somebody gets sick. School schedules change. Work runs late. Siblings have activities. Family schedules collide.

Scouting America's research with former Cub Scout parents includes competing activities among the reasons families reported leaving.[1] First-year 4-H members also reported lack of time because of other activities alongside relationship and organizational concerns.[2]

An absence may tell us something. It does not automatically tell us the family is done.

A message can be as small as:

"We missed you this week. We're doing rockets next Tuesday at 6:30 if you can make it."

They were noticed. Nobody asked for an excuse. The next opportunity is obvious.

Missing isn't quitting. Make it easy to come back.

There is no need for an attendance-tracking system to make this work. If somebody naturally notices an early absence, one personal check-in can leave the door open.

Ask for help before you ask for a title

New parents can become part of the Pack by helping with it.

That does not mean their first contribution has to be an ongoing position.

Scouting America's Den Adventure Host resources give us a useful model. Families can choose a particular Adventure to help host using the same Adventure guides available to the Den Leader.[^4]

The same idea works elsewhere in the Pack:

- “Could you help run this activity?”
- “Could you help with check-in for the first half hour?”
- “Could you bring the supplies for this part of the meeting?”

A parent gets to contribute, learn how the Pack works, and get to know other adults.

Some of those parents will later become exactly the Den Leaders and committee members the Pack needs.

Ask for help before you ask for a title.

Let them discover that they can be useful here before Scouting starts to feel like another job they accidentally applied for.

A few questions to carry into the next meeting

There is no new onboarding system to implement here.

As new families move through their first few weeks, a few questions cover a lot of ground:

- **Does this family have somebody, or do they still mostly know "the leaders"?**
- **Is their Scout consistently experiencing the Cub Scouting we recruited them with?**
- **Are we giving information when it becomes useful?**
- **Is there an easier first step into something unfamiliar?**
- **If they miss something, is coming back comfortable and obvious?**

We do not have to make every first experience perfect.

We want enough good experiences that coming back starts to feel normal.

The best cure for a mid-year crisis may be preventing a first-week crisis.

They joined. Now make it easy to come back.

Related resources

Scouting America

- [Den Leader Resources](#) — Adventure guides, den meeting support, welcoming-new-family resources, and Den Adventure Host materials.
- [Keys to Retaining Cub Scout Families](#) — Practical guidance on BeAScout follow-up, calendars, recruiting, and welcoming new families.

Heart of Virginia Council

- [Cub Adventure Camps](#) — Current Cub Scout outdoor programs including Day Camp, Creepy Hollow, Lion & Tiger Rally, and Weekend Experiences.
- [2026 Creepy Hollow](#) — Current event information and registration, including day or overnight participation.

James River District

- [August 2026 - Welcoming New Cub Scout Families](#) — Recruiting conversations, the Three Yeses, personal follow-up, participation-ready invitations, and the first handoff after a family joins.

Research notes

1. Scouting America, [2022–23 BSA Market Research](#). The 2022 survey included responses from 1,338 Cub Scout parents. Reported reasons for leaving included poor leadership or problems with leaders, loss of interest, not feeling welcome, lack of communication from a leader, cost, fundraising, and competing activities.
2. Lewis et al., [Why Youth Leave 4-H After the First Year: A Multistate Study](#). The study examined first-year members across multiple states and found a mix of structural, interpersonal, and personal reasons youth might not return. Newcomers described feeling lost, not knowing when activities met, weak connections with other youth, and returning members seeming to know expectations that new members did not.
3. Tipnis, Chen, and Gao, [Enhancing Volunteer Retention: The Role of Experienced Volunteers](#). The study examined 49,378 food-bank volunteers over five years. This is not Scouting research and is included only as a useful comparison for how established participants can affect newcomers.
4. Scouting America, [Den Leader Resources](#). Includes Adventure-based meeting preparation, recommended activities, welcoming-new-family materials, and rank-specific Den Adventure Host sign-up sheets.
5. Heart of Virginia Council, [Cub Adventure Camps](#). Current program information lists the Lion & Tiger Rally as a half-day experience and Weekend Experiences as morning, afternoon, or full-day activities,

with overnight camping optionally added.

6. Heart of Virginia Council, [2026 Creepy Hollow](#). Current event information states that families may camp overnight or visit for the day.

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