

Youth Protection Issues: Urgent Information to be shared

Recent events in our council regarding the sexual exploitation of a Scout by a trusted volunteer have increased the urgency of educating our parents and youth about the Youth Protection Policies of the BSA.

In addition, the burgeoning use of electronic communication such as cell-phones and text-messaging/photo sharing has created a new wrinkle and loophole that can be exploited by possible abusers to your child and the youth in your program. Technology has us playing 'catch-up' in many ways.

Careful leadership selection through background checks, letters of recommendation, and reputation are simply not enough. However, the barriers that BSA erects are 5-fold, with careful leadership selection being only one of them. The good news is that if all BSA policies are followed and known by the unit and the parents, the opportunity for abuse will likely be removed or be made so risky that the perpetrator will not risk involvement.

The solution is to have every adult and youth educated as to what is allowed and what is not allowed in the BSA program. The BSA has it covered in the unit and youth-appropriate Youth Protection Training (YPT) videos, online and in-person training, and in the Guide to Safe Scouting and other documents (available for free online).

So how will you protect yourself and your adult leaders from false accusation, your child from exploitation, and the unit from scandal and humiliation, and yet still give the ever-important adult contact and role-modeling that is so important to our program?

Some items that you should be aware of:

- 1) Recent changes in the **Boy Scout Requirements** (January 2008) include information about bullying and Internet abuse by cyber bullies and others.
- 2) **New Youth Protection videos** (that supplement the Youth Protection Training available online and through your training teams) are now available on DVD for both adults and youth in all sections (Cubs, Scouts, and Venturing) and will be available for free at Roundtable for all units and interested persons. (VHS versions may also be available upon request). The training team is always available to help you with presentations or to answer questions.
- 3) **Electronic threats** to your child's personal, physical, and mental well-being should be identified and discussed by your unit committee and the adults in your unit. Roundtable and the training team will have information about ways that Scouters, parents, and youth can safely use the Internet, text messaging and other electronic communications that proliferate in our culture.

Scout Roundtable and the *Up Etowah Creek* Newsletter will also have information on ways that parents can find out if their child is being abused/bullied by others or is abusing others, behavioral tell-tales to watch for, how to track usage of cell phones and Internet site

visits, establish security barriers for communication devices (computers, cell phones, PDAs, etc) and more.

4) Safety in Traveling: Know how and when to properly file a Tour Permit, know what the council has on updates on Tour Permits, and upcoming changes in the filing of Tour Permits (there is the possibility of online filing in the future).

What Every Unit Should Be Stressing:

Youth Protection Training is important for all members of the unit, adults and youth alike. **Get your unit trained**, in person or online. And if your unit leaders say that you do not need to be trained, they are wrong. Protect yourself and your children by knowing and enacting the policies and procedures of the BSA.

- ALL youth must be told that one-on-one contact of any sort (in person or electronically) with an adult who is not their parent is not allowed in the BSA, and what they should do if it happens.
- ALL youth need to be encouraged to watch out for each other and be made aware that bullying and/or harassment is not tolerated in the BSA, from adults or from youth.
- ALL parents must be educated so that they know what the rules are and what to look for: for example, that if a leader brings their child home from a meeting, there must be another child (the leader's son for example) or 2 adults in the car with them
- ALL parents, youth, leaders, and volunteers need to know what to do and who to contact if suspicions are raised.

All Youth Protection Videos are available for free in DVD and/or VHS format from the Scout Shop, your training team, or your Unit Commissioner. Training materials, helps, and guides and a complete list of available publications are also available online at <http://scouting.org/pubs/yp/index.html>

Online Youth Protection Training is available for all levels through the council website at www.indianwaters.org . Create an account and be sure to print off the final page when the training is completed, so that you will get credit through your unit (pack, troop, or crew) for being currently trained. The next in-person Youth Protection Training will take place on February 26 at 7:00 pm at Faith Presbyterian Church. Register online through the council website . Cost is \$3: pre-register and pay at the Scout Shop, or on-line by February 22, 2008.

For more information, to arrange a Youth Protection Training for your unit, or to air a question or concern about Youth Protection in a pack, troop., or crew, please call Etowah Creek District YPT specialist Joan Janoch 345-5700, or email

youthprotection@etowahcreekbsa.org

*If you have a suspicion about abuse in your pack, troop, or crew, or elsewhere in the BSA, please contact Scout Executive **Larry Brown** at lbrown@bsamail.org, IWC 715 Betsy Drive, Columbia, SC 29202 (803)750-986*