



Running a section rota

Involving parents, carers and families in your section meetings



Scouts
South London

Involving parents, carers and families in your section meetings

It's a fact that forty-five per cent of our new section leaders come from parents of the children in scouting. Involving parents in running your section or group is a great way to show them what Scouting is about and how they can help.

Whilst many parents drop off and pick up their child from section meetings, few realise that scouting is not just a section meeting – there is a whole host of other roles that are on offer. They also have a vested interest in keeping local scouting strong.

Parents and other family members are the best and most likely source of support available to you. Whether it is behind the scenes, helping occasionally or on a more regular basis at your weekly meetings or coming along to help on a day trip or at camp.

You may have already taken on the challenge of recruiting parents to help with the task of running and organising and there are many highly successful ways to get the parents of your members involved.

This guide is designed to share some of these ideas and provide you with help and advice on how to run a section rota and get parents involved in your section meetings and events.

It's not all plain sailing, encouraging parents to get involved means being more flexible in your approach and realising that not all people are able or prepared to offer their services on a regular basis.

The dad who is willing to take your members round the fire station he works in during the year or the mum who can help out at your meetings every third week are still a valuable resource. Who knows, once they see for themselves how rewarding working with young people is you may be able to encourage them to give more of their time!

Why are they not getting involved?

Whilst a lot of parents and carers have a realistic picture of the challenges we face, many are still picking up on some of the myths that circulate. These include:

- Scout groups are closing due to lack of interested young people not adults
- Leaders are paid
- Leaders are 'superheroes' who know everything
- It is an all or nothing approach (*i.e. no flexibility and you have to be prepared to commit to once a week*).
- You have to work directly with young people
- Scouting is very 'cliquey' and you cannot help out if you have not grown up through the movement
- You have to wear a uniform to help out
- You spend all your time doing paperwork
- There is lots of training involved

You can download or order all the resources mentioned in this guide from: southlondonscouts.org.uk/section-rota

Getting people to sign-up for your section rota – in 3 simple steps.

Let's think about how a parent may feel. They may be shy or just simply scared that if they offer to help, they won't know what to do or will end up being given loads to do! Remember that you as leaders have an aura of control, confidence and knowledge that could make parents feel they have nothing to offer. How wrong can they be!

We need to encourage them into the group by slowly giving them a little more responsibility each time they help, slowly developing their leadership skills and sense of adventure.

So how do you get them onto the section rota in the first place?

Step 1 – Ask or inform

Decide as a leadership team how many parents you need each week to make the section run well. Use the **parents guides** to provide easy to understand information for parents. It's a simple way to induct parents and inform them of what you do in the section.



Available free of charge from Scout Stores

– follow the link from southlondonscouts.org.uk/section-rota

Also give all parents a **rota leaflet**:



Have the conversation

Parents and carers (and their wider families), are generally interested in finding out more about scouting. When a new member joins your section have an upbeat conversation with their parents/guardians about the opportunities to get involved and encourage them to return the **getting involved form** (available to download and adapt from southlondonscouts.org.uk/section-rota)

Step 3 –Use their skills

Give everyone on your rota a copy of our helpers' leaflet. This gives them an overview of what we are asking them to do and provides them with information that will help them get the most out of helping out.

When planning your sessions write them clearly so that you can explain to each helper what the section is doing that session – what games you are playing etc.

Give the parent a specific role to do straight away – not just making the squash (that's not a good use of their time and they won't be back!)

You may split your section into smaller sub-groups, why not allocate the parent one sub-group to help / support during the session? You may play a game, explain the rules to the parent or print them off and ask them to run that game (maybe give them a week to digest and prepare).



Getting people to move from the rota to a uniformed role.

Step 1 – Add a little more responsibility

Once a parent looks comfortable helping to run a game or is starting to use their initiative ask them for some direct help with planning a session.

Ask them to look for a game or craft activity on the theme of next week's session and give them a specific time limit for that activity.

It really doesn't matter what you ask them to do, the idea is that they get that amazing feeling of satisfaction when an activity they have devised is enjoyed by the whole section.

After a while ask the people on your rota for help to organise and plan an outing, they made be confident to plan it all on their own with guidance from you

Step 2 – Involve them in planning

Once they are happy running an activity and is happy to find and run a game or creative activity, invite them to plan meetings.

Listen to their thoughts and ideas and make them feel valued in the team by implementing some of them.

You can then introduce the section planning resource books and online resources. You have now shown them how easy planning a session is, how much time it takes and also that you work well as a team.

Step 3 – Close the deal

During this time, you will have developed a good working relationship with your helper(s).

They have enjoyed the sessions they have participated in; they have experienced running an activity on their own and have grown in confidence. They will be having fun!

After a few months of helping on the rota on their terms, you can now close the deal by asking them to consider becoming a leader or section assistant. They may just be waiting to be asked. The training may encourage them if you describe the benefits, as could the skills that they can add to their CV. But don't scare them off by making it sound like a lot of extra time and commitment!

They may just want to be part of the team and you can always explain that they are doing the role anyway so they may as well take on an adult appointment and take advantage of all the benefits that come with it. (wear uniform and accrue service awards etc!)

Step 4 – Provide a warm welcome or keep trying!

The people has said yes, fantastic, you have already completed most of their induction. You need to continue to be as supportive and ensure they are inducted well and complete their **adult information form** and getting start training.

If the parent says no, don't panic.

You have a confident assistant who just does not wish to be in uniform, they are still a real asset to your section, and you can continue to use them on the section rota.

Don't take it personally and continue to take advantage of their skills with the section rota. And you never know, one day they might say yes!

Top tips for running an effective section rota

- ★ When organising a rota or asking people to pledge a certain amount of time to scouting, have a good think about the tasks that need to be done, and particularly give them a real job to do – making the squash is fine, but it doesn't warrant them giving up an entire evening!
- ★ Planning your programme in advance lets you know how many helpers you need. Why ask for two helpers every week when one week you might need four and the next you won't need any.
- ★ Make sure people know what you want them to do in advance – either the week before when they pick their child up or give them a ring. It can be daunting for people who don't know what to expect.
- ★ Try to find someone to coordinate your rota for you...
If a parent tells you they can't ever come because of younger brothers or sisters, this is a great job to offer them as it can be done from home (or even more likely, in the school playground!)
- ★ Have an up-to-date section rota and distribute it to everyone involved. This keeps everyone up-to-date with when they need to come along and the programme for the evening. It also allows people to know who to swap weeks with if they need to.
- ★ Display a copy of your rota somewhere prominent in your meeting place. This will act as a constant reminder that you operate a rota and who has signed up to help on which evenings.
- ★ Try not to make the rota a chore. Let parents know that when they agree to take part in a rota, they will be able to have a taste of what scouting is really about. Get them involved in activities and games and make them feel as though they are contributing to the success of a meeting.
- ★ Find out if the parents who are helping have any particular skills or interests. Try to incorporate these into your meetings. If parents feel that they can contribute to young people gaining an award, you may find that they become more motivated to find out other ways in which they can help.
- ★ Don't be afraid to ask people or their relatives for help. Research shows that most people will say 'yes' if asked to help with a specific task. By giving people the opportunity to have taste of what volunteering for the scouts is like, you may find yourself with some potential leaders for the future.
- ★ Organise a trip or adventurous activity and take more helpers along than you need. The helpers will have fun, enjoy the activity and it may increase their interest to get more involved.
- ★ Expand the rota to a family rota, where it doesn't matter who helps out on that particular week, as long as someone is there. For example, it could be an aunt, uncle, grandparent, brother, sister or neighbour. This takes the pressure of one person and adds diversity in age range, experience and skills.
- ★ REMEMBER – it's a slow process – it is unlikely you will get people making the leap from no involvement to full involvement. Most people will start off on a rota and gradually take on more commitment if they are interested. This process can take over a year.

More thoughts...

Flexibility, flexibility, flexibility!

Be prepared to accept what people have to give. Make their experience an enjoyable one and hopefully they will come back for more. But if they don't, accept this and move on. Don't push a commitment so far that you scare that person off for good. Whilst your long-term objective may be to get parents to become leaders you need to accept that some may never want to do this and that what they can offer as a helper is just as valuable.

Talk to parents about what their child has gained from scouting

With nine in ten parents saying scouting is a worthwhile activity for their children to take part in, few would be happy to be told that groups are closing down every week due to lack of adult support. Talking about the benefits of scouting, and the need to ensure it continues to be successful, may make parents think about the situation and how they could play a part in solving it.

Show parents what they can gain from helping out

People are busy and need to prioritise how they spend their free time. When pulled in so many directions, some people will ask what's in it for me? By showing them how fun and rewarding scouting can be you are much more likely to get them to help out.

Learn more about your parents

Who are they? What do they do for a job? Do they work part time and therefore have more time on their hands? What are their hobbies? Also, don't forget the parents of those on your waiting list if you have one.

Communicate, communicate, communicate!

Nothing is better than asking them face-to-face. Why not have a social event just for parents and showcase some of the projects their children have been involved with and highlight forthcoming activities? Put people in a better frame of mind with some refreshments.

Think differently

Why not hold your investitures in an unusual or memorable place; invite all parents on a parent and child weekend camp or organise a parent and child event where parents can join in with the activities and witness the fun at first hand?

Allay their fears

Make sure your groups parents' welcome pack dispels most of the myths attributed to scouting but it will be down to you to ensure a parent feels confident and happy from the outset.

Make parents feel part of the 'family'

Many people often use scouting jargon that others would not understand. Try and put yourself in the perspective of someone who is new to scouting and explain the terminology as you go along. Avoid using terms such as CSL or GSL use the full title instead.

Get the whole family involved

Don't just concentrate on the parents. Your members may have older siblings who would be willing to help out as young leaders or grandparents who are now retired and have some spare time on their hands.

Don't be afraid to ask for help

But don't look desperate either!

Remember...

People are more likely to join a successful operation rather than a failing one.

So, to successfully recruit more regular or flexible adult volunteers your scout group and sections must be seen as:

- ★ open and welcoming: it should be a 'place of doors, not a place of walls'
- ★ an energetic place, full of enthusiastic people and full of activity
- ★ making a major contribution to the community
- ★ well organised where people's time is productive
- ★ safe (especially for children) and well managed
- ★ part of a huge, vibrant and successful organisation



FORMS, FORMS, FORMS!

People who want to be involved won't necessarily expect to have to fill in forms. However, all adults who are involved more than once in a 31 day period and/or are staying overnight, and/or are handling the sections money, and/or may have unsupervised access to young people need to be DBS checked and, if they don't have an adult appointment, need to fill out our **adult information form**.

Explain that this is necessary to maintain a record of people involved in scouting events and to ensure the safety of our young people.

Completing the necessary paperwork and processes in advance makes it much easier for you to manage your events.

Adults who offer service more frequently than once a month should be encouraged to become a Section Assistant.

Who should not be checked?

Parents should not be routinely checked unless they are involved.

All adults who are involved:

- more than once in a 31 day period
- are staying overnight
- are handling the sections money
- may have unsupervised access to young people

need to be DBS checked



The follow-up – Saying thank you

A thank you goes a long, long way, so don't forget to say thank you to everyone who helps. The more personal the thank you, the more meaningful it will be.

Giving helpers public recognition and a **thank you service certificate** to take away when they reach a significant milestone (say 10 hours of volunteering etc.) makes them feel appreciated but will also serve as a reminder of the great time they had. You can download and adapt these from southlondonscouts.org.uk/section-rota

When saying thank you, ask people whether they had a good time and what it was they particularly enjoyed. If anyone offers further help, make sure you are enthusiastic and have an answer to give them – for example, details of other camps or activities they could attend.

After the evening, trip, event or activity make sure you keep in touch with everyone who helped out and let them know what is happening in the group or section.

If you have a regular communication for parents anyway, highlight who has recently helped out and the difference they made and why not add a personalised note for those who have helped out, highlighting anything they would be particularly interested in.

If you hold social events for your leadership team, consider inviting along those parents who were part of the leadership team at your event. This would be a gentle way of getting them gradually more involved and interested in helping out more frequently.



Food for thought...

A Group Scout Active Support Unit is a great way to involving parents on a rota to make them feel they belong to scouting!

A Scout Active Support unit is a great way people to volunteer some of their spare time to support your group in a flexible way.

If you think this is the right route to involve the parents and family members of your group you could choose to set up a Group Scout Active Support Unit – It's easy, the first step is to find someone that is happy to take on the role of the unit manager.

This is a great way to recognise the parents and carers that are helping on your section rotas less than twice a month. If they help more than once per month, you should consider talking to them about taking on a Section Assistant or Assistant section Leader role.

An Active Support Unit should be a an exciting, lively and active unit (or team) – by opening a unit which only one or two people join it might affect the future success of Scout Active Support – so consider wisely whether it's best to start a unit, or invite individuals to take up appointments.

Scouts 
Active Support



Section rota check list...

- Appoint someone to coordinate the rota
- Regularly promote the scheme and recruit parents and their family members
- Provide everyone with a rota guide:
 - a copy of the terms programme
 - a copy of the terms rota
 - a contact list for the section's leadership team
 - Helper leaflet
 - Yellow card
 - Purple card
- Ensure that everyone understands what to do if they are unable to attend on their agreed evenings
- Involve the parents in your planning and make sure that they know what they will be helping with before they arrive at the meeting
- Ensure everyone is introduced to each other



<Group Name>

Rota for our < Season /Season> term <year>

Date	Meeting Theme	No of helpers needed	Helping this week...	
			Parents name	Parents of
<Month>				
<Month>				
<Month>				
<Month>				





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southlondonscouts.org.uk



contact.us@southlondonscouts.org.uk



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