

Managing Behaviour



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Introduction

All of us have had occasions when behaviour has affected the smooth running of a meeting or event. Such behaviour exceeds high spirits and general 'naughtiness'. It spoils the activity or event for everyone and can lead to accidents, damage or distress.

The reasons for behaviour like this can be many and varied and may well lie outside Scouting and its activities. As a Leader it is important to distinguish between the causes that you can influence and those you can't. This doesn't mean that any old behaviour will do or is acceptable!

When certain behaviours persist, Leaders can feel undermined and inadequate, but there are some ways to manage what is going on and to lay down rules for the future.

Whatever you are going to call it – discipline, control, management – some order is essential to the smooth running of any activity to ensure that it is fun for everyone. Young people also need to feel that the adults with them can keep them safe and secure so that they can participate fully in what is on offer. This will require the co-operation of all those involved – Leaders, Scouts of all ages and parents.

This factsheet offers suggestions that might help prevent behavioural difficulties. It also offers guidance on what to do when things do go wrong.

What is challenging behaviour?

Problem behaviours beyond the odd 'bad night' can take many forms. It may be harmless, irritating, attention seeking, bullying (including

names calling, intimidation and excluding others from joining in), physically or verbally aggressive behaviour, violence or even sexual harassment. None of these are acceptable and will need the whole leadership team will need to discuss and decide on the best approach.

You need to make sure that all involved adults and young people know what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Regular discussions about behaviour can lay the ground rules so that everyone knows what to expect.

Scouting today is no different to society in general in that it includes a number of young people with difficult behaviours which make the smooth running of activities or meetings difficult and, in some cases, impossible. Any such behaviour which is unacceptable to Leaders and which affects the functioning of individuals or Groups must be seen as a matter of concern, deserving discussion and support.

Medical conditions

Some behaviour problems arise from known medical conditions requiring particular support for the Member concerned. They may be on medication or a specific behaviour programme and you will need to discuss this with those involved outside meetings. A consistent approach will reap the best rewards with clear boundaries set and adhered to. ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) is one such case. It is not the only one – and there are a number of factsheets on specific Special Needs available from the Scout Information Centre.

The Scout Information Centre

Gilwell Park Chingford London E4 7QW Tel + 44 (0)20 8433 7100 Fax + 44 (0)20 8433 7103 email info.centre@scout.org.uk www.scoutbase.org.uk

You may need to consider further support and advice when discussing the possible admission of a young person with a specific behaviour problem in the same way as you would with any prospective Member with a Special Need. They may need a named adult in addition to the leadership team to act as a mentor or 'buddy'. Considering their needs fully in consultation with their parent/carer and themselves will be necessary to safeguard both the Member concerned and the others in the Group.

Outside Scouting

There may be young people within your Group who have other particular difficulties, for example, with bullying at school. The school should deal with issues such as this. However if both parties also attend Sectional meetings then it needs to be made clear that whatever is going on cannot be carried on into Scouting activities. There may be very different standards of acceptable/unacceptable behaviour in certain situations – home, school, other activities, but you will need to be sure of what is acknowledged as acceptable or unacceptable at your meetings and activities.

Planning ahead

Before an incident arises you may want to discuss a number of questions with your team, such as:

- When does the level of naughtiness become unacceptable?
- Does the structure of the meeting allow problems to develop?
- How does body language or general attitude of the adults affect behaviour?
- Should Leaders be expected to tolerate persistent bad behaviour?
- If the causes are outside our control, what can we honestly influence during 1-2 hours a week?
- What steps are available to help with control?

- What is the final resort with regards to behaviours we cannot do anything about?

Having discussed the questions, decide on a joint approach. Prevention is always better than cure, you will all need to know what you intend to do – and don't forget to revisit your decisions especially when someone new joins the team. Agree what you consider to be unacceptable. Extreme examples would include swearing, kicking, punching, biting, spitting, screaming and so on. You will also need to consider wilful or persistent rule breaking or interruptions, talking over others, excessive noise and so on.

A plan of action

Agree a number of steps – your first resort shouldn't be the most severe or you've nowhere else to go! Obviously physical contact is not an option, but think about the safety and security of steps – sitting out is one thing, but where? Don't put young people in your care out of sight, or 'outside the door' or alone with one Leader. They need to be where you can keep an eye on them AND be able to watch what it is they are missing out on.

Make sure everyone at your meeting knows what acceptable behaviour looks like, sounds like and feels like. How will they know that behaviour is 'good'? You can't say it's always quiet for example or that it's only ever one person talking – think about your craziest games – would those descriptions apply. But you can make certain statements such as – people (and that includes other adults) listen to each other, everyone plays by the rules, teasing is unkind and is not allowed – for example anything that relates to making fun of anyone's race, faith, abilities and so on.

Now take a good look at your weekly programmes. Problems often occur when there is nothing to do so watch out for those games where players get 'knocked out' (not physically of course!) go for missing a turn or losing a life. Mix up old favourites and new ideas so there is always something for everyone. Make sure the activities are planned and flow one from another. There's

less scope for trouble when there are no gaps to fill!

Does everyone know what they are supposed to be doing? Are the instructions clear? Is there something for everyone to do?

Messages from adults

What messages do your adults give out? Do they stop and listen when instructions are being given out? How do they model 'good' behaviour? Do they recognise and acknowledge good behaviour as well as pick up on poor examples? Do you look like a team with shared levels of acceptability? When you all work together and react alike there is far less opportunity for 'playing one Leader off against the other'. Do you support each other when an activity is happening? It's much easier to keep control if one of you is running the activity and another is helping to observe. It is very easy to miss something while you are running the activity so another pair of eyes can be invaluable.

What is the 'praise' or 'blame' culture of your Group like? You may want to look at whether the atmosphere is full of criticism or a constant reinforcing of acceptable behaviour. 'Thank you' and 'Well done' need to be heard (and meant) when talking to young people and between Leaders too. Remember too that it is the behaviour which is unacceptable, rather than the young person and provide opportunities for them to have good behaviour acknowledged. Avoid labelling individuals as 'good' or 'bad', referring rather to acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This helps everyone to focus on what the problem is and deal with it.

Taking action

If, despite your best efforts, a situation arises when bad behaviour disrupts continually, threatens safety or challenges your authority or

that of another adult, then you will need to take action.

Try to keep cool, calm and collected. It shows assurance and control.

Take positive action. Don't let the situation drift on or pretend it didn't happen. It might be as simple as stopping the activity, stating what you regard as unacceptable and making your expectations clear before continuing. Or it may be necessary to separate the culprit(s) from the activity for someone to chat to them while you re-start.

Try asking the individual or group you are addressing to sit. This will reduce aggression and anger and reinforce the message that you are in charge.

If you are taking the young person to one side always remain within sight or hearing of others at all times. Ensure that the other Leaders are aware of where you are and what is happening. Always avoid unobserved one to one contact with a young person.

Especially where you did not witness the incident, listen carefully to all sides before making any statements or judgements. This is often more difficult than it sounds because emotions and strong feelings can get in the way of the issue at hand.

When you have a view of the facts, calmly have your say sticking to the facts. Highlight any safety issues and reinforce what should be happening. Avoid trying to reinforce these messages with personal threats or aggressive statements.

Keep as much eye contact as you can to reinforce your message.

Keep some personal space between you and the person you are talking to.

Later, when time allows (and you will need to make time) and when the situation is calmer you will need to review the incident to see if it was a 'one off' or part of a build up which needs watching. Brief your team and find out if there are any other situations 'bubbling under.'

Until you have all the available facts, you will not be able to make a fair and balanced judgement.

Later still, at a Leaders' meeting, discuss the incident, the actions taken and any lessons to learn for the future.

Further support

Sometimes you may feel as if you have tried everything, but can't crack the problem. Ask for help! It might be helpful to get someone not in weekly contact with your meeting to come along and watch what is going on for you. Try asking the Group Scout Leader or the Assistant District Commissioner or a Leader from another Section to attend a meeting and observe what is happening. Don't tell them the problem and ask them to tell you what they see. They may spot something simple, or be able to identify another young person or point of the evening which acts as a trigger. They may actually be able to tell you that it's nothing to do with your meeting at all, that the cause is outside your control – very important information.

Of course, it may well be that the behaviour just doesn't happen on that occasion – invite them another time and try again. Did you run the meeting any differently with a visitor there? Or is the behaviour more erratic or less frequent than it feels? (Sometimes it just happens that way!)

Involving parents

On most occasions where persistent bad behaviour is spoiling Scouting for others it is a good idea to involve those at home, telling them of your concerns and asking if they have any ideas on how to resolve the problem. In the first instance this might be a chat at the end of the meeting with the young person present. Or you might ask them to come up to the meeting place at the end of the next meeting for a chat. They may know of something which has happened which may go some way to explain the behaviour or suggest solutions. If such informal contact doesn't improve things to your satisfaction you

may need to make a formal appointment to speak with the parents/carers.

If you are going to make a home visit then it is essential to prepare for it and to be accompanied by another adult from the Group or District. Before the visit talk to the rest of your team. Decide what action you are going to take and how far you are prepared to go to ensure acceptable behaviour. During the visit, sensitivity will be required as many parents/carers may not believe that their child could misbehave sufficiently to need a visit from two Leaders.

When explaining the problem stick to the facts without exaggeration and, if action is agreed, make a point of agreeing a period of time for review and further discussion or feedback.

You may discover particular conflicts within their Lodge, Six or Patrol. Check out whether moving to another might help. The young person may respond more positively under different leadership or in another peer grouping.

It may be that involving the parents/carers will improve matters or give you some additional information on how to handle the situation. It may be that you agree to a shorter time at the meeting for a while will help. By attending part of the meeting rather than all of it some breathing space can be gained for all involved, without making the young person feel shut out. In this case it's better for them to come later to the meeting and join in once order is established and then stay to the end. Once an improved pattern of behaviour has been established they can attend for longer and longer sessions until they are able to cope with the whole meeting again.

Leaving Scouting

However much we dislike the idea, there may be situations outside our control where the only sensible course of action is to ask the young person to leave. Asking someone to leave Scouting is the ultimate sanction and must follow the procedures laid down in *Policy, Organisation*

and Rules. The Group Scout Leader and the District Commissioner will be involved.

In such cases, the leadership team may feel a bit deflated or defeated, as if they have 'failed' in some way. Remember all we have promised to do is 'our best.'

Happily in the majority of cases, positive actions by the leadership team brings about the order and behaviour needed to ensure that everyone (including the adults!) enjoys their time in Scouting.

Further information

Factsheet FS315066 *Promoting Good Behaviour in the Scout Troop* contains suggestions for The Troop, Leaders and parents.

A range of factsheets covering a variety of Special Needs is available from the Scout Information Centre on 0845 300 1818, or to download from ScoutBase:

<http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/ps/sneeds/>

The Scout Association produces a range of anti-bullying resources, including a free resource for Leaders: *Would you recognise the signs of bullying? - Anti-Bullying Guide*, which is available from the Scout Information Centre or can be downloaded from:

<http://www.scouts.org.uk/bullying/>