

# A Leader's Guide to involving parents

Parents are the most likely source of support available to you and your Group. But how do you get them involved... and keep them involved?

This brochure will give you some ideas for making parents feel welcome, and motivating them to take an active part in their child's Scouting experience.

Not all parents are able or prepared to offer their services on a weekly basis, and many may not even realise that there are ways they can help without making the commitment to becoming a trained, uniformed Leader.

With a bit of lateral thinking and a flexible approach, you can encourage them to become key members of your Group.... without scaring them off!

You never know, once they realise how rewarding (and fun!) Scouting is for both children and adults, you might have some new Leaders on your hands!

## Be friendly and welcoming!

- A welcoming, friendly and safe atmosphere
- A clean and tidy Hall and surrounds
- Happy, confident kids who are having fun, learning new things and working together as a team
- Smiling, motivated and friendly Leaders
- Other happy and involved parents

### A quick quiz! What do parents see and feel when they walk into your Scout Hall?

Did you score 5 out of 5? If not, how do you think this might impact on the parents in your Group? Parents are a valuable resource for Leaders, and they would much rather be part of a happy, thriving Group than one that appears to be struggling.

It is important to ease new parents into the Group gently – you don't want to frighten them away on their first visit by swamping them with information about becoming a uniformed Leader!

Parents are far more likely to volunteer their support if they feel welcomed and involved. Therefore, it is worthwhile investing the time and effort into 'laying the groundwork' before asking for help.

- Explain to the parents how your Scout Group operates, and help them to understand the difference between uniformed and non-uniformed roles.
- Encourage the parents to ask questions, and listen to their feedback.
- Send the parents photos of their kids in the thick of activities, having fun and learning.
- Organise fun and adventurous activities that the whole family can experience together. Can you involve older siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles?
- Organise social events where Leaders and parents can get to know each other. This helps to build friendship and trust, and gives you an opportunity to find out more about the parents and how they can 'add value'.



### Remind them how great Scouting really is!

In 2009, Scouts Australia conducted a Nielsen Company survey of adults in the wider community asking them to prioritise the things they felt that today's kids should learn and experience, and to rate which youth organisations most effectively deliver these values and experiences.

Respondents rated Scouts Australia as the best equipped Australian organisation to offer young people:



- Confidence and self esteem
- Honesty and trustworthiness
- Helpfulness and care for others
- Imagination and adventure
- Ability and willingness to take on challenges
- Sensitivity to issues such as the environment



Parents understand the benefits that Scouting provides their children, but it doesn't hurt to remind them! Talk about what you're doing for the kids, and the need to ensure that Scouting continues - it may help parents think more about how they can help.

Be proud of the difference you make to young people's lives and tell the parents about your experiences as a Leader. If parents can see the satisfaction - and fun - you get from volunteering, many of them will want to try it for themselves!

### Be clear (and realistic) about expectations

Let parents know what to expect - and what will be expected of them - if they do offer to help out. For example, if you are looking for Group Committee members, it could be helpful to write down a short description of each role, and the tasks and time commitment involved, so that parents can make an informed choice about volunteering for a position.

Some parents may be happy to help out at meeting nights once a month, or your Group may have a weekly parent duty roster. If parents come along to meetings, make sure they have something to do. If their experience is an enjoyable one, hopefully they will come back for more.

Quite often a parent will be happy to help out but may want to give it a go first. Instead of suggesting to a parent that they take on an ongoing role, try asking them if they'd be willing to help organise a one-off event or project such as a Group barbecue or a lamington drive. If they aren't willing or able to take on further roles, accept it and move on. Don't push a commitment so far that you scare a person off for good!

### Capitalise on their unique talents!

What do the parents in your Group do for work? What are their skills, hobbies and interests? Find out, and ask them to do something they'll enjoy.



For example, ask parents from different cultural backgrounds to run a cooking night and teach the kids about their culture. Do you have parents with musical talent? Ask them to bring their instruments and teach the kids some songs! Parents who work in emergency services, trades, or other 'hands-on' jobs are a great for organising workplace excursions. Why not 'bring the workplace to the Scout Hall' for an interactive session? That dad who's a plumber could have the kids unblocking toilets in no time! Do you have parents that enjoy DIY or gardening? They're perfect to help out with Scout Hall maintenance and working bees! Is there a parent who is good with websites? Have them build one for the Group!

Every parent is unique, and capitalising on that can not only help you manage your Group effectively, but also greatly enrich your Group's program and activities. There could be opportunities for you to learn or try something new as well!

**Be Prepared... to ask for help. Nothing is better than a face-to-face ask. Define what needs to be done, identify the skills needed, then figure out the best person for the job. Remember to be flexible and to think outside the square!**

