

How to smooth the transition to a Scout troop - Scouting magazine



When Paula Castleman looked at her district's [track](#) record for Webelos-to-Scout transition a couple of years ago, she was not impressed.

"We only had about 25 percent of our boys going from Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts," she says. "There was a problem there, and we needed to make sure we worked on it."

As a partial fix (and as a Wood Badge ticket item), the Scouter from Lenoir, N.C., organized a daylong event in which local troops taught basic Scout skills like fire-building and knot-tying, round-robin style, to Webelos dens.

"They all got to experiment a little with every troop there," she says. "That wasn't what I told them we were doing, but that was the goal."

Castleman knew from her time as a Scout mom, den leader, troop committee member, district commissioner and Cubmaster of Pack 271 (her current role) that dens and troops need to get together early and often to ensure a smooth transition to a troop for their graduates. In other words, familiarity breeds contentment, not contempt.

Getting to Know You

"Familiarity" is the magic word for Webelos Scouts in Pack 3157 of DeMotte, Ind.

Committee chair Linda Gunter says the pack's second-year Webelos den follows a unique schedule. On the first Thursday of each month, they meet with one of the two troops in town. On the second Thursday, they meet with the other. On the third Thursday, they attend a pack meeting, and on the fourth Thursday, they meet as a den.

This schedule began about five years ago when a former committee chair had to take over as Webelos den leader and reached out to the local troops for help.

"It happened by default because we lost the leader, and the Boy Scouts were willing to do that program, and it's just been great," Gunter says.

Gunter calls the setup a win-win-win situation. The troop members get to hone their own skills and [complete](#) advancement requirements for which they have to teach younger Scouts. The Arrow of Light Scouts get the chance to evaluate troops in a deeper way than a one-time visit would allow. And their parents get a sneak preview of what the older Scout program looks like.

In part based on all those joint meetings, Pack 3157 almost always graduates 100 percent of its fifth-graders into troops. What about retention?

"We have a very high percentage," Gunter says. "I would say over the last five years, never less than 75 percent have stayed."

Joint outings are another way to smooth the transition, which is why Gunter's and Castleman's packs schedule joint outings with local troops or invite troops to help with pack outings.

Castleman also likes to take fifth-grade Webelos to family night at summer camp, especially if they're nervous about what comes next. One year, she paired a boy who has autism with an older Scout in camp.

"I didn't know it, but the Boy Scout who was his tour guide bought him something in the camp store so he would have something to take home," she recalls. "He talked about camp all the way home and for three or four weeks after that."

Not surprisingly, he was ready to [join](#) a troop the next spring.