



## Family Troop Best Practices Guide

Scouting America troops across the nation participated in a family troop pilot (called a combined troop during the pilot) between September 2024 and July 2025. This guide is a summary of family troop best practices discovered during the pilot as reported by participating troops from across the nation.

### Making the Decision

**On average, boys and girls tend to have different rates of physical, emotional, and cognitive maturity during adolescence. These developmental differences may make separate troops for boys and troops for girls a more effective option for many families, providing a setting where youth can grow, lead, and challenge themselves alongside their peers developing at a similar pace. These environments can also help young people build confidence, take on responsibility, and try new things without additional social pressures.**

**We also recognize there's substantial variability in maturity rate and temperament among individuals, and some families may prefer a troop model where boys and girls learn to collaborate with and understand one another as they develop. In all troops, adult volunteers and youth should be mindful that all Scouts have meaningful opportunities to practice leadership skills, hold positions of responsibility, and gain confidence.**

**Ultimately, each young person is unique, and our local councils, chartering organizations, and troop leadership are best able to determine which of the approved Scouts BSA delivery models best meets their needs. Parents are encouraged to carefully consider their adolescent's individual readiness, temperament, and comfort level when choosing whether a troop for boys, a troop for girls, or a family troop will best support their growth and help them thrive as developing leaders and responsible citizens.**

Please refer to the *Family Troop Decision Guide* for more important considerations for forming a family troop.



## Troop Formation (Adult Volunteers)

### Best Practices for All Troops

- Adult volunteers should work together with a shared vision to serve all youth well. Clear communication among volunteers regarding goals and values is critical, as is practicing the Scout Law by being friendly, courteous, and kind. Ensuring alignment on major decisions between youth, adult volunteers, parents, and the chartered organization(s) creates a positive culture and enables the troop to thrive.
- Adult volunteers should familiarize themselves with the Safeguarding Youth policies of Scouting America. They should note the adult volunteer requirements for troops and the requirements for separate restrooms, shower houses, tenting, and sleeping arrangements, including barriers between boys and girls.
- Consistent with Scouting America policy, the chartered organization selects the Scoutmaster. The Scoutmaster should be chosen carefully to meet the needs of the youth in the troop. They should also complete both Scoutmaster Leader-Specific Training and Introduction to Outdoor Leader Skills (IOLS).
- Assistant Scoutmasters and the committee chair should also complete the appropriate leader-specific training.
- Many adults can serve the troop. Consider having multiple assistant Scoutmasters to support the program, provide two-deep adult volunteer supervision, and support the required registered adult female requirement when girls are present.
- Successful troops recognize the importance of excellent volunteers for each Scout's experience. If essential volunteers face barriers to participation, troop leadership should work to actively overcome these challenges. Our pilot troops have suggested paying for adult volunteer registration fees, loaning camping gear, funding childcare, and offering transportation support.
- Build an adult volunteer culture that is welcoming to all adults for whom outdoor experience is new. Encourage adult volunteers to attend Introduction to Outdoor Leader Skills training, as well as other Scout or community workshops that can help build outdoor confidence. Just as we bring along new Scouts to learn those skills, so should we for the adults. A Scout is friendly and helpful!



## Best Practices for Family Troops

- If a boy troop and girl troop have merged into a family troop, do not assume one troop will be absorbed by the other troop. Scoutmasters from each troop should be considered for the role in the family troop, or a new Scoutmaster may be chosen. It should be an open discussion with the chartered organization.
- Traditions and activities from both troops should be honored, or new traditions and activities should be built together, according to the Scouts' preferences.
- In a family troop, it is important to give both male and female adult volunteers similar opportunities to work with the youth, be role models, and lead by example. Only one adult registered leader may serve as a Scoutmaster at any given time. However, our pilot troops noted that when the Scoutmaster is female, it's often helpful for the main assistant Scoutmaster to be male — and vice versa.
- We should ensure no Scouts are excluded from events due to lack of appropriate adult volunteer leadership. If, despite best efforts, an event or outing lacks appropriate adult volunteer leadership, it should be canceled rather than excluding any youth.

## Troop Formation (Youth)

### Best Practices for All Troops

- In Wood Badge, we learn to “Train them, trust them, let them lead.” Leadership training for our youth is key to their success. Troops that hold annual or biannual Introduction to Leadership Skills for Troops (ILST) training and send their youth leaders to National Youth Leadership Training (NYLT) found it helps their youth leadership thrive.
- Scouts BSA uses the patrol method and patrol leaders' council as a primary methodology for youth leadership. The senior patrol leader should be elected from the full troop. The troop committee, in consultation with the Scoutmaster and possibly the patrol leaders' council, sets the specific rules for the election, such as the term length and whether a majority vote is required.
- Adult volunteers and youth should be mindful that all Scouts have meaningful opportunities to practice leadership skills, serve in youth positions of responsibility, and gain confidence.



- The senior patrol leader, with guidance from the Scoutmaster following the directive of the chartering organization and feedback of the Scouts, assigns Scouts to patrols. No Scout should be assigned to a patrol they or their parents are uncomfortable with.
- It is important that youth leadership respects every Scout and allows all voices to be heard. Remind your Scouts that a key part of our programs is to treat everyone respectfully and in alignment with the Scout Oath and Law.
- Every Scout is a friend to every other Scout. Emphasize the Scout Oath and Law in how the troop, youth leadership, adult volunteers, and committee operate. This is the No. 1 most cited success factor in the pilot.

### **Best Practices for Family Troops**

- On average, boys and girls tend to have different rates of physical, emotional, and cognitive maturity during adolescence. Because of these differences, boys and girls have distinct developmental needs during adolescence that may benefit from patrols serving only boys or only girls. Separate patrols for boys and girls can provide a setting where youth can grow, lead, and challenge themselves alongside their peers developing at a similar pace. However, we also recognize there's substantial variability in maturity rate and temperament among individuals, and unique situations can occur that make boy-only or girl-only patrols impractical or impossible. Chartering organizations should carefully choose a patrol structure that meets the values of their organization and the needs of their families.
- Our pilot troops recommended that family troops avoid a competitive boys vs. girls dynamic and instead foster an atmosphere of cooperation.

### **Troop Growth**

- Troops that actively recruit all year thrive. Informing friends and neighbors that Scouting America is for both boys and girls is also a key success factor. Recruitment methods are varied but include much more than waiting for Arrow of Light Scouts to arrive in the spring. School events, bring-a-friend activities, parent networks, and other methods have proven successful. The best recruiting tool can be an exciting, youth-led program that gets Scouts talking about their



adventures to other youth. This is called peer-to-peer recruitment, and it's particularly effective in Scouts BSA.

- Establish onboarding procedures for new families to better understand your troop and the Barriers to Abuse. We recommend all parents take Youth Safeguarding Training. This is particularly important in a family troop, where people may not be familiar with this new option.

## **Troop Operations**

- Troops found success by creating specific guidelines with and for youth on behavior expectations, including topics such as dating and bullying. The patrol leaders' council works in collaboration with adult volunteers to create a troop code of conduct that specifically addresses potential areas of concern, sets clear expectations, and is signed yearly by youth and their parents. Frequent reminders on Scout-like behavior are helpful at events and outings.
- Consistent with the national Scouts BSA clothing guidelines released in 2025, create a Troop Clothing Guideline using the template provided. Setting clear and fair expectations for all youth reduces opportunities for conflict over clothing.
- Scouts BSA is youth-led, with adult guidance and supervision. The patrol leaders' council should take the lead on proposing the troop activity calendar, the code of conduct, meeting plans, and outing plans.
- While all Barriers to Abuse must be met, a family troop is one unified troop. There should not be separate programming or activities for boys and girls. Our pilot troops also noted that boys vs. girls activities do not support a collaborative troop atmosphere.

## **Troop Outings and Events**

- Active and engaged adult supervision is critical. Adults should keep an eye and ear on what youth are doing, especially during less structured downtime. See <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safe/> for more safety expectations.
- The Guide to Safe Scouting and Barriers to Abuse must be followed for tenting, including providing separate tenting arrangements for male and female youth.
- As in every troop, patrol cooking and gathering areas must always be actively supervised by adult volunteers. Our pilot troops also recommended having a large, communal, and adult-supervised gathering space on campouts for boys and girls to gather socially out of the elements. Tenting areas for boys and girls



should be clearly separated from these spaces and one another and reserved only for sleeping and changing clothing.

- The buddy system, as defined in the Barriers to Abuse, must be followed. A single girl and a single boy may never be a buddy pair; however, a third scout may be added to create a buddy group of three.

### **Staying the course ...**

Should you find the family model not working for your troop, please consult the *Converting From a Family Troop* guide for assistance.

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