



## Youth Protection Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the Boy Scouts of America's (BSA) commitment to Youth Protection?**

Nothing is more important to the BSA than the safety of our youth members. We believe that even one instance of child abuse is unacceptable, and we are outraged there have been times when our best efforts to protect youth were not enough and Scouts were abused. We sincerely apologize to victims and their families.

The BSA is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for our youth members. Youth protection requires sustained vigilance, and we work every day to protect children through mandatory policies and procedures at every level of our organization. We are also committed to continuous improvement in our approach to youth protection.

### **What are the Boy Scouts of America's Youth Protection policies?**

The BSA strives to prevent child abuse through comprehensive policies and procedures, which include the following safeguards to serve as barriers to abuse:

- Ongoing youth protection education for all volunteers, parents, and Scouts.
- A formal selection and screening process for adult leaders and staff that includes criminal background checks.
- A Volunteer Screening Database system to prevent the registration of individuals who do not meet the BSA's standards due to known or suspected abuse or misconduct inside or outside the organization.

Requiring two or more adult leaders be present with youth at all times

Youth protection begins with you. All units, adult leaders, and youth members have a responsibility to enforce youth protection program policies. Our education and training programs are specifically designed to teach Scouts, parents, and adult volunteers to recognize, respond, and report abuse—in and out of Scouting.

### **What updates are coming to the BSA's Youth Protection Policies?**

The BSA is introducing the next generation of youth protection for our organization. Our updated youth protection policies include:

1. Any person looking to become a registered leader in Scouting must complete the BSA's youth protection training before registering.
2. Youth protection training is mandatory for any volunteer who participates in an outing lasting longer than 72 hours.
3. Units may not re-charter until and unless all adult leaders are trained in the BSA's youth protection.

### **Why is the BSA updating its Youth Protection Policies? Were the previous policies inadequate?**



The BSA constantly evaluates and reinvests resources where needed to strengthen our policies and ensure they are ahead of or in line with society's knowledge of abuse and best practices for prevention. We also regularly consult with survivors, experts from law enforcement, child safety, psychology, and other relevant fields.

### **How can those involved in Scouting report suspicions of inappropriate behavior?**

The BSA has a dedicated 24-hour Scouts First Helpline (1-844-SCOUTS1 or 1-844-726-8871) available to report any suspected inappropriate activity. Contact local law enforcement immediately in any case of suspected inappropriate behavior.

### **How does the BSA support victims of abuse?**

The BSA believes that even one instance of child abuse is unacceptable, and we deeply regret the times when our best efforts to protect youth were not enough. We are committed to providing ongoing support to victims and their families, including counseling. We want to help victims heal, on their own terms, with a professional counselor of their choice.

- The Boy Scouts of America offers assistance with counseling to any Scout, former Scout, or the family member of any Scout who suffered abuse during their time in Scouting. The BSA has a dedicated 24-hour **Scouts First Helpline** (1-844-SCOUTS1 or 1-844-726-8871) and email contact address ([scouts1st@scouting.org](mailto:scouts1st@scouting.org)) for these sensitive matters.
- Contact local law enforcement immediately in any case of suspected inappropriate behavior.

### **What is the BSA's message to parents about youth protection issues?**

Youth protection is of paramount importance to the BSA, and integral to everything we do. Parents are our most important allies in protecting our youth. Keeping an open dialogue with your children—no matter what their age—is a vital part of keeping them safe. The subject can be uncomfortable, but parents must speak to their children about these issues. That's why every Cub Scout and Boy Scout handbook includes the BSA's Youth Protection materials that helps parents speak to their children about youth protection issues. Additionally, all aspects of Scouting are open to observation by parents and leaders.



### **How are adult leaders selected?**

All potential volunteer Scout leaders must provide personal references from the community they hope to serve and pass an extensive background check.

- **STEP 1: Application**

All adults who have been selected as potential leaders of youth by a chartered organization must provide references, past addresses, other community affiliations and affirm that they have had no criminal accusations made against them.

- **STEP 2: Adult Leader Youth Protection Training**

No person can become a registered leader in Scouting without first completing the BSA's Youth Protection training and all registered adult volunteers are required to complete the training every two years. The training is available online 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- **Step 3: Chartered Organizations Reference Check**

Chartered organizations provide local insight and ongoing supervision. The involvement of local chartered organizations (churches, schools or civic groups) helps ensure that volunteers are known and trusted in the community.

- **STEP 4: Criminal Background Check**

The BSA requires criminal background checks on all Scout leaders. The background checks are administered by a nationally-respected third party that also provides this service to many local, state and federal governments; educational institutions; and other nonprofits.

- **STEP 5: Volunteer Screening Database Check**

Before an applicant can join or volunteer with Scouting, the BSA verifies that he or she is not included in our database of individuals who have been prohibited from participation. The database prevents the registration of individuals who do not meet the BSA's standards due to known or suspected abuse or misconduct inside or outside the organization.

### **Have all registered adult Scout volunteers undergone criminal background checks?**

Yes. All registered volunteers have undergone a criminal background check.

### **Is Youth Protection training a requirement for all adult volunteers?**

Yes, all adult volunteers are required to complete [Youth Protection training](#) before they start as a volunteer, and every two years thereafter.



### **How is the BSA communicating with youth members about sexual abuse and the things they can do to protect themselves?**

Scouts are required to complete *How to Protect Your Children from Child Abuse: A Parent's Guide* with their parent or guardian as a requirement for rank advancement. The BSA teaches the “three R’s” of youth protection, which convey an important message in a clear manner easily understood by youth members:

- **Recognize** situations that place them at risk, how child molesters operate, and that anyone could be a molester.
- **Respond** to suspected, attempted or actual abuse, as well as policy violations. If a peer is affected, reassure them that they are not to blame and encourage them to seek help.
- **Report** suspected, attempted or actual abuse to a parent, trusted adult or law enforcement. This prevents further abuse and helps protect other children. Understand that you will not be blamed for what occurred.

### **What specific steps has the BSA taken in the past to address volunteer misconduct within its organization and protect its members?**

Throughout the organization’s history, the BSA has taken steps to create a safe environment for youth. Recognizing that youth protection requires sustained vigilance, the BSA has continued to develop and enhance our Youth Protection policies to make Scouting as safe as possible for our members.

Key enhancements in recent decades include the following:

- 1991: The BSA prohibits one-on-one adult and youth activities.
- 1994: Required criminal background checks for all professionals and staff who work with youth.
- 2003: Established online training “Youth Protection Guidelines: Training for Adult Leaders and Parents.”
- 2003: Required third-party criminal background checks on all new adult volunteers.
- 2008: Required all current volunteers to go through a criminal background check.
- 2008: Implemented Youth Protection requirements for youth to advance in rank.
- 2010: Established mandatory Youth Protection training for all of the BSA’s volunteers.
- 2010: Hired a full-time Youth Protection director to continue to enhance the BSA’s Youth Protection program.
- 2010: Updated Youth Protection materials to raise awareness of potential abuse—even in the Scouting program.
- 2011: Established a dedicated website focused on communicating the BSA’s commitment to youth protection.
- 2011: Mandatory reporting of suspected abuse.
- 2012: The BSA holds the first National Youth Protection Symposium in Atlanta, Georgia.



- 2012: An email address ([youth.protection@scouting.org](mailto:youth.protection@scouting.org)) is established for volunteers to submit questions about youth protection.
- 2013: The BSA holds the second National Youth Protection Symposium in Irving, Texas, with an expanded group of youth protection experts and youth-serving organizations ([www.nationalyouthprotectionsymposium.org](http://www.nationalyouthprotectionsymposium.org)).
- 2014: The anti-bullying Be Kind initiative is launched; campaign materials are provided for use by units, leaders, and youth.
- 2016: The BSA creates new Youth Protection materials and trainings focused on the prevention of youth-on-youth incidents.
- 2016: The BSA holds the third National Youth Protection Symposium in Atlanta, Georgia.
- 2017: The BSA holds the fourth International Youth Protection Symposium.
- 2018: The BSA introduces new Youth Protection Training for all leaders and other volunteers.

Throughout this period, the BSA has continued to develop and update educational materials for youth members, including a Youth Protection comic book series for Cub Scouts and personal safety awareness training videos, which are now used both within Scouting and by schools, sports programs and other community youth groups. Most of these materials are now available in both English and Spanish.

**Is it true the BSA maintains confidential reports on incidents of abuse within Scouting? How are they used?**

Because the BSA is committed to providing the safest environment possible for our youth members we are proactive in collecting and acting upon many kinds of information, including tips and hearsay, even if that information cannot be proven in a court of law.

When the BSA receives such information from the local community indicating that someone is unsuitable for participation in its programs, the BSA adds the individual's name to the Volunteer Screening Database, whether or not the adults were Scout leaders and whether or not the youth involved were Scouts. The Database is essentially a list of people who do not meet the BSA's standards because of known or suspected abuse or other inappropriate conduct either inside or outside Scouting, along with supporting information used to identify them. Centralizing this information helps the BSA identify and keep out persons who are or might be ineligible to be members or serve as volunteer leaders. Used in conjunction with national background checks, the Volunteer Screening Database enables Scouting to act more quickly, even on suspicion alone, to identify and keep out persons who have been determined to be ineligible.

The Volunteer Screening Database is only one component of the BSA's established Youth Protection program, which includes criminal background checks, comprehensive training programs, safety policies, and the mandatory reporting to law enforcement of any abuse or suspected abuse. The Database provides a second tier of information to augment the BSA's ongoing efforts to keep out individuals deemed inappropriate for BSA membership.