

Managing behaviour in the Colony or Pack



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Introduction

All of us have had occasions when behaviour has affected the smooth running of the Colony or Pack during a meeting or event. Such behaviour exceeds high spirits and general "naughtiness". It spoils the activity or event for everyone and may lead to physical injury, damage or distress.

The reasons for such behaviour can lie outside Scouting and its activities. It is important to distinguish between those causes of behaviour that Leaders can influence and those that they can do nothing about.

Leaders who have experienced persistent disruptive behaviour often feel a sense of inadequacy. They think they have somehow failed. Unfortunately, incidents of this sort happen to everyone sooner or later, even in the best run meetings and events. Therefore, it makes good sense for Leaders to think ahead to prepare themselves.

An important first step is to recognise that discipline and good behaviour needs a team effort. Good behaviour can only be achieved with the co-operation of all concerned, that is, adult Leaders, Helpers and young people.

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

1. Handling the Moment

If, despite your best efforts, a situation arises when bad behaviour disrupts the activity, threatens safety or challenges your authority or that of another adult, then as immediate action you should:

- Try to stay cool, calm and collected. It gives a powerful message that you are in charge.
- Take positive action. Don't let the situation drift on or pretend it didn't happen. Your action might be as straight forward as stopping the activity and stating what you believe is unacceptable and making clear what you do expect. Or, it may be necessary to separate the culprit(s) from the others for a separate talk whilst the activity is re-started for the remainder.
- Remember that when talking to an individual or a group, it helps reduce anger and aggression if you tell them to sit while you stand. It further reinforces the message that you are in charge.
- If you need to talk with the culprit(s) on one side, always be in sight of others - protect yourself. At all costs you should avoid being alone with a young person behind closed doors.

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- Especially in situations where you did not witness the incident, listen carefully to all sides to try to get the facts before you make any statements or judgements. This is often more difficult than it sounds because emotions and strong feelings get in the way of the real issue.
- When you have the facts, calmly have your say, sticking to the facts. If necessary, highlight any safety issues and state what you find unacceptable and what you expect to happen from now on. Avoid trying to reinforce these messages with personal threats and aggressive statements.
- When talking with an individual or a group in such circumstances, remember the importance of maintaining eye contact in helping you get your message across.
- Remember close proximity fuels anger and aggression. Maintain space between you and the individual/group.

Later, when time allows (and you will need to make time) and when the situation is calmer, talk with those involved about the incident. Try to find out:

- Was it an isolated incident or resulting from a chain of circumstances?
- Was it anything to do with the meeting or was it related to something outside the meeting?
- Was it a situation that had been simmering for a period of time?

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

Later still, perhaps at your next Leaders meeting discuss the incident, the actions taken and the

lessons to learn for the future. Remember for next time that prevention is better than cure.

2. Prevention is Better Than Cure

Accepting that an effective "cure" will be necessary sometimes, it is far better to work towards "prevention". Here, there are a number of things that the Leadership team can do to maintain acceptable standards of behaviour and discipline in the Colony or Pack. Above all, it is important to recognise that maintaining behaviour and discipline requires a team effort, so discuss the following issues as a team, perhaps at Leaders meetings as a regular agenda item:

- Discuss and agree behaviour that you will not accept. Extreme examples would include swearing, kicking, punching, biting, spitting, screaming and so on, but you will also need to consider persistent breaking of rules or failing to follow instructions for activities, persistent interruptions, not paying attention, talking whilst someone else is talking, excessive noise/shouting/jostling and so on.
- Discuss and agree the procedures to follow if these types of behaviour occur and ensure that all the Leadership team are aware of them, including occasional Helpers. Don't forget new Leader recruits.
- Discuss and agree the types of behaviour you expect to see. These might include young people and adults listening to each other, everyone following instructions for activities, sticking to the rules at games, showing a fair attitude. You might agree that no one will make fun of anyone else because of their colour, race, faith, abilities and so on and that quiet times would be quiet (but still fun). There would be no malicious teasing and everyone

would be able to participate in all parts of the meeting.

In order to encourage the type of behaviour you expect, the Leadership team might:

- Take a good look at the Colony/Pack programme. Problems often occur when there is nothing to do. This applies to adults as well as young people! Keep the programme active, varied and fun. Try to avoid knock out games where increasing numbers will not be taking part. Is the programme a mix of old favourites and new ideas?
- Take a good look at how the Leadership team runs programme activities. Are the activities properly planned? Does everyone know what is happening and what he or she is supposed to do? Does everyone have a part to play? Is all the equipment available and ready at the right time in the right place? Does the programme keep moving or are there waiting times between activities?
- Take a good look at the behaviour of the Leadership team. What messages does this give to young people? Do you think about how to reward good behaviour rather than criticise bad behaviour? How often do you give praise, say "thanks and well done"? Is the team consistent in its approach to discipline? Is everyone treated in the same fair but firm way with no favouritism? Do the adults observe the same rules and instructions as young people? This applies to Leaders not directly involved who might be chatting in a corner of the hall whilst instructions are being given or during a quiet period.
- Look at your teamwork. Troublemakers will easily detect when it is possible to play off one adult against another. So a consistent approach with everyone aware of what action is to be taken and what each other has said

will reduce the opportunities for troublemakers to find an excuse for bad behaviour. Do those not directly involved in the activity help by keeping an eye on things? It is easy to miss something in running the activity so extra pairs of eyes can be invaluable, especially when young people know they are being observed.

3. Other Sources of Help

Sometimes, the underlying cause of bad behaviour is outside our control. Examples might be allergies and other undisclosed or undiscovered medical conditions. It is important to note that there may be very different standards of acceptable/unacceptable behaviour between home, school and Scouting.

If a situation arises when standards of behaviour are not as you would wish but nothing you do seems to make any difference, then it may be helpful to invite someone from "outside" to your meeting. This might be the Group Scout Leader or Assistant District Commissioner (Beaver Scouts), that is, someone who does not regularly attend your meeting.

Don't tell them the problem, let them make their own judgement but it is possible that they will see something you have missed. At the same time, they may simply confirm that the underlying cause for bad behaviour is outside your control. This is important information.

It is also worth noting that if the problem doesn't occur on the night your visitor is present, try again. If the problem consistently disappears during a visit, then perhaps the way the meeting is run when a visitor is present is different from normal.

On most occasions where persistent bad behaviour is causing difficulties, it is a good idea to involve parents/carers, informing them of your

concerns. At one level, this would be a chat at the end of a meeting, with the young person present. At a second level, where such informal contact has not improved the situation to your satisfaction, a home visit may be necessary. The young person concerned should be told that you intend to visit parents/carers. It is also essential that another adult accompanies you from the Group or District.

Before the visit, prepare by talking with others in the Leadership team. Decide what action you are prepared to take, how far you are prepared to go to ensure acceptable behaviour. During the visit, sensitivity will be required because no parent/carer believes their child could possibly misbehave sufficiently to warrant a visit by a Leader from Scouting.

When explaining the problem, stick to the facts without exaggeration and if action is agreed, then make a point of determining a review period after which the position will be discussed further.

4. The Last Resort

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. Causes of bad behaviour like allergies and other medical conditions or, those that require specialist help are outside our control.

Asking a young person to leave the Movement 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 should not feel that they have failed. All we ever promise is to "Do our best".

5. In Conclusion

Happily, in the vast majority of cases, positive actions by the Leadership team can influence good behaviour and will enhance the quality of Scouting for all concerned.