



February 2001

Duty of Care - Our code of conduct for adult volunteers

The mission of Scouting is to contribute to the education of young people, through a value system based on the Scout Promise and Law, to help build a better world where people are self-fulfilled as individuals and play a constructive role in society.

This Code of Conduct is expected of all adults who volunteer within Scouts Canada, recognizing that at all times they are expected to act responsibly and exercise a "Duty of Care" to the youth members.

Adults in Scouting:

- * respect the rights & dignity of themselves and others.
- * demonstrate a high degree of individual responsibility, recognizing that at all times their words and actions are an example to other members of the Movement.
- * act at all times in accordance with Scouting principles, thereby setting a suitable example for all.
- * do not use the Movement to promote their own beliefs, behaviors or practices where these are not compatible with Scouting principles.
- * act with consideration and good judgement in all interpersonal relationships, both inside and outside Scouting.
- * respect everyone's right to personal privacy at all times. Take special care when sleeping, changing clothes, and bathing are associated with any Scouting activity.
- * avoid unaccompanied and unobserved activities with youth members. Remember, "in earshot and in vision".
- * avoid potentially compromising situations by ensuring, where reasonably possible, that at least two adults are in attendance while supervising and/or accompanying youth members.
- * realize that bullying, physical, verbal or cultural abuse, sexual harassment, neglect or any other type of abuse, is unacceptable conduct by any member of the Movement.

DUTY OF CARE

Position Statement

The primary responsibility of adults in the Scout Movement is the welfare and development of youth members. The single most important function of the Volunteer Recruitment and Development (VRAD) process of Scouts Canada is to ensure that only suitable adults are recruited.

Our section programs and our ethic requires us to provide an environment in which children and young people feel valued and secure; and can grow as individuals while developing a sense of self worth, personal integrity and increasing competence through the acquisition of skills and achievements. Any adult behaviour which is not supportive of this developmental process is inappropriate and requires appropriate intervention/action.

We have a duty of care to keep youth members safe and protect them from physical and emotional harm. In adventurous activities, this duty is exercised through sensible risk management. In our general program activities, this duty is exercised through a respectful, caring, empathetic and friendly relationship with young people. In the recruitment and selection of adult leaders, their personal standards, character and ability to develop this relationship is much more important than any technical skills or experience.

1. Encouraging Positive Behaviour (Discipline)

Occasionally, there may be a necessity for appropriate disciplinary action. Scouts Canada encourages positive reinforcement to correct inappropriate behaviour.

The following examples are **inappropriate** discipline methods:

- * physical blows or force
- * confinement
- * emotional/humiliation/name-calling
- * any other form of abuse

Alternatives to punishment:

If we allow someone to experience the consequences of their actions, there is potential for an honest and real learning situation to occur. Discipline can be maintained through both natural and logical consequences.

Natural consequences represent the pressure of reality without interference. Disrespecting others, for example, will ordinarily invite similar treatment. But it isn't always appropriate to let natural consequences take their course.

Logical consequences involve an intervention by someone else. So, disrespecting someone carries a consequence like removal from a program activity. The disadvantage, of course, is that this can deteriorate into another form of punishment imposed externally. Logical consequences should be negotiated as much as possible beforehand by everyone involved. Thus, an agreement is reached as to the consequences of foul language or put-downs (Code of Conduct). Because everyone is part of the agreement, everyone is also responsible for seeing that it works. By adults and youth taking responsibility together, logical consequences become an alternative to punishment.

2. Physical Contact

When dealing with youth, there is acceptable touching and unacceptable touching. A handshake is

generally acceptable; a hug is sometimes acceptable; and an embrace is usually unacceptable. Touching which gives offence or causes any unease is not acceptable.

3. Relationships

Scouts Canada affirms a duty to its youth members for their welfare and development. Adults accept a responsibility to Scouts Canada to care for youth members and deliver the program. Adults enjoy Scouting and benefit from the training and experience it brings. However, adults are deliverers of the program. It is the youth members who are entitled to the benefits and protection of a safe, quality Scouting program. The correct relationship between an adult and a youth member is that of the adult being an instructor, guide, dispassionate friend and protector. It is a position of integrity, trust and maturity.

4. Language

Scouting ethic requires that we do not use vulgar or inappropriate language when working with youth members. Language should be acceptable to the reasonable onlooker and appropriate to the development of good citizenship.

5. Discrimination

Scouting is a world wide, multi cultural movement. We welcome people to membership regardless of gender, race, culture, religious belief, sexual orientation or economic circumstances. Youth members are strongly influenced by the behaviour of adults. We need to be sensitive to the traditions and beliefs of all people and to avoid words or actions which "put down" anybody.

6. Harassment

Harassment breaks down the positive and protective environment we seek to develop, and, at its worst, is emotionally harmful. It is contrary to our objective of individual growth and development. Some examples are ongoing teasing, disparagement, belittling or excluding individuals.

Sexual harassment is any verbal or physical behaviour of a sexual nature which is unwelcome and offensive.

7. Privacy

The individual's right to privacy must be recognized and taken into consideration in such matters as sleeping places and sanitary facilities.

Adult members should, where possible, have sleeping accommodations separate from youth members, unless discipline, safety or available facilities dictate otherwise. (If sleeping accommodations are shared with youth for any of the above reasons, at least two adults must be present at all times.) *B.P.&P.*

8. Alcohol Policy

No adult volunteer or other person who has a duty of care toward any youth member (Beavers to Rovers inclusive) shall consume alcohol or any other mood altering substance during any Scouting program which involves youth members or within a time frame which would affect their ability to carry out their duty of care toward youth members.

9. Smoking

It is inappropriate for any member to smoke in front of youth at any Scouting activity.

10. General Conduct

Adult Leaders **should**:

- * Help to establish safe and open communication in each Section of the Group.
- * Have an "open door" policy. Declare all meetings open to parents or Leaders.
- * Treat all children, and others, with respect and dignity befitting their age.
- * Be conscious of other's "personal space".
- * Encourage participation by all, while being sensitive to each child's individual capacity.
- * Be a role model for children. Be friendly, courteous and kind.

Adult Leaders **should not**:

- * Show favoritism for particular youth members.
- * Invite youth member(s) alone to your home or other private accommodation.
- * Have private talks with individual youth members away from the presence of other Scouts or adults. [Private talks should be in sight but out of hearing of observers.]
- * Carry one youth member alone in your vehicle.
- * Go on a hike or other activity with one youth member alone.
- * Demonstrate first aid on a youth member.
- * Assist youth members with personal hygiene or dressing except where health or disability requires it and then only in the presence of another adult.
- * Take part inappropriately in body contact games.
- * Let children involve you in excessive attention-seeking behaviour that is overtly physical or sexual in nature. Be particularly careful with the very needy child. Re-direct the behaviour to "healthy" activities and provide caring attention before it is asked for.

11. General Duty

Every adult's responsibility goes beyond the confines of his or her specific appointment to their own youth. Adults are expected to intervene when they identify breaches of any part of this Duty of Care document.

There are three primary areas of responsibility: **to the parents, to the young people and to yourself.**

11a. Responsibility to Parents

At the simplest level, parents have a right to know everything that their daughter or son is going to be involved in. Of course, they have the right to say no if they feel any activity is inappropriate. Parents are also your greatest ally, and you should keep them as well informed as possible. Parents will sometimes defer to you, but only if you have convinced them that you merit their confidence, and have earned their trust and respect.

The best way to start achieving this trust is to talk with each parent. The initial visit with parents when a youth first joins your section is critical for future relationships. This visit takes time, effort and commitment, but it is well worth it. Discuss with the parents what Scouting is about, its Mission and Principles, program, weekly meetings and special events. Allow them to question you. It is better to deal with issues and concerns that the parents may have in a relaxed setting, rather than later in a "crisis" situation.

Where unsupervised activities take place, these are done so with parent/guardian's written approval (e.g. Scouts or Venturers camping alone).

Take a personal interest in their child and communicate regularly, simply and clearly with parents. Knowing parents personally is a great asset.

11b. Responsibility to Children

By knowing each individual young person, you'll be in a better position to anticipate how the youth may react in various situations. In physical activities, you may get fears and concerns being expressed which are easy to understand, but you may also get displays of bravado covering up real fears. In intellectual activities, you may get questions if a person does not understand, but you may also get disruptive behaviour as a way of saying the same thing.

Child Abuse

As an adult leader caring for other people's children, you may become concerned about suspected child abuse. An abused or neglected child is a child who is harmed, or threatened with physical or mental harm, or from who is withheld the necessities of life. There are several forms of abuse: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. **In most Canadian jurisdictions, there is a legal duty to report if a child has been or is at risk of being physically or emotionally harmed (including sexually molested) by a person having charge of the child. There is also a duty to report if a child less than 12 years of age has seriously injured another person or caused serious damage to another person's property and is either not appropriately supervised or is not getting the treatment that the child requires.**

(Taken from Scouts Canada's booklet, "How to Protect Your Children from Child Abuse: a Parent's Guide")

If a child you know becomes a victim of abuse, your first reaction can be very important in helping him/her through the ordeal. The following guidelines may help you to deal sensitively and competently with the situation in which a child discloses that she/he is being abused:

- * Stay calm. Don't panic or overreact to the information the child tells you. Listen compassionately, and take what the child is saying seriously.
- * Don't criticize the child or tell the child they misunderstood what happened.
- * Do respect the child's privacy and take them to a place where you can talk without interruptions or distractions, staying within view of another adult or the group.

- * Take the time to listen to what the child has to say. Tell them you appreciate being told about the incident and that you will help to make sure that it won't happen again.
- * Explain that you will need to tell the proper authorities what you've been told. Refer to Administrative Procedure 3(D).
- * No judgement statement should be made about the person whom the allegation is made.
- * The child should not be questioned unless what he or she is saying is unclear. Avoid leading questions. Open, non-specific questions should be used such as, "Can you explain to me what you meant by that?"
- * You should show real concern, but NOT alarm or anger, when receiving information from a child about possible sexual abuse.
- * If a child you know has been sexually abused, do not blame yourself or the child. People who victimize children are not easy to identify. They come from all walks of life. Often they have a position of status - they go to church, hold regular jobs, and are active in the community. Child molesters are sometimes very skilled at controlling children through giving excessive attention, gifts, and money. Child molesters use their skills on parents and other adults too, disguising their abusive behaviour behind friendship and care for the children.
- * A detailed account of any discussion regarding alleged or suspected abuse should be written as soon as possible after it has taken place, concerning who, what, when, where, how, **but not WHY**.

11c. Responsibility to Yourself

It is important to know your own limits and abilities. If you are leading an activity with any potential risks, always make sure that you are working well within your own capabilities. If you are working on the edge of your own skills, you are endangering the young people in your charge. Seek out and obtain skills and knowledge to enable you to perform your designated role.

12. Guidelines

- * Do not rely on your good name to protect you.
- * Do not, for one moment, believe "it can never happen to me."
- * While respecting the need for privacy and confidentiality, try never to be completely alone with a young person. When it is appropriate to work one to one, make sure that others are within earshot and within vision.
- * Never touch a young person in a way that could be misconstrued.
- * Never make suggestive or inappropriate remarks.
- * If you suspect a young person is developing a "crush" on you, discuss it with other Leaders and, if appropriate, the parents.
- * If you notice any of your colleagues are at risk from their behaviour or a young person's crush, discuss it with them.

- * Co-ed leadership in co-ed Scouting situations is highly desirable.
- * The presence of an Adult Leader is a requirement for any activity which involves Beaver and Cub sections.

Additional Resources

- * Scouts Canada's Bylaw, Policies & Procedures
- * Scouts Canada's Camping/Outdoor Activity Guide
- * Scouts Canada's Help Line 1-800 339-6643 or E-mail pgmhelp@scouts.ca
- * Scouts Canada's Web page www.scouts.ca
- * Scouts Canada's Parent's Guide on Child Abuse
- * Local, Regional or Provincial Scout offices
- * Provincial & local laws