

Den Discipline

Utah National Parks Council

Does the idea of a six highly energetic boys jumping on your couch, bouncing off your walls, painting the cat and causing all kinds of mayhem just make you want to pull your hair out? Don't worry - every Cub Scout leader has felt like that at one time or another.

For the sake of your sanity, not to mention your house or your cat, you will need to come up with some guidelines of behavior for the den. This is known as den discipline. It is important to remember that discipline is not punishment. Discipline is making the Cub Scout responsible for his own behavior - telling him that if he chooses a certain course of action, what the specific consequences of that action will be. Discipline is training given to a child to mold or correct his behavior. As a den leader, you need to spell out for the boys what is acceptable behavior and what is not. Also, let them know the consequences for acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

A den code of conduct (or den rules) should be established in an open discussion with the boys. Some of their ideas may be silly to you, but don't judge too harshly. Many of their ideas that relate to safety, respect for property and relationships with others will be along the same lines as yours. You may need to make suggestions for things the boys don't bring up. And they'll be delighted if you decide to throw out a rule or two. You should also discuss the consequences of breaking the den code of conduct. What should be in your den code? Things that are important to you and your boys. Since every den is different, every den code will be different. Here are some suggestions to help you get started.

- No put-downs, name calling, or crude language.
- No physical aggression.
- You are a guest in this house, please act like one. (Try to be on your best behavior.)
- Be on time.
- Wear your uniform.
- Bring your book.
- One person speaks at a time and everyone listens.
- No running inside.
- Share, take turns.
- Leave the cat (or dog or hamster or fish) alone.

A few rules are enough to start, but more may need to be added as you go along. Cub Scouts may want to write out their den rules and sign on a line at the end of the list. This is a way of sharing with parents the expectations of their sons. A large poster can also be placed at the den meeting site to remind boys of the code.

Now that the rules have been established, stick to them. Be fair. Don't let one boy get away with doing something you would discipline another boy for doing. Be consistent. Don't warn and threaten but take action quickly. Don't send a boy home unless he oversteps the disciplinary bounds you have drawn. If you do send a boy home, call his parents immediately and tell them why.

Here are a few ideas to keep your den meetings running smoothly.

- Use the Cub Scout **SIGN** as a signal for quiet. When boys see this symbol, they should stop what they're doing, be quiet and raise their own arm in the sign.
- Keep den meetings going at a **FAST PACE**, with lots of variety and fun things to do. Plan more than you think you will need. Get assistants and den chiefs involved.
- Treat boys **IMPARTIALLY**. Boys expect fair treatment and your example becomes their model. If you make promises, keep them.
- **DON'T CRITICIZE** a boy in front of the den. Wait until you can talk to him alone.
- Give boys opportunities to make **CHOICES** as often as possible. Involve them in planning.

- Take some time to **EVALUATE** your den meetings. What went well? What didn't go so well? How can I do this differently next time?
- Focus on the **POSITIVE**. Catch boys being good, helping others, keeping the den code of conduct. Baden-Powell said "A pat on the back is a stronger stimulus than a prick with a pin Expect a great deal of your boys and you will generally get it."

When asked what tricks, programs or guidelines were used in their den to promote discipline, one leader said "Well, we have our good days and our bad days. Sometimes we just have to remember they are little boys that need to use their bodies. So, we always try to have at least one activity each den meeting that gets them moving! Normally, den meetings are full of various activities, so the boys have a good chance to work off that energy.

"Most of the years we have taught, the boys got along fine. But we had one year when that was not so. The first time we had two boys collide physically, we let them know it would not be tolerated. We told them we are like brother wolves in a den and we support each other. I said if it ever happened again the parents would be informed and they would possibly attend our future meetings. No more problems!"

Some den leaders use little "pats on the back" to help with den discipline and reward boys who are doing good. Here are a few things that have worked.

Print up "**SCOUT BUCKS**." These can be anything from a fancy piece of paper with cool graphics that looks like money to a slip of paper that says "Scout Bucks" on it. Distribute these to the boys when you catch them doing something good. You can also give them out for being on time, wearing their uniform and bringing their book. At the end of den meeting (or the end of the month or another time you designate), boys can go to the den store and buy something. This store can be a box that you have filled with small toys, candies, gift certificates or coupons for free goodies, scout paraphernalia, etc.

"BEAR STUMPS" Each boy is given a block of wood that doubles as a stool at den meeting. He earns nails that will be hammered into the stump if he meets the following requirements:

- **Red:** He must attend den meeting.
- **Blue:** He must wear his Scout uniform.
- **Green:** He must bring his book to den meeting.
- **Yellow:** He must be represented by at least one member of his family at pack meeting.
- **White:** He must meet the requirements of a "Bear Necessities." challenge. This challenge, a charge to do something to make the world just a little bit better, is written down and sent home with the boy.
- **Silver:** He must do three good deeds for the week, without being asked. (Chores do not count.)
- **Gold:** He must have done one good deed, that includes a sacrifice of at least one hour, with no expectation of reward.

The den leader hands out the nails before the meeting begins, and the Bear Cubs can only hammer before the meeting and after the closing prayer. If hammer or nails are misused, the Bear loses his nails for that week. The boys are challenged to see how creatively they can decorate their stump. This can be adapted for Wolf dens and Webelos dens too.

Give each boy a whole piece of shoestring **LICORICE** at the beginning of the meeting. Every time you need to discipline the boy, cut off two inches. He gets whatever is left at the end of meeting time for a treat. A variation of this method would be to give each boy a small cup and three or four M&M's when he arrives. When you catch him doing good, (waiting his turn, helping someone else, volunteering to do something, etc.) reward him with a few more M&Ms to keep in his cup. When the meeting is over, he gets to keep the goodies in the cup.

The **GOOD CONDUCT CANDLE** is an oldie but goodie. A candle is lit as the meeting begins. If the boys misbehave, the candle is extinguished. Use your den code of conduct as a basis of when to keep the candle lit and when to blow it out. You determine if the behavior is suitably changed so that the candle can be lit again. When the candle is burned down to a certain level, a reward is given. It can be a pizza party, a day at the park or pool, or a day of games. Help the boys decide what the reward will be, and then they will work for it. This method has several disadvantages. Most schools and some churches do not allow open flames. Open flame is dangerous around any group of young kids. Then, what do you do for discipline once the candle is blown out?

Use a **MARBLE JAR**. Give each boy three marbles at the beginning of the meeting. When he breaks a rule, he gives up a marble. The marbles left at the end of the meeting go into a jar with a line drawn around it at a height determined by the leader. When the marbles go over the line, the den gets a special treat. Adjust the size of the jar to make this happen every two months or so.

Use carnival or homemade **TICKETS**. Give each boy three tickets at the beginning of the meeting. Have him sign his name on the ticket. When he breaks a rule, he has to give up a ticket. Tickets left at the end of the meeting can be placed in a bank. At the end of the month, add up who has the most tickets, and he gets a special treat.

Use a **POINT SYSTEM**. Award points for every part of the uniform worn by the boy (shirt, neckerchief, slide, belt, pants, socks, tucking in shirt), a point for coming, bringing their book and anything they passed off at home. Additional points can be awarded as you see fit (pack meeting attendance, helping without being asked, performing a service project etc.). When the boy earns a set amount of points, he can choose a gift from the Scout bag. The bag contains different items from the Scout Shop, Wal-Mart, Harbor Freight, dollar store, etc. When a boy earns his Arrow of Light, he is allowed to pick his own party (within reason - no Disneyland!)

An Indian **COUP** and beads can be used in conjunction with any of the above methods. The boys can make their own coups out of leather or vinyl. They can be worn on their belts, around their necks, or displayed on a board. The boys can earn beads for:

- Attending den meeting
- Passing off achievements and electives
- Advancement
- Denner service
- Coming in uniform
- Bringing his book
- Attending pack meeting
- Bringing a snack
- Almost anything else - beads are cheap!

The real keys to your discipline system are:

- **HAVE ONE**. Don't wait to see if you need one, you do! If you wait until you need it, it's too late!
- Make sure everyone (Cubs and parents) **KNOWS** what it is. Explain it at the parents' meeting, in a note sent home with the boys, and at your first den meeting. Remind when necessary.
- **STICK TO IT**. Plan on the boys (and maybe the parents) testing you to see if you mean it. Be ready for it. They expect you to do what you say you will do. You lose all credibility if you don't.

Den Discipline with Positive Attitude

Alice, Golden Empire Council

Focus on the **POSITIVE**. "Catch" the boys being good, helping others, keeping the den code of conduct. Baden-Powell said "A pat on the back is a stronger stimulus than a prick with a pin. Expect a great deal of your boys and you will generally get it." Set a goal to say at least one good thing about each boy at every den meeting. But don't give undeserved compliments - boys know when the praise is genuine! Remember, **"It's better to build boys than repair men."**

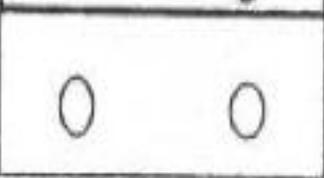
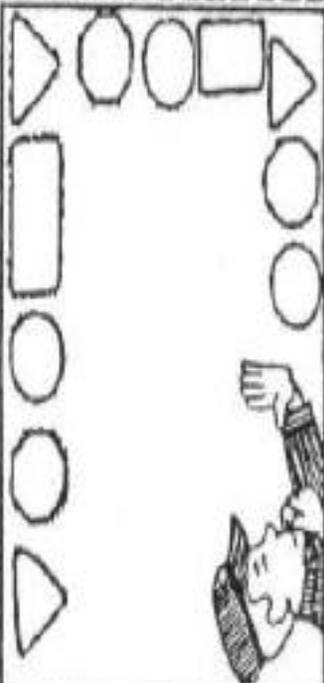
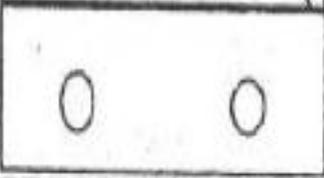
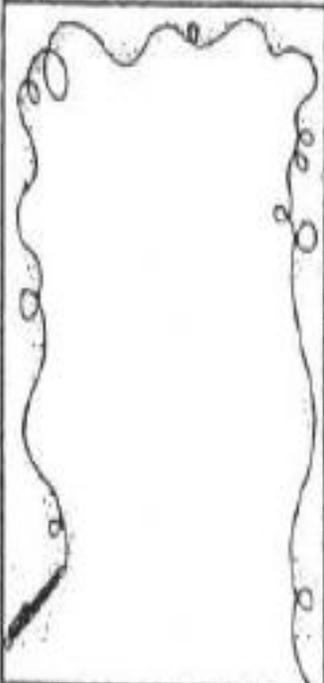
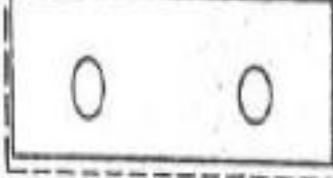
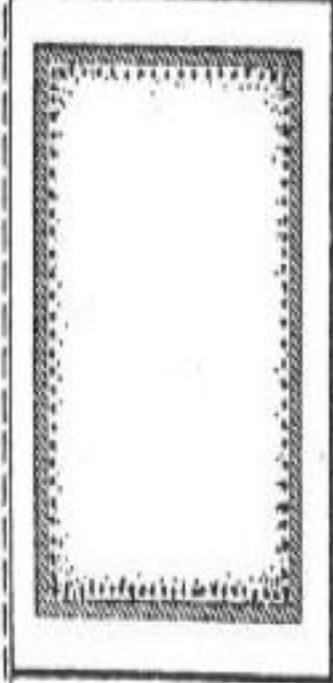
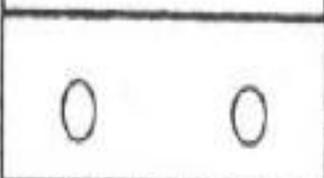
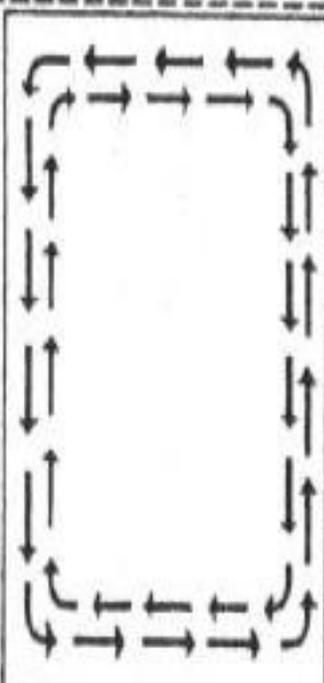
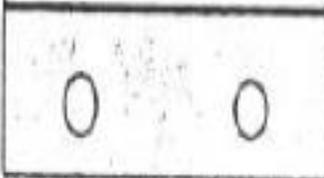
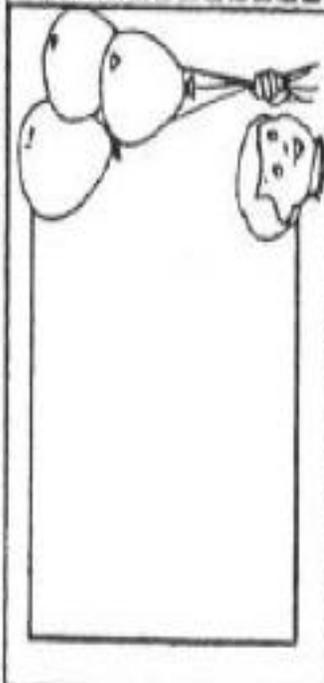
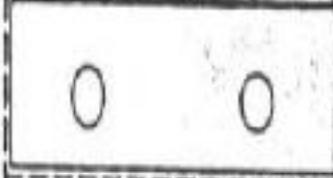
DON'T CRITICIZE a boy in front of the den. Wait until you can talk to him alone. You might want to have a signal so that your assistant can ask a boy to come with her - make sure this is done without sounding angry or as if punishment is in store. Often, removing a boy from the action will defuse the situation. The other adult can simply take the boy to another location and have him help set up for another activity or discuss what happened in the den meeting.

USE POSITIVE WORDS

- **Be specific** about what a boy does right - "Thank you for remembering to pick up your mess!" rather than just "Good Job"
- **Be sincere** and don't exaggerate - "I really like the colors you used in that drawing" rather than "That's the best drawing I've ever seen"
- **Be Immediate** with praise so you can reinforce good behavior.
- **Share the Praise** - while criticism should be done in private, praise is **GREAT** to **SHARE**. Share it by saying "I like the way John is putting the cap back on his markers". You can also Share Praise by adding stickers or beads to a Den Doodle or Individual Boy's Coup Stick. And don't forget to Share with Parents - send an email to let them know when their son is doing a good job or being a good example!

COUPONS - Enlarge and photocopy the coupons below, consisting of a front and back cover and six pages of various coupons. Use as an award for the Cub Scouts. As a boy achieves goals of good behavior, he is awarded "coupons," which are compiled by the Den Leader. At the end of the month, (or whatever time you have decided) he receives the assembled coupon book. Coupons can be redeemed for treats, tokens to "purchase" incentive items, special privileges, such as helping make a den treat. Assemble the cut out pages, fastening with a staple and threading yarn through punched holes.

Note from Alice: I think a really good way to use these coupons would be to fill them in as a note to send home to parents - Parents need to know when their son has shown a Positive Attitude!



Cub Scout Coupon Book



Do Your Best !