



Good Questions to ask a Troop before Joining

Choosing the right Boy Scout troop for you is an individual decision. Troops vary in their focus and the personalities in each troop differ. You need to think about what will make scouting a fun, rewarding experience for you and then find a troop that appears to best fulfill your needs.

If you're a Webelos scout, having completed five years of Cub Scouts, you may feel that you've experienced all there is in the program. But Boy Scouts is a very different program full of new experiences. Make a commitment to try it for a year to observe the differences and then decide if you want to continue on or not.

A boy needs to visit at least one troop meeting before joining Boy Scouts. You really should visit several troops to learn the uniqueness of each. Select a troop that fits the needs of your family.

When you visit troops, try to get answers to these important questions to help you decide on a home troop:

- How many registered scouts?
 - 30-50 is generally recognized as a good troop size, but there are many larger and smaller troops.
- How many of those registered scouts are active?
 - Some troops have lots of names on the roster, but the scouts don't participate. Count how many are at the meeting you visit and if it doesn't match what you are told, visit again before deciding to join.
- How many assistant Scoutmasters, Committee members, other troop positions?
 - A strong troop committee supports the plans created by the scouts. Assistant Scoutmasters are needed to support scout advancement and troop events. One assistant Scoutmaster for every 8-10 scouts is good.
- What would a chart of the age distribution of the 'active' scouts look like?
 - A few older and lots of 11-12 year olds indicates a troop that is either recently growing or is having problems keeping scouts active. More older scouts indicates there's something for them to stay for.
- How many scouts have earned Eagle in the past few years and how many are still active in the troop?
 - Often scouts reach Eagle and stop participating. Hearing that scouts stay in the troop until the age out at 18 indicates a strong program.
- How are the patrols organized?
 - New scouts should be kept together to start, but then either continue on as their own patrol or get integrated into existing multi-age patrols.

- What goes on in troop meetings?
 - You should see this when you visit. Some troops spend most troop meetings doing merit badge work - this is not the BSA model for merit badges. Some troops run around in chaos at meetings. The agenda for each meeting should be prepared and run by the Senior Patrol Leader. Meetings should have an opening, time for scout skills, fun time, planning for events, a scoutmaster minute, and closing. The key thing is that you should see the troop being run by the scouts, not the scoutmaster or other adults - even if it seems inefficient.
- What service projects does the troop do?
 - Service is a key part of scouting. There should be many opportunities for service throughout the year.
- How is the rank advancement managed?
 - There should be support in place for new scouts to advance up to First Class. The most important thing you should hear is that the troop has good Troop Guides for the new scouts. These are helpful scouts in a leadership position tasked with guiding new scouts in their first year. Some troops force-feed advancement up to First Class in a new scout's first year while others let the scout flounder with no direction - both tend to lose scouts)
- How are Merit Badges managed?
 - The BSA merit badge program is intended for scouts to seek out and complete merit badges that interest them, as well as 12 required badges for Eagle rank. A troop that schedules merit badges and scouts just attend similar to school is not following the program. A troop that spends their troop meeting time on merit badges is not following the program. Scouts need to take responsibility to select merit badges and complete them with a merit badge counselor advising and guiding them.
- How is troop leadership managed?
 - The troop should really be 'boy-led'. Every troop will say it is 'boy-run' or 'boy-led', but you need to see if that is true. Who is in front of the troop? Who is corralling the scouts to start the next activity? Who is teaching? What are the older scouts doing? These should all be scouts in leadership roles. A Senior Patrol Leader runs the meetings with assistance from his Assistant Senior Patrol Leader. Every patrol has a Patrol Leader responsible for leading his group of 5-9 scouts. These scouts should meet every month to plan upcoming activities. There should be an annual scheduling session where the scouts plan campouts, high adventure trips, and other events for the future.
- When and how often does the troop meet?
 - A troop should have an outing scheduled for every month. Troop meetings should occur on a regular schedule at least twice a month, and preferably three times. Troops should not stop meeting for the summer - the troop meetings should continue but with less expected participation due to family vacations.
- How is family communication handled?
 - Email, phone trees, web site - depending on the type of communication and your preferences, any can work. A troop roster should be kept updated and distributed to all scouts.

- What camping has the troop done and is planned?
 - This is probably the big question that will effect your choice since you can relate to the answer with no prior BSA background. There should be a wide range of outing themes, not the same 12 events every year. There should be a week-long summer camp, and an outing every month.
- What high adventure trips have been done recently and are planned?
 - Many troops will rattle off Philmont, Seabase, Northern Tier, and National Jamboree as their high adventures - these are all great trips, but they are very expensive and pretty much a pre-packaged deal. If a troop tells you their scouts are planning a trek in the Rockies, or whitewater rafting, or hiking the Grand Canyon, or some other self-directed high adventure, that shows a broader view of scouting. Ask if the scouts or adults are planning those outings - scouts CAN do pretty much all of it, with just guidance as needed.
- What participation and training is expected of parents?
 - You should expect that parents are needed to make the troop's plans succeed. The most important thing a parent can do is ask the scout how a meeting or outing was and to support him in scouting. Many troops would like each family to help with transportation to 2 or 3 campouts each year, some require less. You should hear that adults are required to complete Youth Protection Training before interacting with the scouts. Troops also need a few adults to take on troop roles each year, such as Asst. Scoutmaster or Committee member - these are required to offer a complete scouting program. They should be expected to complete training for their position.
- What fundraising is done?
- How are the funds managed? Does each scout have his own account?
- What equipment is provided by the troop and the scout?
- What uniforms are required?
- How often are Roundtables attended and by who?
 - District roundtable meetings should be held each month and the adult troop leaders should attend to find out district and council information.)

Some additional questions to ask:

- What district and council events has the troop attended recently or planning to attend?
- How will new scouts learn what to do as Boy Scouts?
- How much will a year of scouting cost?
- How are conflicts between scouting and sports/theater/music/... handled?



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