

What I Wish Every Scout Parent Understood

March 28, 2013 by Clarke Green

<http://www.scoutmastercg.com/what-i-wish-every-scout-parent-understood/>

I received this email from a Scout parent:

I am new to the Boy Scout Program and I am not getting answers to questions.

For instance my son is to bring a blue card to a merit badge event for the counselor to sign. I got a blue card from the Scoutmaster. Another parent with experience in Boy Scouts told me that they needed to be signed by the Scoutmaster, so my son took the blue cards to the next meeting but the Scoutmaster would not sign them because the counselors name wasn't filed out. My son and I did not know that was necessary.

Is there a briefing or meeting for parents with no experience in Boy Scouts know what to do or ask? I feel there is a lack of needed information.

I answered:

Typically we don't have detailed briefings or meetings about this sort of thing for parents. It's not that we don't appreciate the role parents have in Scouting or that we want to keep them in the dark. It's just that Scout parents aren't the ones we want asking these sorts of questions or doing these sorts of things, we want their Scout asking and doing.

You are a bit frustrated because you feel you lack the information a responsible, supportive parent needs. Many parents feel this way – you are not alone! I want to help by giving you the most important information a Scout parent needs to know and what I wish every Scout parent understood.

Scouting is unique. It is different from school, church, sports and other youth organizations. Understanding just what we are trying to do is not easy sometimes; in fact one of my key challenges as a Scoutmaster is talking to parents who think they know what I am talking about but they really don't.

When it comes to the things Scouts do there are at least two things happening at once. There's the immediate practical goal (like getting a merit badge or going camping) and the much broader (and more important) goals of developing leadership, citizenship and physical, spiritual and mental fitness.

For example; when a Scout goes camping he needs to find out what to bring, gather the gear and put it in his pack. It's perfectly understandable that a parent may feel they need to do some or all of this for him – after all that's part of being a supportive, responsible parent right?

I wish they wouldn't.

If a new Scout packs his own pack he'll forget something and maybe be a little uncomfortable (I still forget things after 30+ years of camping!) but he will learn more from forgetting than he will if you pack his bag for him. What he learns from that process is one step closer to that broader goal.

At first this may seem a little harsh or make a Scout parent feel that they are not being responsible and that's an uncomfortable feeling for most of us.

Scouting is not just an opportunity for Scouts to do fun stuff it's also an opportunity for parents to learn and grow. I went through this process with my son. It was uncomfortable and challenging at times, but ultimately it was very rewarding.

My son now works for the college he attended and he'll tell you that one key skill many new students lack is the ability to navigate the routine things that they are used to having done for them (from laundry to signing up for classes and managing a schedule). He'll also tell you that he learned how to look after himself and others through the process of Scouting.

What I wish every Scout parent knew is something they can't really understand until they have been through this process. I want them to step back, be supportive, understanding, and cooperate with the process. I want them to look for teachable moments and help their Scouts figure out what to do next not by supplying answers but by asking questions.

If you cooperate with the process, if you keep your eye on the broader goal, you'll see your Scout start to grow and figure things out for himself. You'll find that your job is not so much telling and doing as helping him discover answers and how things are done. Your job is not making things easier but helping him look past the initial frustrations of not knowing. Soon he'll learn to ask those questions of himself, he'll grow in confidence and ability and surprise you as he does.

It's hard for Scout parents to get comfortable with the idea of not knowing on purpose – but if they don't know a Scout has to figure things out for themselves. When parents get uncomfortable, when their Scouts get frustrated, they go after the Scoutmaster and complain about how chaotic, inefficient and needlessly difficult things are.

I try to tell them that the Scouting process is purposefully designed to be challenging and every Scout (and Scout parent) will experience frustration or discouragement from time to time. We embrace the challenge, the chaos; we take the inefficient, frustrating moments and turn them to our advantage to help our Scouts achieve those broader goals.

When Scouts get discouraged or frustrated, (and they will), that's when we need a supportive, responsible parent to step up and help them overcome the discouragement or frustration and keep on trying.

Scouting cooperates with parents who cooperate with Scouting. It gives them powerful opportunities to help their sons grow. What we do in Scouting is almost never about the immediate, practical goal. Boys don't always understand this and I don't expect them to, but I wish every Scout parent did.