

# Top 41 Things Every New Cub Scout Leader Should Know

## (and the Old Cub Leaders, too)

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You have signed on the dotted line. You are now a leader for a den of rowdy, excited boys. If you are one of the fortunate ones, your pack has an experienced Scouter that has provided you with all of the resources and support that you need. However, many packs have new leadership, or are new to the world of Scouting. Or perhaps the leadership in the pack has overlooked your needs. The following is a list, in no particular order, of things that the well-prepared Cub Den Leader needs or might like to know.

### Get Trained:

#### 1. Fast Start with "This is Scouting"

This should be at the top of every leader's list. Check with your Cubmaster or the local Scout Shop. The training is available online at [www.scouting.org/cubscouts](http://www.scouting.org/cubscouts). This link will take you to the national Boy Scouts of America site. If there is a copy of the old Fast Start video at your council office, viewing it will help your first meetings get off to a good start, while providing an overview of the Cub Scout program. (2009 Note: Training has changed and Fast Start is no longer used as an official training for Cub Leaders. "This is Scouting" is the current first contact training for all leaders and is available online. Check online for other resources. Be sure to talk to other experienced Den Leaders in your pack or at Roundtables, too).

#### 2. Cub Scout Leader Basic Training

Training in your specific leadership role will benefit you in several ways: It will give you the basic knowledge for running your den and presenting a fun and informative program to your son and the den, plus it will introduce you to Scouters and other people in your district or council that can support you in many ways.

### Know the Program

#### 3. Know what is available for your program:

*Tiger Cub Handbook, Wolf Handbook, Bear Handbook, Webelos Handbook, Cub Scout Leader Book, Cub Scout Program Helps, Webelos Leader Guide, and the Guide to Safe Scouting* are all available through your Scout Shop or National Supply. Check with your Cubmaster or another leader in your pack to see if these items are available to borrow. The *Cub Scout How-to Book* is one of the best sources for games, crafts, projects, songs and skits and can be found at your Scout Shop and at online used-book sites such as [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

#### 4. Find out who the 'troubleshooters' are in your District. These folks can be invaluable to call when you are having trouble with the boys, the parents, or getting program ideas.

#### 5. Go to the Cub Scout Roundtable in your District. Go to Cub Scout Roundtable in another District or even another council. Roundtables are monthly meetings for Scouters to present news, ideas of upcoming themes for the meetings, and provide crafts, songs and games to be used "right now". Some of the best training takes place in the parking lot after the meeting is over, so do not be afraid to ask for help and make friends after the meeting. The local experienced Scouters that are good troubleshooters will welcome you and help you out.

### The Meetings: If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail

#### 6. Plan for both inside and outside games. Keep 3x5 cards with a list of games in your Den Leader bag, including ones that can be used as emergency games in case you are rained out or are waiting for all of the Scouts to arrive.

#### 7. Plan your meetings well in advance. Set up a calendar and issue it to the parents. Ask for their help in running the meetings according to the calendar.

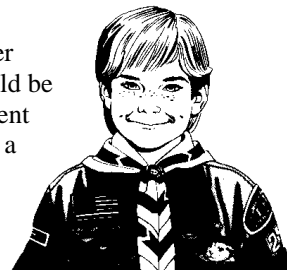
#### 8. Read and use the Program Planning Helps. These are usually in the inside section of Scouting magazine, which you should be getting as a registered Scouter. They are also available as a **free** download at [www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org). These handy helps provide you with an outline of each meeting at all levels of Cub Scouting (Webelos Leaders have a different set of

helps located in the Webelos Leaders Handbook). A very useful tool for planning those meetings. New at Scouting.org are monthly themed Podcasts called CubCasts (see Resources at the end). Listen online or download to your MP3 player.

9. **Go Local!** Check the local city and park calendars for events and ideas
10. **Make a Wish!** Make a wish list of things to do or places to go then check them out. Work them into your plan for the year.
11. **Correlate the achievements with the local events in your community.** If there is a Fire Safety Week, use those weeks for Fire Safety in your den and ask the local fire department if you may bring the boys for a tour of the firehouse. How about parades or fairs?
12. **Remember community service opportunities:** many cities have a clean-up day, beautification day, etc.
13. **Don't re-invent the wheel!** Get last year's calendar and activity list from the leader that is one year ahead of you. Knowing what has been done in the past could help you make contacts or get ideas about what to do (or not to do) with your boys. Ask questions about which events were most enjoyable for the den.
14. **Try out the craft, game, or activity in advance.** You will be assured that you have all of the materials, the instructions are clear and in the right order, the craft is fun, and the activity is age appropriate.
15. **Prepare a Game Box or Den Leaders Bag** (see end of article for list)
16. **Ask parents to help with a game or craft.** Be sure to ask them *in person*. General cries of "I need Help!" will go unheeded. Invite them out for coffee, or phone them and tell them that you have a specific job for them to help with. Then let them do it! You have many other things to do.
17. **Assign parents small tasks at first,** and then graduate to larger responsibilities suited to their time and talents. (Be sure to see Hint #30)
18. **Enlist the parents to help with tool use, etc.** A Pinewood Derby Car-making night would be a great activity to hold at a boy's house whose parent has a band saw, or enjoys working with wood and has the tools. Invite other dens to come, too!
19. **Prepare a phone list for parents and make up a phone tree.** You should have to make only one phone call and the other parents of your den should pass on the message. This is a good job for an Assistant Den Leader or a parent who has trouble coming to the meetings because of work or young siblings.
20. **Rotate the snack duty between families.** Post the schedule in your newsletter. Get all parents involved.
21. **What, no newsletter?** You should try to make up one once a month so that parents know what to bring, what to be working on at home, and where to meet. Make it short, one-half page, then print out 2 copies per page and cut them in half. Print it on colored paper if available. If all of your families have email, then email a copy. But do not assume that they received it or read it. Give them a call and ask. Or better yet, ask one of the parents to make that call for you. Don't you have other things to do?
22. **Organize the Handbooks.** Use paperclips and adhesive notes in the books to show what has been done and what needs to be done. I used Post-it notes to tell the parents what they needed to be working on with the Scout, and they clipped a paperclip on completed achievements for me to check off. The clips were moved to the back of the book once I recorded the achievement. I then highlighted the item in the book to show it was recorded. Fast and easy.
23. **Have a First Aid Kit available** and use it to teach the First Aid sections of your level (check your handbook).
24. **Collect a few dollars for dues for craft supplies and incidentals.** Check with your Cubmaster first, as some dens do not collect dues and the Pack Committee has a budget for supplies. It all varies by pack, so be sure to ask. The boys can pay monthly or weekly. Have a parent keep track of the dues paid, and present receipts for supplies to her. That keeps the other parents involved and frees you to gather material. Be sure to check Freecycle.org for a local Freecycle to get tons of free craft supplies that folks throw out, especially recycled items.



25. **Use the Denner System for your den.** The boys choose a Denner (changes monthly or bimonthly). The Denner helps the Den Leader and leads the games, etc. Check out your Cub Leader manual for more information.
26. **Use pillowcases instead of flags to practice flag folding.** They are the same size and proportion, you can have one for every 2-3 boys, and if they drop them there is no harm. Once they can demonstrate proficiency, then allow them to fold the real flag.
27. **Keep the boys focused with a den discipline.** Using a "conduct candle" or a marble jar (preferred method; see the next hint) helps the boys take control of their own behavior. Make a mark on a candle three to four inches from the top. Light it at the beginning of every meeting and set it out of reach. If the group misbehaves, blow it out. When the candle has burned down to the mark take the den out for pizza or bowling. Also use the candle to demonstrate responsible Fire Safety. Extra Tip: Don't threaten or warn. Slowly count to three: at "Three" blow out the candle. I would do this and hear "Shh, she's counting!" and they would settle down.
28. **Reward the Group with a Marble Jar** I prefer the *Marble Jar method* to the candle method. In this method you are not punishing the entire group for the behavior of one. Each boy gets three marbles or beans when they come in the door (three strikes, a concept that even 4 year olds understand). If the Scout misbehaves he loses a marble. All of the marbles left are put in a jar at the end of the meeting and when they fill the jar (or make it to a mark on the jar) they get a special activity. The group is rewarded for good group behavior. They are rewarded faster if all Scouts behave themselves. This is a key point: If the Scout loses all three marbles (Three Strikes) **he must call home** and have mom come get him. Having the boy call his parent to come early to get him is very powerful, and acts as a deterrent. Dial the phone and hand it to the boy. "Tell your mom that you have to be picked up now. And tell her why". Stand there and make him struggle with it. Do this one time and you generally will never have to do it again.
29. **The Meeting is for the Boys.** Ask parents with small siblings to either stay home or take other small siblings into another room and baby-sit them. Yes, I know, the parent of each boy should be there to help. But the meeting is for the boys, not for the 4 year old sister. Moreover, if a parent has to spend the whole time watching a little one, she or he will not be much help to you with a craft or game, anyway. If siblings do attend be sure to plan for additional crafts for them ( don't be afraid to ask for compensation from the parent for any additional costs).
30. **Thwart the Helicopter Moms** You will also find that many boys behave better if their parent is *not* there, especially if the parent is a "helicopter" that has to swoop in and do everything for the boy! *There is a fine line between support and coddling.* Part of Cub Scouts is to "Do Your Best", not have your parent do your best for you. See Hint 28. It is also very distracting and stressful to have a coffee klatch going on with the non-involved moms in the back of the room while you are trying to get the boys to do something. Give them specific jobs at the meeting.
31. **Have the same closing and opening each time.** It allows the boys to memorize it, provides a starting and stopping point, and lends cohesion to the meeting.
32. **Always have a backup game or activity planned.** You never know if you will have to pass the meeting over to another because of emergency, the speaker does not show, etc. Be Prepared! , and having the security of that game in your pocket alleviates many fears. Keep balloons and beanbags handy for tossing and throwing games. *See the Den Leader Bag at the end of this article*
33. **Stop talking and get the boys busy.** They hear adults drone on all day long. My rule is the "Readers Digest Rule": 25 words or less and it is time for a game or a craft.
34. **Remember to adjust games, songs, and skits for the age of your den.** If they are very young, do not make them read lines. Have them act the song or skit out while an older Scout, a parent or the Den Leader reads the story. Practice the skit and songs with the boys several times before presenting it to the pack at a pack meeting.
35. **Arrange for a speaker to come to the meeting to talk to the boys.** Ask the local police and fire departments if they have a speaker for Scouts.
36. **Look Locally for Speakers.** Don't forget to ask the local post-office, grocery store, hardware store, fire station, or a wildlife rehabilitation center for a tour or a speaker. Most kids have never seen inside the back of a store, and are thrilled



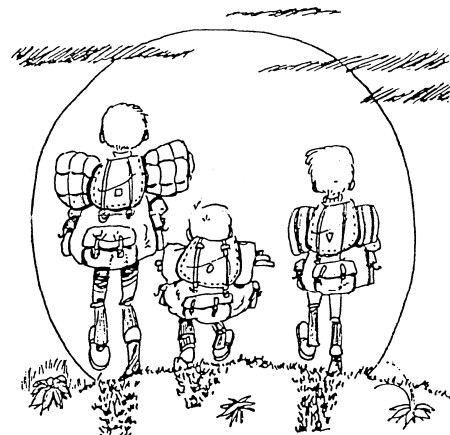
to see what happens behind the scenes in your local grocery or retail store. Be sure to check with Lowes, Home Depot, or your local hardware store. They often have workshops for Scouts or will sometimes give you birdfeeder or birdhouse kits for the Scouts to assemble.

37. **Thank the Scouts and helpers.** Be sure to recognize the Scouts and parents for good deed, help with the meetings, and other achievements. A simple *Thank You* in front of the group, plus a small token (a pin, neckerchief slide, or a certificate that is handmade or made on your computer) will win hearts and increase cooperation in all parts of the den.
38. **Put announcements at the end of the meeting.** The boys will remember and the parents should be present to pick up the Scouts.
39. **“We Can Play This Again Next Week”** When playing a game, be sure to quit while it is still fun. They can play it again next week (a good incentive to be there), and you know it is a success.
40. **Go online and search for Cub Scout Games and Crafts.** And be sure to check the resources section at the end of this article. Do be careful, though. Some games/songs/skits listed for Cub Scouts may not be appropriate- watch for bullying, hazing, or hateful/demeaning language.
41. **Be Cheerful!** This is supposed to be fun!

## Make a Den Leaders Bag

Use a briefcase, bookbag-sized backpack, or even a cloth shopping bag. Fill it with the items that you might need during your regular den meetings such as:

- Attendance book
- Advancement forms
- Phone list of parents and emergency numbers
- Your Den Newsletter
- Copy of the Cub Scout book at your level (Tiger, Wolf, Bear, Webelos)
- Extra paper and pencils
- Small US Flag and a desk stand (available as a set at all flag shops and your Scout Shop)
- Bold markers for games, signs, and posters
- Plastic sandwich bags for awards, collections, etc.
- Marble jar for discipline (see hint number 28)
- A whistle to gather boys and start or stop contests
- Scissors: several pair, as they tend to get lost.
- Twine for games, knot tying, and marking off a circle.
- Balloons for relays, indoor balloon toss and other games
- Plastic drink straws (large) to propel balloons, throw like javelins, or to carry items for relays
- Extra games instructions written on cards for emergency games
- Deflated beach ball to be inflated for games (especially inside games)
- Beanbags or socks filled with rice and tied with a string (they will not roll away)
- Masking tape for marking lines and putting things up on walls.
- Pushpins for where you cannot use masking tape.
- Ping-pong balls for lots of game options (try blowing them across the table with straws)
- Toothpicks and some clay to make sculptures
- List of "brain teasers"
- Rubber bands for binding things, throwing, shooting
- Several bandannas for blindfolds, as a starting tool (when the handkerchief reaches the ground Go!), to practice knots
- Several lengths of rope to demonstrate knot-tying (clothesline is ideal).



## Resources for Den Leaders

Don't forget to check at your public library for great books on crafts, games, and songs that you can use in your meetings.

### Den Leader Resources from the BSA

[www.scouting.org/scoutsource/CubScouts/Leaders/DenLeaderKit.aspx](http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/CubScouts/Leaders/DenLeaderKit.aspx)

Here are some of the basic documents you'll need to run your Cub Scout dens. They have scanned all of their Cub Scouting resources looking for the most pertinent items, then added some notes of their own. You can quickly see what these documents contain without having to open each one. Note that these are Adobe Portable Document files (.PDF), which you can print directly or send out for professional printing. Free. They can also be ordered through your district executive (call your Cubmaster) at no charge.

Titles available include:

#### **Program Ideas for Your First Month of Den Meetings, No. 510-232**

If you are starting out with brand-new Cub Scouts, "Bobcats All" is the theme, and this little piece is pure gold. It is handy for new den leaders as well, making everything simple and straightforward. (8 pages)

#### **Cub Scout Program Helps for New Den and Pack Leaders, No. 331-118**

Perhaps *the most essential document* for new den leaders, this is their recipe book for three full months of den activity. The online edition covers all types of den plans the current year. These are also available in a bound edition, for an entire year of program, through ScoutStuff.org.

#### **2009–2010 Program Planning Insert, No. 13-34409**

This is an especially helpful item in the annual Program Planning conference. The core is a planning chart that gives an individual leader the big picture of how den meetings should fit into advancement and the full year's calendar of activities. (8 pages)

#### **Welcome, New Den Leader, No. 510-231**

A very basic primer for the brand-new leader, it contains an exhaustive list of literature and other resources. (6 pages)

#### **So You're A New Den Leader, No. 510-239**

#### **So You're A New Tiger Cub Den Leader, No. 510-233**

#### **So You're A New Webelos Leader, No. 510-247**

#### **So You're a New Pack Committee Member, No. 510-240**

#### **So You're A New Cubmaster, No. 510-237**

Introduction to the roles includes a bulleted list of tasks and rewards of volunteering.

#### **Cub Scout Outdoor Program Guidelines, No. 510-631**

This booklet gives a comprehensive view of outdoor Cub Scouting and directs the reader to more resources. You'll find that it is an essential part of program planning meetings. (8 pages)

### **Cub Casts [www.scouting.org/ScoutCast](http://www.scouting.org/ScoutCast)**

Podcasts in the monthly themes - click on Cub Scout

<https://people.creighton.edu/~bjs74318/bluejay/pack114/library/>

**Pack 114's Reference Library:** Barb Stephens has set up a terrific site full of things to do with your Tigers, Cubs, and Webelos.

[www.geocities.com/~pack215/](http://www.geocities.com/~pack215/)

**The Virtual Cub Leader's Handbook:** A compendium of just about everything that you need to know about the Cub Program. Don't forget to check out the Meetings Dazzlers page <http://www.geocities.com/~pack215/meeting-ideas.html>

[www.cubmaster.org/](http://www.cubmaster.org/)

**The USSSP (US Scouting Service Project)** site for just about all things relating to Cub Scouts. Here you can also find the information for email lists, as well as hundreds of resources on the web for games, skits, tricks and puzzles, songs, and crafts. Many of your advancement questions that cannot be answered by your Cubmaster may be found here, too.

*~ Lorie McGraw is an editor and contributing writer for American Scouting Digest. She has been a Den Leader and Webelos Leader, Cub Roundtable Commissioner, and a Trainer for new Cub Leaders. She welcomes your comments and suggestions. Contact her at [Pyromomma@pyromomma.com](mailto:Pyromomma@pyromomma.com)*