

It's a Great Fit!

The BSA is a uniformed organization for good reason--Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Scouters in uniform represent a symbol of pride in Scouting's timeless values.

One of the best pictures I ever took was when my older son donned his Cub Scout uniform for the first time. Golden autumn leaves gleamed behind him, highlighting his crisp, new blues. There was a gleam in his eye, too, as his new adventure began.



Five years later, I took an even better picture, as his little brother wore that uniform for his first den meeting. Not only did Nick reflect the excitement of being a real Cub Scout, he also showed pride in being able to wear the same uniform that had helped start his big brother on his road to Eagle.

So when parents ask me if I think the uniform is an important part of the Scouting program, I tell them I'm a believer!

I've seen that pride, that sense of belonging to a glorious and historic organization, countless times over the years.

A symbol of Scouting values

And I'm not the only Scouter who understands why the BSA is a uniformed organization. Ray Monson, a Cubmaster in the Los Padres Council in Southern California, consistently sees the pride in his Cub Scouts: "Think back to the first time your boy slipped on his Cub Scout shirt," he tells parents each year. "He couldn't wait to wear it in public, proclaiming to all that *he* was a *Cub Scout*."

Phil Boyd, Scoutmaster of Troop 332, Vacaville, Calif., says good uniforming offers tangible benefits to Boy Scout units as well. "A full uniform for Scouting makes us all look like a part of the same team," he notes. "And it creates a good first impression in the community."

As a symbol of the values Scouting upholds, the uniform also serves to remind boys to live up to those values.

"Scouting is an honor and there is a code of conduct you expect from a Scout when he is wearing the uniform," explains Tim Grissom, a den leader and former Cubmaster in Pack 495 in North Carolina's Occoneechee Council. When Cub Scouts see each other in full uniform, they are more likely to be polite and in control than they are when wearing everyday clothes, he adds.

The cost factor

If uniforms are so good for Scouting, why don't we all wear them?

"Cost is a factor but not the only one, and surprisingly, not the major one," says Gloria Atkins, associate national director, Cub Scout Division, who has spent 21/2 years advising the national volunteer committee on uniform and insignia.

Though some units wonder whether we expect families to pay too much to put their boy in uniform, uniforming is actually meant to help the less affluent families, by creating an environment in which expensive designer clothes have no place and everyone's clothing is equal.

A comparison between Cub Scouting and the most popular sports for boys in that age-group shows that Scouting families actually get quite a good deal for their money.

The combined cost of uniform, required fees, and required equipment for Cub Scouting and youth soccer is about \$100 each, while participation in baseball can run closer to \$175. However, while soccer and baseball last about three months each, Cub Scouting lasts the whole year and requires no special shoes or equipment.

The influence of parents

Parental support for uniforming, therefore, may be a much more important factor than cost.

"Parents don't realize how important it is to fully support the program they've chosen for their son," notes Gloria Atkins.

If baseball or soccer is important enough to invest in the full uniform and equipment package, why isn't Scouting, she asks. By choosing to put a boy in only part of the uniform--say, the shirt and neckerchief--a parent is subtly undermining the program; the boys may soon decide that sports are more serious, more worthy, than Scouting.

Leaders need to help parents realize that the uniform was designed with the boy in mind. Far from being a "Sunday best" outfit, suitable only for the blue and gold banquet, the Cub Scout and Boy Scout uniforms are made for rough-and-ready use appropriate to a weekly meeting or camping adventure.

In a scientific study performed in my laundry room, three pair of boys' size 10 pants--denim jeans, sweatpants, and the official uniform slacks--were washed and dried together. After 20 minutes in the dryer, the uniform slacks were completely dry; it took 40 minutes for the sweatpants, and even after 50 minutes, the jeans had clammy pockets.

If you were the Webelos Scout who fell in the water during his first camp-out, which pair of pants would you rather wear?

It starts with leaders



When leaders wear the full Scouting uniform with proper insignia in place, it sets an example for boys to follow from the moment they sign up to join Cub Scouting.

Of course, parents are not likely to support uniforming unless the unit leaders do so first. Ken Gilder, a former Scoutmaster in the Jayhawk Area Council in Kansas, agrees that a sense of pride in being a Scout is enhanced by wearing the uniform.

But "for that pride to be instilled in the boys, it must first be present in the leader," says Gilder. "Good uniforming in the troop starts with the Scoutmaster."

Sara Seaborne, recently retired chairman of the National Project Team for Cub Scout Uniform and Insignia, worked for six years on ways to encourage uniforming at all levels of the program.

Her key advice to leaders: "If your boys aren't wearing the uniform, it might be because they're looking at how you dress. You don't realize how much of an example you're setting for a 7- or 8-year-old boy."

Sometimes, no matter how much emphasis the unit leaders put on uniforming, they still need something extra up their sleeves to get the boys to suit up. To that end, many packs give an award at each pack meeting for the den with the best uniforming.

In addition to attendance and participation, uniforming can figure into the competition. Tim Grissom reports that his pack gives a "Cubby," an Oscar-like statue, each month; uniforming is the "tie breaker" when all other categories are equal among dens. At the den level, Grissom's Cub Scouts earn beads at each meeting, both for participation in activities and for attending in full uniform.

Putting on 'a way of life'

Finally, then, it's clear that we should all wear the uniform and we should try our best to wear it correctly.

Ultimately, though, we all need to remember that the uniform is not the program; the uniform supports the program. As leaders, we have truly done our best when our boys wear the full uniform because they want to, because they have pride in the values of the organization.

To my boys, and many boys like them, putting on the uniform means putting on a way of life. Our job is to offer the full program--including the uniform--and then to help each boy make sure it's a good fit.

Frequent contributor Cathy Steg wrote "Making Good Boys Better" in Scouting's January-February issue.

A Uniform for Every Boy

Money is no object--or doesn't have to be--if your unit gets creative on how to make uniforms available to every Scout:

A closet for "experienced" uniforms. Many packs and troops keep an ongoing collection of donated uniform pieces as members outgrow them. Here's how to make that bag of blue and khaki get your whole unit in uniform:

- Organize it: Have a parent volunteer as uniform chairperson each year, and make sure everyone in the unit knows where to donate uniforms. Explain how to donate clean uniforms, with patches removed and sizes clearly marked.
- Advertise it: The bag of uniforms doesn't do anyone any good if it's just sitting in a closet. Hand out a flier at Join Scouting Night to all new families, so the parents know where to go if they need a uniform and can't afford one. Update the flier regularly, as the unit's uniform chairperson changes.

- **Make it "cool":** When you display the uniforms at a pack or troop meeting, hype the "hero factor." Was a uniform once owned by the current captain of the football team or drum major of the marching band? Pin a note identifying that uniform's previous owner, to make it a most-wanted item among the younger Cub Scouts.



"Experienced" uniforms often have a story to tell. Hype the "hero factor" of its previous owner. Is he now an Eagle Scout or captain of a sports team?

I recently found Cub Scout uniform parts that had once belonged to a young man who went on to become an Eagle Scout in our troop and just became one of our assistant Scoutmasters. That uniform could be magic for some lucky new Cub Scout.

Pack and troop accounts. Some units offer ways for the boys to pay for their uniforms through participation in unit money-earning projects.

Scott Bernier, Scoutmaster of Troop 443, Pine Tree Council (Maine), explains that "a portion of each money-making activity goes into an account designated for each Scout who participates. The Scout can use the money in that account for any Scout-related expense: uniforms, trip fees, camping equipment. Any money left in the account when the Scout turns 18 rolls into the troop's general account."

Uniform drive. Units can advertise a special day when used uniforms can be dropped off at a central location, perhaps the pack or troop meeting place. Many people whose sons have grown up would be happy to provide a uniform for a boy in need, if they were given the opportunity.

Groups that give good will. Uniform chairpersons can contact organizations such as Goodwill and the Salvation Army and ask that Scout uniforms that have been given to them be donated to your unit.

Many charitable organizations such as these would willingly set uniforms aside for you to collect at no cost.

--C.A.S.

What Is the 'Full Uniform,' Anyway?

Once your unit is willing to wear the uniform, you need to give them the right information. Some key points for all units:

- The "uniform" is the official uniform. Full uniform includes official shirt, pants, neckerchief, cap, belt, and socks.
- Packs and troops are not authorized to make changes in the uniform. It is not up to the unit to decide that boys (or leaders) may wear the pants or shorts of their choice.
- All female Cub Scout leaders have the option of wearing either the full blue/gold or the full tan/olive uniform.
- Webelos Scouts may wear either the full blue/gold or the full tan/olive uniform (though uniform parts may not be mixed) as they and their parents choose. The Webelos den does *not* make this choice as a den.

Veteran Scouters, beware: A quick comparison of my first *Cub Scout Leader Book* (1989 printing) with the latest edition reveals more than a dozen changes in uniforming, ranging from style of socks to color of female leader's uniforms.

Older Scouters (like me) need the current editions of leader resources just as much as new leaders do. Go to the source for the most accurate, up-to-date information:

- *Cub Scout Leader Book* (BSA Supply No. 33221), chapters 11 and 16.
- *Insignia Guide* (Supply No. 33066).
- Uniform inspection sheets--*Cub Scout* and *Webelos Scout* (No. 34282A), *Boy Scout* (No. 34283), *Female Leader* (No. 34281A), *Male Leader* (No. 34284).