

A Fresh Look At Online Scouting



As we deal with another period of COVID-19 lockdown, the challenge to retain our youth members' participation in Scouting grows increasingly difficult. For many Scouts virtual Scouting may have lost its novelty with many receiving their school lessons over the same medium. In this respect, is Scouting seen as the same as school?

Moving forward it's critical that as many youth members as possible participate in our program, in some form, so that, when face-to-face Scouting resumes, they are eager to once again join their friends at their Scout hall.

We now need to focus on providing a quality Scouting experience. Quality over quantity.

Here are a few tips that will help retain our youth members.

A good short meeting is better than a long, boring one.

If I were a Scout ...

It's always a good idea to occasionally put yourselves in the shoes of a Scout and ask, "If I was a Scout, would I have enjoyed that program?"



If you thought the program was too long or possibly boring, then the Scouts will have thought the same. Time to make some changes.

If you see the Scouts starting to fidget, be distracted or simply walk away; they've had enough.

Consider presenting a shorter program that packs a lot of punch in a shorter period.

Present shorter program sessions on an individual Patrol basis

Scouts become lost in a large virtual Scout meeting. Imagine a screen of small faces. We all have Scouts who are a little bit quiet, who tend to stand back or even have a disability that makes their interaction just that harder. These Scouts are lost in the myriad of faces and virtual Scouting is not a good experience. They are also the Scouts that a likely to stop participating.

Rather than run one virtual Scouting meeting over a 90 minute period for the whole Unit consider running smaller bespoke sessions of say 20 minutes for a Patrol at a time.

Your night program might look like this: -

7:00 – 7:20 Program for Patrol 1

7:20 – 7:40 Program for Patrol 2

7:40 – 8:00 Program for Patrol 3

You could present the same program for each Patrol with the difference being the program session is personalised, and individual Scouts have the opportunity to interact, socialise and make a contribution. No longer will quiet Johnny be lost in the background or Sammy not understand what's happening because of distractions.

Your overall weekly commitment to Scouting will be the same, however the experience for the Scouts and Leaders will be that much deeper.

Socialising

When our Scouts are in their hall environment the hall is abuzz with Scouts interacting, chatting, laughing, and generally having a great time.

Sometimes, the way we structure our virtual Scout meetings may miss this important social interaction.

Open early

Why not open the virtual meeting a few minutes early so Scouts can login and freely chat to their friends? Even leave the virtual meeting open for a period after the meeting to allow Scouts to keep chatting with their friends.

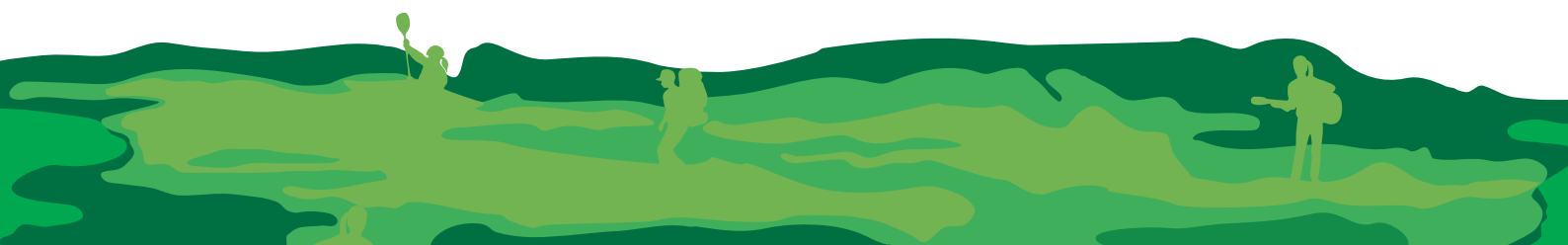
In-between activities

In between program activities give the Scouts time to chat amongst themselves or even place the Patrols in chat rooms to do just that, chat.

How can we reinforce a Scout's link to Scouting?

Encourage Scouts to wear their uniform

A Scout uniform gives a real sense of belonging, pride in your Unit and achievement. Just the very action of a Scout putting on their uniform and scarf is an invaluable and visible link to their Scouting.



A well pressed shirt, clean scarf and badges neatly sewn demonstrates a Scout's pride in their uniform and Group.

Inspection

Occasionally start your program with a quick inspection and even have the Scouts inspect their Leaders. When you were in your hall did you have an award scheme that included points for inspection? Just because we're remote Scouting doesn't mean those positive reinforcement activities should stop.

Why not try a scarf tying competition?

You could combine the activity with a discussion about the history of your Group scarf. Why not invite your Group Leader along to lead the session?



The Program

Prior to COVID-19 Units were making great headway in transitioning to the program. Units were talking about Challenge Areas and introducing participate, assist and lead. Scouts were planning their program.

It's important that we maintain that momentum, particularly the language of the program. We can do this by ensuring: -

Scouts' program ideas

At the end of a program ask the Scouts what they would like to include in their program for next week.

Ask the Scouts whether they have an activity they would like to share with the Unit.

Review>

On a regular basis ask the Scouts to Review> the last activity as the Review> process is how we can make the program even better. A simple thumbs up or thumbs down is a good start.

Unit Code

Remote Scouting means that Scouts are interacting with each other in a totally different environment. Ask the Scouts what they would like in their Unit Code or if you have one already, to review the Unit Code to reflect remote Scouting.

Suggest listening to each other, waiting turns and being respectful.

Badges

Badges acknowledge a Scout's achievement and need to be awarded as soon as possible. Even in our virtual Scouting environment how can Scouts be involved in the presentation of badges to other Scouts?

Virtual Scouting Opportunities

Most Groups would be using Zoom or a similar platform and this opens up a whole range of program opportunities.

There are so many interesting people within your community that you can invite to your meeting. Why not consider inviting a local policeman or VIP to talk to the Unit for 10 minutes followed by a short Q&A session?

Other interesting guest speakers could include your local Member of Parliament, your local vet, a local historian, past members of your Scout Group.

Have you held a joint virtual Scout meeting with another Unit or Patrol from your District? Look even wider and hook-up with a Patrol from a country Unit. The Scouts might even want to plan a get-together once the COVID-19 crisis is over.

