Scouts Victoria

Communicating with Prospective Families

As a Leader, you are the on-the-ground face of Scouts in your local community. Not only are you responsible for delivering the Scout Program to existing Youth Members, but you are also the first point of contact for potential new recruits and their families.

Generally, families have little to no prior knowledge of Scouts and how Scout Groups operate at a local level. Parents will often determine whether to enroll their child in Scouts based on their first impressions of the Group, and how information is conveyed by its Leaders and other members. Simple and clear communication is key to building good rapport early on and to ensuring parents have all the information they need to make the decision for their child to join your Scout Group.

The objective of any type of communication is to ensure that the recipient understands what we are trying to convey. This simple guide includes a series of tips to ensure you can communicate effectively with prospective families and increase the chances of welcoming a new member to your Scout Group.

Types of Communication

People communicate with each other in several ways that depend upon the message and the context in which it is being sent. Choice of communication channel and your style of communicating also affects communication. Below are different types of communication, which are often used when interacting with prospective families.

Face-to-Face

Prospective families are often met during events such as community festivals, fetes and open days, therefore communicating face-to-face is a given as part of your role as a Leader. While face-to-face communication may be daunting to some due to its immediacy and the inability to 'edit' the message or its delivery, it is often the most effective type of communication as it allows us to create a bond of trust that electronic communication simply cannot.

When we talk to others face-to-face, it is important to consider both what we say and how we say it – i.e. the information we convey, and the verbal and non-verbal cues which express how we are feeling.

In the lead up to any event, make sure you take some time to brush up on your elevator pitch – that is, a 20-30 second summary about Scouts, designed to spark the interest of prospective families and encourage them to find out more. Generally, the elevator pitch should answer the following questions: What is Scouts? What do Scouts do? What are the benefits for my children

As a Leader, you should also be well across essential details about Scouting in your local Group including Sections, age ranges, different activities, opportunities for young people and volunteers, meeting times, fees and how families can join your Group. While you may not necessarily speak about all these points when conversing with prospective families face-to-face, it pays to be prepared to answer all sorts of questions.

It is also important to avoid assuming that prospective families will know what you mean when you use Scout-specific terminology such as 'Sections' and 'Jamborees'. Oftentimes this is not the case.

Remember to place yourself in their shoes, and to explain details in a simple and digestible manner.

Aside from the information you communicate, prospective families also observe verbal and nonverbal cues such as your tone of voice, gestures, facial expression and body language. These cues help families interpret the information they are receiving and are therefore very important to consider when communicating face-to-face. For example, if you speak about how great Scouts is, but have a dull tone of voice and are constantly looking around instead of maintaining eye contact, families will see through your words and assume that you are not interested in the conversation you are having.

When communicating with prospective families face-to-face, it is important that you maintain a friendly demeanour, and that your tone of voice, posture and body language is both professional and approachable. Let your passion for Scouting show - tell them all about the amazing activities and opportunities their child will experience through Scouts, and don't forget to smile!

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Email

While most prospective families are met face-to-face at an event, a significant number also make initial contact with Scout Groups via email. These families may have come to consider Scouts through advertising, word-of-mouth communications or through their local community, and often make contact to enquire about joining and other specific details about your Group.

Emailing prospective families – either as a follow-up to a previous engagement or in response to an enquiry – is a great opportunity to effectively introduce your Scout Group and the opportunities and benefits it offers for young people and their families.

All email correspondence should be customised and personalised to meet each family's unique informational needs. This includes addressing any questions and providing essential details about your Group such as meeting days and times, activities and contact details. Make sure your emails are clearly structured (introduction, body and conclusion) and are easy to read.

An example initial email to prospective families can be found in Appendix 1.

Social Media

Many Scout Groups now have a social media presence, which usually takes the form of either a Facebook Page or Group. These social media spaces provide useful platforms for sharing information and staying in touch with parents of current members, as well as opportunities to engage with prospective families looking to join Scouts.

Your Scout Group's Facebook Page or Group should contain basic information about your Group, including:

- Ages and Sections
- Location of Scout Hall
- Meeting Days and Times
- Contact Details

It should also include a space where prospective families can get in touch about any enquiries they may have. Families will often get in contact by sending a direct message to your Group's Facebook inbox so be sure to spend a few minutes each week checking and replying to messages. The rule of thumb when replying to messages is to do so within 24 hours.

A few ways to assist with this include:

1. Creating a master sheet of frequently asked questions and standard responses to each
2. Share the responsibility of responding to messages with Section Leaders and other Adults in the Group
3. Setting up an automated response to address frequently asked questions as soon as you receive a message.

Below is an example of an automated response:

Thank-you for contacting [insert Group name] Scouts. One of our Leaders will get back to you shortly.

Our meeting days and times are:

- Joeys (5-8): Monday, 6pm
- Cubs (8-11): Tuesday, 6pm
- Scouts (11-14): Tuesday 7.30pm

Social media is quickly becoming a primary form of contact, and should be used to your Group's advantage when communicating with prospective families. But remember - anything you publish on social media not only reflects yourself, but your Scout Group and Scouting as a whole, so remember to be mindful of what you post or write online.

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Appendix 1: Example Email to Prospective Family

Dear [Mr/Mrs/Miss] [Surname],

Thank you for your recent enquiry about [Group name]. [Group name] welcomes children and young people aged [age ranges catered for].

Our Group joins over 400 others across Victoria dedicated to providing fun and challenging opportunities for young people to grow through adventure. Our aim is to encourage the physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual development of young people so that they take a constructive place in society as responsible citizens, and as members of their local, national and international communities.

We do this through experiences that give young people the opportunity to learn, make new friends, work with others, and develop their character and leadership skills, while taking part in an extraordinary variety of activities that they will remember for a lifetime!

Today's Scouts can take part in 'traditional Scouting skills' such as camping and bush craft, through to more extreme challenges such as abseiling, overnight hiking, rafting, canoeing, canyoning, snow activities, rock climbing, sailing and even flying! Scouts also have the opportunity to become involved in performing arts, leadership development, community service, amateur radio operation, environmental projects, large-scale Australian events such as Cuborees, Jamborees and Ventures, international events, and service projects in developing countries.

To give you the opportunity to meet our fantastic team and to see what Scouts is all about, I'd like to invite you and [child's name] to attend our next meeting on [day] at [time]. We'd be very happy to show you around the Scout Hall, and to give [child's name] the chance to join in on some activities.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact me on [contact number].

We look forward to seeing you at our next meeting!

Yours in Scouting,

[Name]
[Appointment]
[Group Name]