

# How To Choose A Troop

I have, over the years, been asked by Webelos Families “How should I pick a Troop?”. The short answer is: “Visit at least 2~3 Troops in your area and find one who’s personality, program, methods and goals best match your own needs and expectations.”. There is no right Troop for everyone, so the real question is “Where do you believe your son will best thrive and be motivated to stick with the program?”.

The real problem in making this determination is that most Webelos Families do not understand the fundamental differences between the Cub and Boy Scout Programs and, therefore, they don’t know what questions to ask nor how to evaluate the answers received. I believe that the top three fundamental program differences are:

Cub Scout	Boy Scout
1. Adult Planned, Run, & Led Program	1. Scout Jr. Leader Planned, Run & Led Program
2. Primarily an Indoor Program of Activities	2. Primarily an Outdoor Program of Activities
3. Group Award & Advance - Adult Driven	3. Individual Award & Advance - Scout Driven

1. These issues are further obscured by the fact that virtually every Troop claims to be “Boy Run”, however, few truly are and even those that are will appear, at times, to be adult run and vice versa. Some skills and activities, either new or unknown to the Troop or required by BSA rules, may require adults to be more involved even in the best of “Boy Run” Troops. The trick is determining which is the exception and which is the rule.

2. Webelos Families, usually the parents more than the boy, are often worried by an outdoor camping program that runs year round and, while this is supposed to be the nature of the program, it may not be best for your son. If your son does not like being, and learning to best deal with, being occasionally cold, hot, wet, dirty or uncomfortable, this may be a problem in a Troop following the traditional outdoor activity model where indoor meetings exist only to plan and prepare for the actual outdoor activities.

3. Advancement & Awards can become a real problem with parents, not usually the boys, when parents expect their sons to advance in the Cub model: everyone works together on an activity pin or rank requirements which is adult motivated and run - and virtually every Cub that shows up gets the award/advancement. In BSA, the Scout has to individually take the initiative to seek out a Jr or Adult Leader to learn and demonstrate the skill and get it signed off together with whatever other requirements are required and, even then, individually seek out a SMC & BOR (Scoutmaster Conference & Board of Review). Just because the Troop works on a skill at a meeting or Camp Out does not mean it will be awarded or signed off. Even more fundamental is the BSA focus upon “The Journey, Not The Destination”. Awards and rank are secondary, and incidental to, the skills and NOT the other way around. There is a reason it is called “The Trail to Eagle” that often escapes goal oriented parents and Scouts.

## So what actual questions should be asked?

1. Inquire, observe, & determine: What is the Philosophy of Troop Program
  - a. Scout or Adult planned & run?
  - b. Are older Scouts teaching and signing off requirements?
  - c. Are Adults, for the most part, working through Junior Leaders?
  - d. Does the Troop have regular (monthly), and Jr. Leader run, PLC's (Patrol Leader Council)

### and, if possible, ask if you can sit and watch the next one?

e. Which of the Junior Leaders are trained, particularly the SPL (Jr Leader in Charge), ASPL & PL's (Senior Patrol Leader, Assistant SPL & Patrol Leaders): JLOW (Jr. Leader Orientation Workshop); NYLT (National Youth Leadership Training); Council Specific Training (Den Chief & Chaplain Aide); etc.?

f. Are the Adults trained? Scoutmaster Fundamentals, Wood Badge and Beyond

g. Use of Scout Uniform (although many Troops will have a Summer use "Class B")?

2. Inquire, observe, & determine: What is the Quality of the Troop Program?

a. Ask to see present & past Annual Plan/Monthly Themes to see types of things Troop does

b. Troop go to Summer Camp every year and do most of the boys, even the older ones, attend?

c. How effectively does the Troop communicate with, and involve, families (robust web site?)

d. Emphasis upon participation in Council, District, Nat'l Events, other Structured Events vs. Planning and Executing it's own Troop Events and, of those Council, District, etc. Events, are Adult & Junior Leaders involved in running or just attending ...?

e. What is the # & age spread of "Active" Scouts - although every Troop goes through cycles

f. Size of Troop vs. Resources and Activities - does the Troop have the gear, adult & junior leader training, certifications and participation to effectively deliver the planned program - or - is the Troop going to outside Vendors for anything and everything - outside vendors are a necessity for any program but not to the extent that it no longer a Scout program.

3. Inquire, observe, & determine: How many older boys are advancing & staying actively involved?.

a. What does the Troop do to try to retain Scouts in the Program and, if they stick with the Program, what percentage make Eagle before turning 18? (All Troops have varying degrees of retention issues)

b. If a Troop brags about their 13-15 yr old Eagles and there are no significant number of 16-18 yr old Scouts (regardless of rank) involved, or holding Jr. Leader positions in the Troop, run away as fast as you can!

c. Sit in as an observer on a BOR (Board of Review) if you have the opportunity to do so

d. Do the Scouts actually know, and are they teaching, Scout and other Skills?

e. How do the Older Scouts present themselves and interact with Adults & younger Scouts?

**\*\*\* Above All Else Talk to other Scout parents, visit 2~3 Troops, ATTEND A TROOP EVENT! \*\*\***