

UNIFORMING IN BOY SCOUT TROOPS

The Scouting program in the Boy Scouts of America has three specific objectives, commonly referred to as the "Aims of Scouting." They are character development, citizenship training, and personal fitness. To accomplish these aims, the BSA has designed eight methods in Boy Scouting. It is important that you know and use the methods of Boy Scouting. Other methods are good, but they may bring different results -- results possibly quite different than we are seeking. One of these methods is uniforming.

Over the years, Scoutmasters have noticed that Scouts who truly try to live by the Scout Oath and Law in their daily lives seem to be moved by the spirit to wear the Scout uniform (if they can afford it). Why? What is so magical about these pieces of cloth? Why would the BSA make wearing certain cloths part of the eight methods of Boy Scouting? I would like to take a few minutes to investigate this method to see what it brings to the table.

The uniform supports the first Aim of Scouting, that of character development. The uniform is a symbol of the boy's commitment to Scouting - his acceptance of the BSA's ideals and willingness to live by them. The boy knows that when he is in that uniform he is expected to act in accordance to the values of the BSA and the values he has made an oath to live by. This purpose of uniforming is as much a part of the method as uniting him with his troop or patrol. Boy Scouting is an action program, and wearing the uniform is an action that shows each Scout's commitment to the aims and purposes of Scouting.

The Scout's identification grows even greater when it is realized that the uniform gives the Scout an identity in a world brotherhood of youth who believe in the same ideals.

Scouts often do not have a complete understanding of Scouting or the commitment they have chosen to make. We need to communicate to them that that the uniform is a symbol of their commitment to Scouting, to the BSA, to their Council and to other Scouts and, not wearing the uniform is a sign to others that they may lack that commitment.

The uniform also makes the Scout troop visible as a force for good and creates a positive youth image in the community. People who are not Scouts recognize the Boy Scout uniform. To the community the uniform represents a welcome image, a reminder that not all kids are bad, and not all gangs are violent.

Uniforming also supports the second Aim of Scouting, that of citizenship training. In that it contributes to patrol and troop spirit. Boys who wear the uniform are put on a par with each other. Fancy clothes purchased by rich parents are gone as are clothes that bind the boy to other organizations and gangs. The uniform helps to build esprit de corps and gives the troop and patrol an identity with a program different from what the boy is exposed to outside of Scouting. However, that 'uniformed Scout' represents more to himself, to his fellow Scouts and to the public as a whole, than simply belonging to his patrol or his troop. Used broadly, citizenship means the boy's relationship to others. He comes to learn of his obligations to other people, to the society he lives in, to the government that presides over that society. The BSA uniform unites the boy with this larger goal by uniting him with the organization whose aim is that goal: the BSA.

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Uniforming also contributes to the third aim of personal and mental fitness. In Boy Scouting, the Scouts must satisfy certain requirements to achieve rank and responsibility within the program. These requirements often require the mastering of a physical or mental skill. When the requirements are satisfied an award or badge is earned. The uniform gives the Scout a reason to take pride in the way he looks, and in the badges and awards that testify to his achievements.

As for adults wearing uniforms, all I can say is what Baden-Powell said: "It is largely a matter of example. Show me a slackly-dressed Troop and I can "Sherlock" a slackly-dressed Scoutmaster. Think of it, when you are fitting on your uniform or putting that final saucy cock to your hat. You are the model to your boys and your smartness will reflect itself in them." Instead of using uniforming as a club that might prevent a boy from participating in Scouting, when you are with the Scouts, even for the simplest of things, put on your uniform. It raises the moral tone of the boys and it heightens their estimation of their uniform when they see it is not beneath a grown man to wear it. It also heightens their estimation of themselves when they find themselves taken seriously by men and women who also count it of importance to be in the same brotherhood with them. As Scouters we must constantly remind ourselves that it isn't so much what we say to the Scouts that they will emulate, but what we do. The Scouts are told by other leaders, by their handbooks and by each other to look to us as role models. And they will, they will do what we do and wear what we wear.

It is important that each of us fully understands the importance of each of the eight methods of Boy Scouting. I hope that after reading this discussion on how uniforming directly contributes to the three aims of Scouting that you have a better understanding of the often neglected and misunderstood method of uniforming.

Yours in Scouting,
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