



A MESSAGE FROM ORANGE COUNTY COUNCIL LEADERSHIP ABOUT YOUTH PROTECTION IN SCOUTING:

Dear Scout Leaders, volunteers, and parents:

You may have heard media coverage discussing the Boy Scouts of America's Volunteer Screening Database and our organization's Youth Protection efforts. The safety of children in our Scouting programs is our top priority. As an organization, we have an important duty and an incredible opportunity to focus on keeping children safe, supported, and protected.

The BSA's Volunteer Screening Database, previously known as "Ineligible Volunteer Files," is at the forefront of youth protection procedures. While it has often been misunderstood and criticized, time and time again it has successfully prevented potential predators from re-joining our organization and gaining access to youth – which is precisely why we have been maintaining these records since the 1920s.

The database system is one of the approaches most often recommended by experts, including the Centers for Disease Control, to keep kids safe and is a collection of information on individuals who, due to past inappropriate behavior or suspicion of inappropriate behavior, are prohibited from participating in BSA programs.

How the Volunteer Screening Database (VSD) works:

- **Individuals are added to the Volunteer Screening Database based on violations of our policies, or suspected violations of our policies.** They don't need to have been convicted to be added to the VSD. We have a very low threshold for removing someone from our scouting programs. Again – this is because our priority is to protect kids, first and foremost, above all else. We believe victims and routinely remove individuals based on only allegations of inappropriate behavior.
- **When an individual is added to the VSD, they are removed entirely from any Scouting program.** They are also prohibited from re-joining anywhere.
- **Every instance of suspected abuse is reported to law enforcement.** Once the individual has been removed from Scouting and has been reported to law enforcement, the BSA has no other avenue for further investigation or public disclosure.

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The protection of youth is the primary obligation of every individual involved in Orange County Council and the Boy Scouts of America— including Chartered Organizations, leaders, parents, members, employees and staff. In the months to come, you may see some national news stories involving lawsuits related to past sexual abuse cases in Scouting.

Orange County Council has been and will continue to be vigilant in creating barriers that help prevent abuse and educating those involved in Scouting to recognize and report child abuse regardless of where it occurs. Every adult can help in the fight against child abuse.

The BSA has adopted some of the strongest barriers to abuse found in any youth-serving organization and we take the responsibility to uphold those barriers seriously. Today, we are considered by many of the top experts in youth protection policies, such as Janet Warren, Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences (PPNBS) at the University of Virginia, to be leaders in this effort. The safety and protection of children in our Scouting programs is our top priority. We wanted to share with you some relevant background information and provide a refresher on the tools that are available to you in the fight against child abuse that can further enable all of us to help create a safe environment for our youth.

- We have screening procedures for registered leaders. The BSA has a formal leader-selection process that includes criminal background checks and other screenings. We act swiftly to report abuse allegations to law enforcement.
- Youth protection training is mandatory for all registered leaders, and we also provide educational materials to parent and Scouts that is available on-line and in printed form in every Scout Handbook.
- We have a strict “two-deep” leadership policy, which requires that a youth is never alone with an adult leader during Scouting activities. Additionally, no youth is permitted to sleep in the tent of an adult other than his or her own parent/guardian. We also prohibit one-on-one contact between adults and youth members, including texting and communications on social media.
- We have no “secret” organizations and we prohibit hazing and bullying. We also require appropriate attire and Scout uniforms at all times.
- We actively share and encourage the use of our 24/7 Scouts First Helpline to report any suspected abuse or inappropriate behavior. Further, we mandate that all allegations or suspicion of abuse are reported to authorities. In addition to removing the individual from Scouting, this means that if we receive a report regarding any suspicious activity or allegations of abuse, our next call is to law enforcement, whose

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investigation we support unequivocally. There is a dedicated 24-hour helpline 844-SCOUTS1 (844-726-8871) to receive reports of known or suspected abuse or behavior that might put a youth at risk. At no time has the Orange County Council or Boy Scouts of America knowingly allowed a sexual predator or child abuser to work with youth, and we always act swiftly and decisively when alerted to abuse allegations.

Our goals for protecting children go beyond our organization– we seek to be part of the solution both in and out of Scouting. The BSA fully supports and advocates for the creation of a national registry overseen by a governmental entity, similar to the national sex offender registry, of those who are suspected of child abuse or inappropriate behavior with a child, and thus allowing all youth serving organizations to share and access such information. The BSA National Council has advocated to Congress for enhanced youth protection policies, initiatives, and efforts. Specifically, BSA has recommended to Congress the following programs and ideas that independent experts agree will keep children safe, including:

- Establishing and funding a system where volunteers can register/be cleared through a common screening process for all states and organizations, with an affordable process for conducting background checks and periodically renewing the clearance to reduce the risk that potential abusers can gain access to children by moving across state lines or to other youth serving organizations;
- Enabling youth-serving organizations to share information about individuals who have been removed from their programs for alleged inappropriate conduct – even if the individuals have not been arrested or convicted – to keep potential abusers out of these organizations;
- Strengthening mandatory reporting laws; and,
- Requiring that sex abuse offenders serve full sentences.

We are optimistic about these efforts because we know that they will make a difference in protecting children.

Thank you for your efforts in helping to protect our youth. If you have any questions, concerns, or information to report, please reach out to us.



Mark Engstrom
Council Chairman



Deborah Harrington
Executive Vice Chair



John Norment
Council Commissioner



Jeff Herrmann
President/Scout Executive

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For more information on BSA's Youth Protection efforts, please visit
<https://www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection/>

- [Download the How-To Guide for taking Youth Protection Training](#) 

Key Resources

[Guide to Safe Scouting](#)

Single source of information for safe scouting. The guide is designed for adult leaders; topics include Youth Protection, Health and Safety and Reporting information. Frequently-asked questions are also addressed [in the Youth Protection and Barriers to Abuse FAQs](#).

How to Protect Your Children From Child Abuse: A Parent's Guide

These booklets are a basic resource to help parents understand how child abuse happens and keep their children safe. Exercises for parents and children are included. Several versions of the booklets are available:

- [For Cub Scouts and their parents](#) 
- [For Cub Scouts and their parents \(in Spanish\)](#) 
- [For Scouts BSA members and their parents](#) 
- [For Scouts BSA members and their parents \(in Spanish\)](#) 
- [For STEM Scouts and their parents](#) 

[It Happened to Me: Cub Scout Meeting Guide](#)

Video Facilitator Guides. A sample letter to parents and guardians as well as English and Spanish meeting guides for facilitators' use when showing the age-appropriate sexual abuse prevention video.

[A Time to Tell: Troop Meeting Guide](#)

Video Facilitator Guides. English and Spanish meeting guides for facilitators' use when showing the age-appropriate sexual abuse prevention video.

[Personal Safety Awareness Meeting Guide](#) (Venturing Program)

Video Facilitator Guides. A sample letter to parents and guardians as well as English and Spanish meeting guides for facilitators' use when showing the age-appropriate sexual abuse prevention video.

[Cyber Chip](#)

To help families and volunteers keep youth safe while online, the BSA introduces the





Cyber Chip. The Scouting portal showcasing Cyber Chip resources includes grade-specific videos for each level.

[Bullying Awareness](#)

These fact sheets will help with bullying awareness and direct you to resources provided by the BSA and other entities we work with to protect children.

[Youth Protection Champions](#)

To address the need for Youth Protection–specific volunteers at all levels, the BSA has implemented its new Youth Protection Champions program. These volunteer champions will be the key drivers of Youth Protection at their assigned levels.

[Camp Leadership ... A Guide for Camp Staff and Unit Leaders](#)

Brochure for unit leaders and camp staff who are responsible for providing a safe and healthy camp setting where Scouts are free from the worries of child abuse.

ScoutHelp

The BSA offers assistance with counseling to any Scout, former Scout, or family member of any Scout who suffered abuse during their time in Scouting. Individuals can email scouthelp@scouting.org  or call toll free at 855-295-1531.

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