

## Youth Protection News Briefs

### **Youth protection training**

The world has changed dramatically since the Boy Scouts of America was founded more than 80 years ago. And as the world has changed, so too has Scouting, to keep our program relevant to the needs of our membership. But throughout all the changes, we have remained steadfast in maintaining Scouting's basic values.

One change in recent years has been the introduction of youth protection materials into the program at all levels. Some Scout leaders have, no doubt, questioned why this was necessary. The answer is simple: This year in the United States, three million children will be victims of child abuse, with nearly 500,000 of those being victims of child sexual abuse.

Child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, is totally contrary to the values we hold dear. But abuse is preventable. As the largest youth serving organization in America we cannot ignore this threat to our youth. By teaching our members about child abuse, we are teaching them to "Be prepared."

**A difficult subject.** For many Scout leaders, child abuse isn't easy to discuss. For most of us it is difficult enough to talk with our own children about the subject; with boys from other families, it can be really difficult. There are many reasons for this.

Ken Lanning with the Federal Bureau of Investigation teaches law enforcement officers and other criminal justice system professionals about child abuse. He says there is a natural revulsion of even thinking that anyone could sexually molest children, and we would prefer to think that molesters are strangers or "dirty old men." Lanning points out that Scout leaders are not the only ones who would like to resort to this form of denial; most of the audiences he talks to have similar sentiments.

Behind our reluctance to discuss abuse is also our desire to protect children from the realities of the world, to preserve their innocence. But the best way to protect children is to educate them, and the BSA has excellent videos to educate our youth members about protecting themselves from child sexual abuse.

These videos now have guides for leaders that give step-by-step instructions, including letters for parents, meeting agendas, and a discussion guide for use after the video has been viewed.

**Educating Cub Scouts.** The video for Cub Scouts is titled "It Happened to Me." It should be viewed either at a pack or den meeting specifically called for the purpose of watching the video. It is strongly recommended that Cub Scout-aged boys have a parent or other adult family member present when watching the video, to answer any questions and open up the lines of communication necessary for protecting children.

**Educating Boy Scouts.** "A Time to Tell" is intended to be shown once a year during a regular troop meeting. Parents should be encouraged to attend, but are not required to be present.

**Leader Guides.** To encourage Scouters to show the videos to their units, the BSA has developed special leader guides for each tape. They are designed to provide Scouters with both the information and the confidence they need to conduct the meeting.

The guides include a letter that should be copied and sent to parents prior to showing the video. They also include agendas for the meetings during which the respective video will be shown and have a discussion guide for use after viewing the video.

Each unit leader's personal copy of the September *Scouting* magazine should include the appropriate meeting guide for his or her program. In addition, the guide for "It Happened to Me" is available in the new edition of the *Cub Scout Leader Book*, while the soon-to-be-released new edition of *The Scoutmaster Handbook* will contain the guide for "A Time to Tell." And local councils will have copies of the guides for both videos.

**Education is Effective.** The videos are effective when used with their intended audiences. Since the tapes were released, initial feedback has shown that after viewing one, some children were able to stop abuse that had been happening to them.

The challenge to each unit leader is clear: make certain the children in your unit have the opportunity to see the video and acquire the knowledge necessary to prevent sexual abuse from happening, or stop abuse that is already occurring.