

Why Youth Protection Training Matters by Matthew Rusten

April is National Child Abuse Prevention month, and a vital way to spread awareness and protect children across the nation is to review the policies and best practices of Scouts BSA.

Preventing child abuse is a responsibility shared between every adult in the program. Creating thriving communities in our Troops demands trust, and just a single instance of abuse can destroy a Troop's community. Proper Youth Protection Training for adults is required to ensure that there is a diverse, knowledgeable network of leaders protecting Scouts. This allows youth to have a safe environment in which to experience the outdoors, be leaders in their communities, and become confident in themselves.

Youth Protection Training is required for all registered volunteers of Scouts BSA as a joining requirement and must be renewed every two years. While any required training may seem like a hassle, taking the time to complete the Youth Protection Training properly is well worth the benefit of protecting the children under your supervision.

It is important to pay close attention throughout the training and to apply the lessons to your current Troop activities and practices. There is always room to improve in the fight against child abuse. Avoid quickly clicking through the screens to get to the certificate at the end, instead listen to the stories told and think about how you would handle the situation being brought to your attention in your own Troop.

As a registered leader in Scouts BSA, there is a responsibility and expectation that you report both violations of Youth Protection policies and witnessed or suspected cases of child abuse.

For violations of Youth Protection policies, immediately notify your local council Scout Executive or his/her designee so appropriate action can be taken for the safety of our Scouts.

For any good-faith suspicion or belief that a child has been a victim of abuse, follow the following steps:

1. Ensure the child is in a safe environment. In cases of child abuse injury or medical emergencies, call 911 immediately.
2. If the suspected abuse occurred in the Scout's home or family, you are required by state law to immediately report it to the local authorities or contact the local child abuse hotline.
3. Notify the Scout Executive or his/her designee. If he/she cannot be reached, call the 24/7 Scouts First Helpline at 1-844-SCOUTS1 (1-844-726-8871) or email scoutsfirst@scouting.org

Effective youth protection relies on the preparedness of each and every adult. Becoming an adult leader in Scouts BSA is a great way to give back to your community and to watch your children become independent, confident leaders. It is your duty to create and maintain a safe space for all youth to flourish, and that duty starts with Youth Protection Training.