

Creating Welcoming Environments for all BSA Members

Training Session for Adult Leaders



Scouts for Equality
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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Session Information, Objectives, and Materials	4
Introduction	6
Getting Started – Meal Planning Game	7
Creating Welcoming Environments	8
No Need to Discuss Sex in Scouting	8
The Picture in the Wallet	8
Making Scouts feel Welcome.....	9
Bonds of Trust	10
Nonverbal Communication and Welcoming Environments	12
Enhancing Facility Privacy.....	15
Showers	15
Sleeping Arrangements	16
Conclusion.....	18
Appendix A: Mystery Meal Planning.....	19
Appendix B: Sources.....	22

Session Information, Objectives, and Materials

Session Length: 60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Understand how to facilitate the creation of welcoming environments in Scouting.
- Understand how nonverbal communication can be a barrier to creating welcoming environments in Scouting.
- Understand considerations for enhancing facility privacy in the context of membership policy changes.

Required Materials:

- Flipcharts & Markers

Trainer Preparation

This class can be presented indoors or outdoors. This session will include facilitated discussion of the topics covered. Instructors should be prepared to discuss their qualifications to train this course, maintaining emphasis on BSA program opportunities and personal similarities between individuals during their introductions. If using a PowerPoint style presentation, the class title and instructor names should be present on the screen as students enter the training area to ensure that they understand what class they are attending. The target audience for this course is either individual unit leaders or trainers of individual unit leaders.

Curriculum Format

Plain text indicates information that the trainer should be reading or saying to participants.

Underlined text indicates information that is intended to be instructions for the trainer.

Text in text boxes indicates a trainer tip, or an opportunity for participant interaction.

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Introduction

Time Allotted: 5 minutes

State class name. Introduce instructors by name. Inform participants that this course will focus on the logistical implementation of recent BSA membership policy changes – namely, facilitating the integration of non-heterosexual members into the BSA program at unit and organizational levels. Instructors should emphasize that this course will not consider support or non-support of recent BSA membership changes in scope for discussion as a component of this course. Discuss housekeeping items. (i.e. Emergency Exits, Bathroom location(s), cell phone silencing, food/drink policy, etc.)

TRAINER TIP: Reiterate that discussion examples throughout the class must relate only to enhancing privacy for all staff and participants creating a non-hostile environment at Scouting events. Maintain the focus on positive improvement opportunities. Do not allow conversations to devolve into debates on the membership policy.

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Getting Started – Meal Planning Game

Time allotted: 10 minutes

Inform participants that you'll begin the training by asking all the trainees to participate in a game to foster discussion and critical thinking on the topic at hand.

Refer to “Appendix A – Mystery Meal Planning” in the end of this curriculum for an explanation of the game, along with required materials, an overview, setup, rules, of the game, and reflection questions. Reflection questions are also listed on this page for your convenience.

Reflection on Game:

- What was the nature of the task?
- What were some of the challenges you experienced in solving the task?
- What did we lose by limiting what you know about everyone?
- Can you think of ways in which placing some parts of our lives “off limits” could be likewise constraining?
- How does this experience resonate with working with LGBT people in Scouting?

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Creating Welcoming Environments

Time Allotted: 15 minutes

No Need to Discuss Sex in Scouting

Many times we have heard or perhaps uttered phrases such as: “There is no need to discuss sex in a Scouting environment.” We agree. However, as we just saw in our meal planning game, we can run into unexpected challenges when we ask people to hide part of their identity. This segment of our session will look at this and other seemingly innocent statements to assist in creating welcoming and non-hostile environments for our members.

You might agree or disagree with the idea that a person’s sexual orientation is a core component of their identity as a person. However, if they feel it’s important to their identity, we have no basis for telling them that they’re wrong. And recent studies¹ have shown that around 55% of gay men in their twenties view their sexual orientation as extremely or very important to their identity. Furthermore, 86% wish there were more gay role models and mentors they could look up to. Remember back to our game a moment ago - we noticed that it’s much easier for someone who is Jewish to understand the lifestyle of their fellow Jews. Rhetorical question: could the same be said of gay adults to gay youth?

Remember, this topic is not about political correctness but rather how to communicate to all members that we are all individual members of the BSA organization as a whole, and as such should feel welcome and included at BSA events regardless of our individual differences that may exist.

The Picture in the Wallet

Most of us can agree that discussions of sex and sexuality-related topics are best left to parents, guardians, and educational and religious institutions where applicable. However, for just a moment let’s put the connotation of “sex” aside.

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For a long time, our organization tolerated passive suppression of family relationships by permitting discussion about “Tom the unit leader and his wife Tina,” while not allowing discussions about other types of family relationships. In many cases both Tom and Tina were co-leaders of units in the BSA. However, Karen was not able to discuss Kim, an equally important person in her life as Tina is to Tom, and Mark was not able to discuss “life outside Scouting” events with Matt, just as equally important to his life as Tom is to Tina. Happy, healthy, and loving relationships are good role model examples to young people as they struggle to understand their own growth and interaction with loved ones and others in their lives.

With the recent change in membership standards allowing for the inclusion of gay youth and adults^{2,3}, we will now be faced with these situations and we must deal with them appropriately. What is appropriate you may ask? Under the current BSA membership guidelines, we must be as comfortable with Karen sharing how Kim is doing in her new job, or asking Mark if Matt will be joining us on our next outing, as we have been when discussing those very same topics in regards to Tom and Tina previously.

Making Scouts feel Welcome

With this in mind, we can take simple steps to ensure that all members of Scouting feel equally welcome and integral to our mission of providing a quality BSA program to our youth members. Should questions arise from our very young members we can simply redirect the inquiries to the child’s parent(s) or guardian(s) to allow them to explain as much or as little as they choose to under the constructs of their family environments.

We must do ALL we can to maintain an air of honesty and avoid any dishonest discussion as some of our younger members form strong bonds of trust with their BSA leadership and that bond should not be risked because of our own unfamiliarity with differences in social situations. When handled properly, the discussion(s) are no longer “sex”-centered but rather relationship-centered, as they should be.

Furthermore, as adult mentors in the BSA, we should seek to avoid comments that would tend to create communication barriers between adult leaders and those we lead. We may not understand or even agree with

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certain music styles, clothing styles, hair styles, jewelry usage, etc. but we need to refrain from offering unsolicited condemnation of member's characteristics, outward appearance, or personality insofar as it does not harm others.

TRAINER TIP: Ask the trainees if they can remember any specific instances in Scouting where they saw people making comments about things like this, and for them to share their experiences.

A couple specific examples we're going to look at are phrases such as "You look like a girl with that (hair, earring, clothing, nail polish, etc.)" or "Man up and move on." or "You run/throw like a sissy." These are disparaging and do not work to create welcome Scouting environments. In addition to the harm these comments may cause to that individual, they also reinforce existing stereotypes suggesting that women are inferior to men. As such, these types of phrases and other actions do not serve the greater good with regard to creating a welcoming BSA environment. Often what we may consider a joke is not well-received by the person that our comment is directed toward or even worse for someone else in earshot that isn't even part of the conversation. The details of how to prevent and deal with bullying are beyond the scope of this training, but are covered in detail in the "Youth Protection Plus" training supplement offered by Scouts for Equality.

Bonds of Trust

Our bonds of trust can be adversely impacted if a member perceives that another member is hostile toward other members or groups of people in general. There is no room for discrimination, intolerance, or mistreatment of others in the BSA no matter what the circumstances may be. "Think before you speak" is a great rule of thumb in situations such as these.

As BSA adult leaders we have accepted the responsibility to care for and watch over our younger members to ensure that they have a safe environment in which to develop their human interaction, leadership and citizenship skills.

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We speak out promptly when we see Scouts engaged in physical conduct that seems or is in-fact unsafe. Just as we do in watching for the potential of physical harm, we must also be prepared to step in to stop situations of potential personal harm through inappropriate “comments, jokes, songs, etc.”

Far too many times we hear of young people attempting to or succeeding in harming themselves as a result of hurtful language, unsolicited physical harm, social isolation or marginalization, and so on. We don't want such a story to emerge about a young person in our unit--especially if we were aware of the conduct toward that individual but did nothing to prevent or stop it. Studies have shown that LGBT youth are at substantially higher risk for bullying and self-harming behaviors. Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24. Gay and bisexual youth are 4 times more likely, and questioning youth are 3 times more likely, to attempt suicide as their straight peers. And gay youth who come from highly rejecting families are over 8 times as likely to have attempted suicide as their gay and bisexual peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection. We must be a safety net for our Scouts, in the event that their families are not accepting of them. We must be ever-watchful over those in our charge and intervene whenever necessary to not only stop hurtful language and conduct but also to educate and mentor those engaged in targeting a more vulnerable member of our program.

TRAINER TIP: Pause for some discussion time. This is likely a topic that will elicit extended discussion and comment so the instructor should be prepared to facilitate yet contain the discussion into the parameters of growth, awareness and understanding for all. The local culture of where this training is taking place will have a large impact on how this discussion goes. Be prepared for pushback and lack of participation from some attendees. Be aware of the time remaining for the rest of your training course.

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Nonverbal Communication and Welcoming Environments

Time allotted: 15 minutes

Many of us understand non-verbal communication from other leadership and training options available within and outside of the BSA. We would be remiss if, during this course, we didn't at least consider the impact of nonverbal communication in the context of creating welcoming environments.

Nearly anyone who has spent any amount of time mentoring a young person understands that they are generally quite perceptive of the people and world around them. Therefore, how you communicate with the members of your unit can either greatly enhance your abilities as a leader or destroy all confidence and credence in your leadership ability. When we lose the trust and confidence of those we lead, we have lost our ability to lead by example.

We all have personal opinions and ideas that influence the way that we communicate with others. As leaders we have to develop the ability to honestly articulate our positions without disparaging the positions of those we lead or interact with. Seek to approach discussion on a contextual or intellectual level rather than an emotional one. There may be times when we have to state that we need to walk away for a few minutes to gather our thoughts before re-engaging with someone of differing thought process. Seek to earnestly converse with others, sit or stand face-to-face, use active-listening techniques by either paraphrasing what is being said by the other person or by inserting verbal indicators such as (I see, that's interesting; what do you mean by that?) to let the person know that you are engaged in the conversation.

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TRAINER TIP: Here is an opportunity for some role-play exercises to illustrate different active-listening techniques. You can have two participants try to role-play a scenario where a Scout is coming out to his Scoutmaster, or a scenario where a Scout is complaining to their Scoutmaster about another kid who he thinks “might be gay.” Try it once before reading through the tips below, and then consider having them try it again after a discussion on these tips.

- Attempt to eliminate distractors to communication between you and the other person. Sit on the same side of the table rather than using the table as a security barrier between you and the other person.
- Inform others in the area if they approach you as you are talking that you will be with them in a few minutes. This lets the other conversation participant know that you value their input and feel that your conversation with them is important.
- Be aware of facial expressions, eye rolling, breathing style, etc. that may indicate that you are “tolerating” rather than accepting other members. Would you use the same non-verbal expressions with your spouse? Significant other? Family member? Best friend?
- Listen with a compassionate ear when you as a leader are approached by a member who is seeking your counsel on a situation that may be occurring within or outside of the Scouting environment.
- In the words of Dr. Stephen Covey (7 Habits of Highly Effective People⁴), seek first to understand, and then to be understood.
- Understand the impact of symbols, printed materials, etc. as a matter of perception that may be misunderstood in contradiction with your true intent. If you believe that misperception has occurred, seek to alleviate the misperception by sharing your position and view of the subject matter at hand with tact and respect. *For example, a Scout may show up to a meeting one night with his fingernails painted, or with a rainbow flag sticker on his water bottle. Some people might see this and think that he’s either trying to make a provocative statement, or that it’s a sign he’s gay. However, there are many possible explanations behind these symbols, and you cannot know his intentions for sure unless he tells you. You should always strive to avoid making assumptions.*

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In many instances we can be much more effective leaders if we understand both the spoken and unspoken message that may be being sent to a recipient communicator. We cannot know what another person is dealing with or going through at any given point in time without them telling us. We can only know how we will react regardless of a topic or circumstance of communication if we are prepared to listen and receive as much as we are prepared to speak and discuss.

TRAINER TIP: Pause for some discussion time. This may be the most difficult section of the course in that participant engages. Traits and tendencies have likely developed and become entrenched in who they are by the time they become BSA leaders. Instructors should be prepared to take discussions offline if needed in order to retain focus on the course content as a whole.

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Enhancing Facility Privacy

Time allotted: 10 minutes

One of the first natural ‘topics of concern’ with the recent membership change is “How do we accommodate shower and personal latrine situations to maintain and ensure privacy for all?” Rest assured that nothing has really changed in this respect. We have been utilizing private facilities with all sorts of people for a long long time. The only change is that now you may know an individual more completely than you did before.

The real situation at hand is how to enhance personal privacy of every member as much as possible in communal situations.

Showers

- The Guide to Safe Scouting should always be the go to reference for ‘how to’ maintain privacy and dignity in communal situations. As “The Guide” changes so must we be willing to change our outlook to maintain compliance with the document.
- Private Shower Stalls – Many of our facilities have already converted from open bay style showers to individual shower and changing stalls. This is probably the best option available to maintain dignity and privacy for all. As long as personal respect and integrity are a component of the BSA program, it really shouldn’t matter who is showering beside whom in a private shower stall implementation. Private Shower and Changing Stalls can be implemented very inexpensively through installation of PVC or thin metal piping and shower curtains that are replaced as they become worn or torn. More permanent facility modifications utilizing doorframes and opaque or translucent glass can be implemented as time and budget permit.
- Care should be taken NOT to attempt to introduce sexual orientation into current practices of age and gender separation of shower and restroom facilities. An individual’s orientation does not imply that interactions and activities with other BSA members indicates any specific ‘attraction’ to any given individual. Rather than segregating heterosexual and non-heterosexual members (potentially creating a

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hostile environment for either party), a better option would be to encourage individuals who may feel 'uncomfortable' to return at a time when the cause of their personal discomfort is no longer a factor in specific facility usage. It is not necessary to inquire as to the specific reason for their personal discomfort - **unless bullying may be occurring**. If you have reason to believe that bullying may be occurring, you need to discuss this with the other adult leaders and plan accordingly. Discussing appropriate responses to bullying are beyond the scope of this training session.

TRAINER TIP: Pause for some discussion time. Eliciting discussion from the course participants can reveal additional solutions that may not be already covered in this curriculum. Reiterate that the goal of this training segment is to enhance privacy, dignity and respect for ALL BSA participants.”

Sleeping Arrangements

In the BSA outdoor experience we utilize multiple methods from sleeping in tents, to cabins to “under the stars.”

Tents – One of the primary points to remember in tenting situations is that often, tent-mates are not assigned, they are chosen by the individuals involved. If this is the case in your unit there is really not much consideration that needs to be expended on sleeping arrangements. Again, many types of people have been involved in the Scouting program for many years. Now, we just may have more insight into each other as fellow Scouts and Scouters than we had before.

There may be situations where a Scout or parent expresses a desire not to share tent space with a particular person for a variety of reasons. Regardless of the reason for the request, in situations like these the unit leader should seek to accommodate those requests to the extent possible. This may mean approaching the unit committee to obtain additional equipment as needed for recurring situations of individual accommodation

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requests. If the accommodations being requested are not logistically possible, the individual making the request should be informed that their request is not possible to meet so that they can consider other options as needed. For example, perhaps they can bring their own equipment.

Cabins – For the most part, BSA already maximizes privacy in sleeping situations for cabin situations to the extent possible. If private changing areas are required or desired in a cabin camping situation, this can be easily accomplished through utilizing visual barriers inside the sleeping facility. Similar to makeshift private shower stalls, a little PVC pipe, some shower curtains and a corner of a cabin can make a suitable changing area for those who wish to utilize such an option. Additionally, a few pieces of rope with plastic drop cloths or blankets can produce the same opportunity without significant effort where such an option is needed. As stated previously, the provisions of The Guide to Safe Scouting must be maintained at all Scouting events and meetings. Adherence to such provisions will enhance the efforts that you choose to emplace to build privacy into sleeping accommodations.

TRAINER TIP: Pause for some discussion time. Eliciting discussion from the course participants can reveal additional solutions that may not be already covered in this curriculum. Engaging participants in discussion and problem solving will yield a by-product of enhanced likelihood of ‘participant buy in’ as they are given an opportunity to become part of the solution on their own terms.

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Conclusion

Time allotted: 5 minutes

In this course we have covered the potentially challenging aspects of creating welcoming environments at a unit level as our organization grows and adapts to a rapidly changing society.

We have discussed some logistical considerations for Scouting events and facilities. Regardless of the guidelines provided to us by our Chartering Organizations for choosing adult leadership, we will all likely be engaged in cross-unit events that will require our awareness and leadership as we seek to engage with other BSA members.

Many of us work for companies that do not tolerate hostile work environments—in fact, 90% of the Fortune 500 prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. We want all BSA members to benefit from the program, feel welcome as contributors and participants of the program, and ultimately to encourage their families and friends to become active, engaged members as well. We have to walk the walk and not just talk the talk. We are obliged to implement National Council membership policies as we continue to grow in our BSA programs.

We discussed how to lead by example through awareness of nonverbal communications. This particular topic is a whole course by itself. If you are interested in additional communications training, please utilize the training resources available to you through your local Council or through BSA/OA resource sites.

We all must ultimately decide what type of BSA leaders we will be. We can embrace growth and enhance our abilities as leaders through training - to the benefit of those with whom we are charged to lead. Or we can resist change and ultimately create environments in which we struggle to merely survive - rather than environments in which we thrive and grow. We all lead by example—will your example enhance your relationship with those you lead or potentially degrade that relationship by creating barriers to trust and confidence in those members under your charge? The choice is yours to make.

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Appendix A: Mystery Meal Planning

Materials: The only materials required for this game are paper and pen, or a whiteboard and markers.

Overview: Trainees will review a proposed meal plan for a campout. The goal is to create a menu that works for all trainees. One trainee will be selected to play the role of someone who is Jewish and keeps kosher. The other trainees will not know this, and this fact may not be revealed to them during the game unless they figure it out on their own.

Purpose: This game is designed to help people understand the challenges of working together as a BSA unit while one person is forced to hide an important part of their identity which impacts their daily life. In most cases, the only way that trainees will figure out what's "special" about the selected trainee is if they are Jewish or know others who are. The same concept applies to working with LGBT people in Scouting.

Setup: Inform the group that you'll be giving them a meal plan for a campout, and as a group they need to review it and make any necessary changes to ensure that it works for everyone. Then, select one trainee to be your "special" trainee. Pull them aside and inform them that, for the purposes of this game, they are Jewish and keep kosher. Give them a slip of paper with the dietary restrictions for their reference (see below). Ensure they understand the rules of the game, listed below.

Dietary Restrictions for "Special" Trainee:

1. You cannot eat rabbit or pork.
2. You cannot eat shellfish such as lobsters, oysters, shrimp, clams and crab.
3. You cannot eat any dairy products (even in small quantity) and meat in the same meal.

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Rules of the Game:

1. Trainees must create a menu that works completely for everyone in the group.
2. Trainees must keep the menu as close as possible to the original one provided.
3. Selected trainee must not be satisfied until the menu is completely kosher.
4. Selected trainee must not reveal what is wrong with the menu, nor their reasons for not accepting a menu. Unless someone guesses their reasoning, in which case they can acknowledge it.
5. Selected trainee cannot object to individual ingredients or items on the menu. They must simply indicate whether each meal listed will or will not work for them.

Starting Menu:

Saturday Breakfast

- Scrambled eggs, bacon, toast with butter and jam, orange juice, and coffee.

Saturday Lunch

- Cold cut sandwiches - roast beef, chicken, turkey, cheese, mayo, lettuce, and tomato.
- Strawberries, oranges, and apples.

Saturday Dinner

- Jambalaya! - chicken, pork sausage, shrimp, onion, green pepper, celery, tomatoes, rice.
- Brownies and ice cream.
- Milk and water.

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Starting Menu - Problems & Solutions listed for “Special” Trainee:

Saturday Breakfast

- Scrambled eggs, bacon, toast with jam, orange juice, and coffee.
 - Problems: bacon is made of pork.
 - Solution: remove bacon from menu, or substitute with a different meat. There is no dairy in this meal, so a different meat would be acceptable.

Saturday Lunch

- Cold cut sandwiches - roast beef, chicken, turkey, cheese, mayo, lettuce, and tomato.
- Strawberries, oranges, and apples.
 - Problems: mixing dairy and meat in the same meal.
 - Solution: remove cheese from menu. Mayo is not considered dairy, and is okay.

Saturday Dinner

- Jambalaya! - chicken, pork sausage, shrimp, onion, green pepper, celery, tomatoes, rice.
- Brownies and ice cream.
- Milk and water.
 - Problems: pork sausage and the mixing of dairy (in brownies and ice cream, also milk) and meat.
 - Solution: remove pork sausage from menu. Also remove brownies, ice cream, and milk from menu.

Reflection on Game:

- What was the nature of the task?
- What were some of the challenges you experienced in solving the task?
- What did we lose by limiting what you know about everyone?
- Can you think of ways in which placing some parts of our lives “off limits” could be likewise constraining?
- How does this experience resonate with working with LGBT people in Scouting?

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Appendix B: Sources

1. <http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/study-younger-men-more-likely-to-consider-being-gay-a-core-part-of-identity/#gs.ob5udvQ>
2. http://www.scouting.org/filestore/training/membership/pdf/Unit_Implementation_FAQ.pdf
3. <http://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2015/07/27/bsa-amends-adult-leadership-standards-heres-change-means-scout-unit/>
4. 7 Habits of Highly Effective