



## Cub Scout Day Camp and Twilight Camp Fourteen Perfect Planning Tips

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You can make Cub Scout day camp or twilight camp a fun and memorable learning experience for everyone involved. All you need to do is Be Prepared. First, some definitions:

**Cub Scout day camp:** An organized outdoor experience for a group of Cub Scouts, typically run by districts and/or councils. Trained adults guide Cub Scouts through experiences you just can't replicate during a traditional indoor den or pack meeting. Day camp typically runs from 9 or 9:30 a.m. until 3:30 or 4 p.m. The camp can be as short as two days or as long as ten.

**Cub Scout Twilight Camp:**  
Same thing as Cub Scout day camp, only at night. Typically starts around 5 and goes until 8:30 or 9:00pm.

### Guides to Cub Scout Day Camp and Twilight Camp

First, check out the BSA's Day Camp Administration guide, published in 2014. It's available [here](#) as a PDF. For another perspective, I'd like to share the guide below. It's the work of Dave Schwartzberg, an assistant Scoutmaster with Troop 69 of Glenview, Ill., part of the Northeast Illinois Council. He created it as part of his Wood Badge ticket. The photos and story idea come from Stephanie Brooks, the Northeast Illinois Council's marketing and alumni director.



# 14 Tips for Planning Cub Scout Day Camp or Twilight Camp

By Dave Schwartzberg

## Opening thoughts

When my eldest son joined Cub Scouts as a Tiger, our Scouting first experience together didn't begin with den or pack meetings. It began with the Northeast Illinois Council Twilight Camp. While the name "twilight camp" implies camping, the event is purely a day camp program providing an outdoor enrichment experience. Cub Scouts emulate council-level camping activities, such as archery, rock climbing, handicrafts, water rockets, hikes and other theme-based developmental activities. But all of the overnight equipment stays home. When looking back at my son's first experiences with twilight camp, he was wide-eyed, enthusiastic and eager to participate. To be honest, so was I.

## Tip 1: Figure out the when and where

The first thing any volunteer, parent or equipment supplier will ask is "when?"

To make it easier for people to attend your camp program, have this information available before you begin promoting the event. Get it on the district and council calendar as soon as possible. Next they'll ask "where?" Venue consistency year over year can be very valuable. Experience with the venue helps when training staff and volunteers. It allows you to reuse some previously created documentation. Knowing the venue, Cub Scouts and parents who had a positive experience in prior years will be lining up to return the following year.

## Tip 2: Recruit volunteers

Be ready with an answer when someone asks "where can I help?"

Each activity station will need at least two to four people running it. In few cases, we've had only one person run an activity station. That's a great opportunity to coach the lone volunteer on how to recruit a parent or two to help out as the dens rotate through. Helpful parents make great volunteers for next year. Understand that some volunteers may not want to help with planning or setup. They may only want to be there on the big day. That's fine. Understanding who those people are and assigning them the appropriate task will help improve the success rate for your twilight camp. Remember to ask Cubmasters to help recruit volunteers. They know who in their pack is an active contributor.



## Tip 3: Identify a successor

At my 2016 Twilight Camp, we had two camp directors: the main camp director worked with the Cub Scouts, while the assistant camp director handled administrative infrastructure. Finding someone to act as an assistant camp director allows the camp director to focus on using his or her gut to solve problems. This assistant could be someone who is getting trained on how to run a day camp program. He or she could be your next camp director.

It's always helpful to find a replacement before you need one. Tip 4: Schedule planning meetings — but not too many. Volunteers are people who have their own lives; Scouting is just a part of it. Having an in-person meeting monthly is reasonable, but your mileage may vary. The key is to keep volunteers informed of current challenges or potential problems.

The volunteers want to help. They want to know about how camp planning is progressing. They love hearing the

registration numbers are growing. They love hearing about how problems are being solved or even help solving them. For example, we had an issue with parking spaces. There is an elementary school adjacent to the park we use, and we were having communication challenges

with the school to receive approval to use their lot. The two new camp directors didn't know someone on staff already had a pre-existing relationship with the school principal.

Had the team been made aware of the problem with parking, the results would have been different. Lesson learned: ask for help when you need it.

#### **Tip 5: Plan for bad weather**

After six years of no weather encumbrances, my first year as camp co-director saw heavy rains and thunderstorms the night before the first day of camp. The park was flooded in several locations. The archery area was sinking. With council consultation, we decided to cancel camp for the first day. We didn't have a call tree prepared, so it fell upon us to use email, mobile phones and more emails to get the word out. Still, we had about four people show up who hadn't gotten the message. Next, we reworked the schedule so that every Scout who attended the remaining two days would participate in every activity. The task was arduous and frustrating but worth it.

#### **Tip 6: Don't make food an afterthought**

Eating together is one way people like to bond. We make the best effort to accommodate as many dietary restrictions as possible. We are very clear in communicating that we cannot accommodate vegans or religious dietary restrictions. We recommend that they bring their own food. Having a menu publicized in advance will help people know what foods will be served and if they need to bring dinner with them or not. Make meal time a positive experience for everyone.

#### **Tip 7: Communicate well — before and during**

Getting the word out is crucial. Publishing a digital parents' guide has been very beneficial to us because it includes all the dates, times, map of the park, emergency contact information (including council), emergency procedures based upon BSA standards for day camps and more. During camp, we used handheld radios for communications. They helped with parking, connecting lost families with their dens, calming upset parents, organizing the team, handling medical concerns and more. Borrow radios from your local council or a volunteer.

#### **Tip 8: Monitor registration numbers**

We prefer registration to be online via the council portal. A very helpful feature of online registration is being able to monitor the current number and rank of registered Cub Scouts, along with the ability to download reports. The report includes pack, rank, name, parent's email and contact information. We use this information to communicate with parents and organize the Cub Scouts into dens by pack and rank. We contact Cubmasters of packs with low to no registration to ask them if they have questions. We contact Cubmasters of packs with high numbers to thank them for helping make day camp a success.

#### **Tip 9: Make check-in smooth**

Registration is online, but check-in is always in person. On the first day of camp, your planning will be tested the most. It will be your busiest day and the day you make new policies and procedures on the fly, especially during Cub Scout check-in.

Potential issues are the pace of the line, incomplete forms, late arrivals, inclement weather, missing payments and more. We calculated the check-in time per Cub Scout to be about two minutes when the process runs smoothly. If your camp has 150 Cub Scouts, that's five hours if you process families one at a time! Instead, you should process Cub Scouts in multiple lanes. Have several lanes of people welcoming families, collecting forms, checking off den assignments and collecting cash. Next, they are redirected to another area to get their shirt, snack and identification wristband. A separate area handles any "exceptions." The final set of volunteers identifies the den the Scout is assigned to, informs them where to go and answers parent questions. Working together as a team keeps the flow steady and everyone happy.

**Tip 10: Organize Cub Scouts into dens**

For us, organizing the Cub Scouts into dens is the best way to maximize activity flow and Scout satisfaction. These aren't necessarily the same as the Cub Scouts' home dens. These dens are just used for day camp. The dens stay together from flag-raising until the colors are retrieved.

**Tip 11: Make activities fun**

You want the Cub Scouts to have the opportunity to experience all activities that camp has to offer. Shooting sports, archery, slingshots, a rope bridge, a rock wall, soccer, whiffle ball, ultimate Frisbee, beep ball and more get them moving and having fun. Don't forget to engage the mind as well, with STEM activities and handicrafts. A mix of physical and mental activities will give the Cub Scouts enough variety to long to come back annually. You will see the results in the survey response comments. Much can be discussed about activity stations, but the biggest take away is to keep with your theme.

**Tip 12: Consider a theme**

In 2016, the theme was CSI (Cub Scout Investigators). Our crafts team created staff badges that were fake plastic police badges held on a light chain and black mount. The staff wrote their name on the badge for identification. This wasn't very expensive, and it was fun. At the crafts table, Cub Scouts casted their footprints and fingerprinted themselves onto a fake booking form. We were fortunate to be able to get uniformed Illinois State Police officers to help process the Cub Scouts. Having the law officers there enhanced the overall experience for the Cub Scouts.

**Tip 13: Utilize your Den Chiefs**

Den chiefs are Boy Scouts who help with Cub Scouting. It's great for the Boy Scouts because they can receive service hours and gain leadership experience. It's great for the Cub Scouts because they interact with Boy Scouts and are encouraged to stay in the program longer. Boy Scouts are there to help the parents keep track of the Cub Scouts and help the Cub Scouts when they are in need of coaching. The Boy Scouts are *not* to take over the role of Akela while the parents have the evening free for quality time with their smartphones.

**Tip 14: Make your campfire count**

The campfire program really brings the entire camping experience together for the Cub Scouts and their families, especially those families new to Cub Scouting. The entire experience comes to a conclusion via fire, songs and skits. It ends with everyone feeling like they had a successful twilight camp program. This will help motivate them to stick with the Cub Scouting program to see what's new for the next year of twilight camp. Eventually, the Cub Scouts will graduate to Boy Scouts and, hopefully, be there to help the new cadre of Cub Scouts the same way they were aided when they were younger.