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SCOUTS AND CHILD PROTECTION

SCOUTS – PROUD AND PROFESSIONAL



Parents Child Protection Guide

The NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People, Ms Gillian Calvert's child-safe, child-friendly message of support

"I encourage all organisations that work with kids to take steps to become child-safe and child-friendly. Kids are safer from abuse and harm when organisations adopt good risk management practices and build a culture that respects, values and includes children and young people.

I commend Scouts Australia NSW for making a positive contribution to making child-safe, child-friendly organisations a reality."

- For over 50 years, when there was no legal screening requirements for youth leaders, Scouts insisted all leaders have referees and submit to a full police criminal record check, which is repeated at varying times during their service.
- In accord with expert advice Scouts provide **SUPPORT** and not **COUNSELLING**.

CHILD PROTECTION IN SCOUTS

The NSW Branch has a special team, consisting of three commissioners, whose task is to oversee child protection and support members. This team, under the leadership of an Assistant Chief Commissioner, is made up of individuals whose special qualifications are allied to the task.

Within 24 hours complaints are acted upon and a decision made to refer the matter on to DoCS - the Police or, if appropriate, dealt with under the team's supervision.

WHY SUPPORT AND NOT COUNSELLING?

Counselling requires meeting individual needs. Parents usually have concerns about who is counselling their child. The level of specialised training, the style used, even the religious persuasion of the counsellor are all important issues worthy of consideration. We believe that the family medical practitioner, religious advisor or local health service can be the best source for a referral.

Today, on the media, we hear words such as debriefing – defusing. They are both forms of **SUPPORT**. Frequently reactions appear 24 to 72 hours after an event and in some cases are seen even a week or two afterwards when the need for 'counselling' may surface. Research and experience shows that in the majority of cases however, the most effective form of help is support.

What helps the victim most - rushing to a counsellor for counselling OR being with someone who can listen, empathise and show understanding, as feelings and emotions are expressed. Even better expressed to Mum with perhaps a shoulder to cry on or a hug?

In those rare cases where, after a week or two, a child is still not coping, then it's time to talk to your medical practitioner, or religious adviser. Get their advice as to a suitably qualified counsellor. To rush the child straight to a counsellor often gives them the thought that their reaction to a problem is worse than it really is.

Hence Scouts follow the advice of experts, undertake research, learn from our own experiences and provide **SUPPORT**, leaving those rare cases where counselling is needed to the families' choice of specialists.

SCOUTS AND THE AUTHORITIES.

Scouts enjoy a healthy relationship with **DoCS** and the **Child Protection sections of the NSW Police Force**. We immediately forward on any issue that is within their area of responsibility.

We prefer to have the complaint come to Scouts first (through Scouts confidential email address childprotection@nsw.scouts.com.au or to your Regional Office). This enables us to take **immediate** steps to maximise the protection of all of our youth members.

If someone goes directly to DoCS or the Police we are unable to get any form of alert while the investigation proceeds perhaps toward Court. This can often take months and during that period we are not permitted by law to know who or what is involved, hence, Scouts is unable to take the necessary protective steps in the quickest possible time. *(Police cases are extremely rare, compared to the number of leaders in Scouting)*

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People oversee the establishment of screening and standards for those involved with children and young people. We are in ongoing communications with the Commission's officers and biannually meet to discuss our screening standards and procedures. Fortunately they have never had to make any changes to Scouting systems and have asked to keep some of our material for their use and records. The Deputy Commissioner for Scouts served for number of years on the Commissioner for Children's Advisory panel. At the time when the Child Protection Acts were being reviewed Scouts was asked to make a formal submission to the Minister.

TRAINING AND RESOURCES FOR LEADERS.

An eight page booklet titled 'Personal Protection Policies and Procedures' (LSG17) outlining the standards and care we expect our leaders to abide by, is issued to all prospective leaders, during their introductory interview, and discussed as training progresses. You can read a copy at: <http://www.nsw.scouts.com.au/Child-Protection/default.aspx>.

Before they are appointed as a leader, each person undertakes in-service training for some months as well as several days of training within special training establishments delivered by skilled trainers. They cover subjects such as scouting skills; programming; First Aid; the Scout system associated with the age group.

The other very important subjects covered in the courses, are associated with the development, protection and well being of youth members. Subjects such as Child Development, Understanding the Child, Child Protection, Dealing with Problems, Risk Assessment, to mention a few.

Parents have their own special section on our web site under Parents / Child Protection. On this site you will see a sample of the various information guides available to our leaders, many of which you might find useful, just go to <http://www.nsw.scouts.com.au/Child-Protection/default.aspx>. In particular you might even care to read. *Leader News on the Web - June 2005 (Teenagers; LSG 16 Peanut and Sting Allergies (November 2005) and others.*

HOW CAN YOU HELP PROTECT YOUR CHILD? (Drugs – sex- drink - extreme risk taking)

Let's not reinvent the wheel. In NSW the schools do a magnificent job through the program called 'Safe Living'.

This covers topics such as molestation, car accident, swimming and diving, stranger danger, etc., in a format which has been well researched. They have all the latest DVDs, techniques and methods available to them.

What educators really want and need from parents and youth groups, etc., is help in reinforcing the message.

Children shouldn't be lectured but simply asked an occasional question or two that provides the opportunity to reinforce the message. Avoid talking about sexual assaults, just focus on things they raise; think is wrong, or makes them feel bad.

Ensure understanding by clarifying – for example:

* **"Who don't you talk to?"** (*If they say stranger, ask them to describe a stranger... in many cases the stranger's description will come straight out of a horror movie rather than simply "someone I don't know"*)

* **"When do you sing out NO?"** (*Anytime someone suggests something or attempts something you think is wrong or not nice. Today sex is a small issue compared to drugs, such as Ecstasy, drinking, or driving with someone drunk*)

A good game is to have your children compete against each other seeing who can sing out NO the loudest or most aggressively etc. Introduce at an early stage, the earlier the better. If only one child just encourage him/her to practice against you.

Then follow up with the questions **"When do we say No? How do we say NO?"** (*soft, firm, angry*)

The other phrase to practice is **"GO-A-WAY"** three distinct sounds; not the typical Australian 'goway'.

REGION OFFICES.

Sydney North
 South Metropolitan
 Greater Western Sydney
 Hume
 South Coast and Tablelands
 Hunter and Coastal
 The Golden West.
 North Coast
 North West
 Riverina
 The State Office:
 Scouts Australia (NSW Branch)

2 Ellis St CHATSWOOD 2067 (Phone) 9411 4088
 1 Carrington Ave HURSTVILLE 2220 (phone) 9570 4525
 8 Baden Powell Place WINSTON HILLS 2153 (phone) 96392488
 P.O Box 1153 CAMPELLTOWN 2560 (phone) 46284994
 P.O Box 200 PORT KEMBLA 2505 (phone) 4274 1099
 P.O Box 854 THE JUNCTION NSW 2291 (phone) 4929 1760
 P.O Box 1991 BATHURST 2795 (PHONE) 6334 3464
 P.O Box 169 GLENREAGH NSW 2450 (phone) 6649 0975
 PO Box 353 TAMWORTH NSW 2340 - 02 6766 4189
 P.O Box 2202 WAGGA WAGGA 2650 (phone) 6921 1870
 P.O Box 125 LIDCOMBE(PO) 1852 .(Phone) 97359000 (fax) 9735 9001

REMEMBER MOST YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EXTREMELY RESILIENT AND QUICKLY BOUNCE BACK