

# Retention of Military Youth in Scouting

Creating a retention plan for military youth in Scouting America which was previously known as Boy Scouts of America requires a tailored approach that acknowledges the unique challenges these families face, such as frequent relocations, deployment of parents, and extended separations. Military youth often experience significant disruptions, and a well-crafted retention plan can help keep them engaged, connected, and supported within the Boy Scouts. Below are key strategies to create an effective retention plan:

## 1. Provide a Strong Sense of Community and Belonging

- **Buddy System:** Pair military youth with a scout of similar age or interests to create a support network. This helps with transitioning to new troops, especially in cases of relocation.
- **Peer Support Groups:** Create small groups or mentoring opportunities that help military youth share experiences, challenges, and advice with one another.
- **Family Events:** Host regular family activities or get-togethers to strengthen the bond between scouts, their families, and the troop, helping them to feel at home even during transitions.

## 2. Flexibility and Support for Transitions

- **Flexible Advancement:** Develop a system where scouts can advance at their own pace to accommodate frequent moves or absences. Allow them to continue their progress remotely if needed.
- **Portable Records:** Maintain digital records of each scout's progress and achievements so that they can be easily transferred when the family relocates. This ensures scouts don't lose credit for activities or rank advancements when they move to a new troop.
- **Transition Welcome Packages:** Provide a “welcome packet” for military families when they move to a new area, offering troop contacts, event calendars, and information about upcoming activities. This helps to integrate them smoothly into their new troop.

## 3. Provide Emotional and Social Support

- **Youth Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship programs where older scouts, especially those from military families, can support and guide younger scouts. This creates a stable source of peer support.
- **Emotional Resilience Training:** Incorporate lessons or workshops on dealing with separation, deployments, and adjusting to new environments. Offering mental health resources or having a counselor available can help address challenges unique to military children.
- **Special Events for Deployment:** When a parent is deployed, the troop can organize special events or celebrations to honor the scout's service and show appreciation, reinforcing their sense of pride and connection.

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## 4. Involve Parents and Families

- **Parent Engagement:** Actively involve military parents in troop activities and planning, recognizing their unique experiences and needs. Hosting regular parent meetings or check-ins can help parents feel connected and engaged in the program.
- **Virtual Participation Options:** For deployed parents or those unable to attend in person, provide virtual opportunities for parents to stay involved, whether through video calls, online meetings, or watching troop events remotely.

## 5. Address the Challenges of Frequent Relocation

- **National/Regional Scout Network:** Utilize Scouting America's national or regional networks to help military families find and connect with new troops before they relocate. Offering troop recommendations or pre-arrival contact can ease transitions. And utilize the Scout transfer data form.
- **Online and Hybrid Scouting Opportunities:** Leverage digital platforms to offer virtual meetings, merit badge workshops, or activities for scouts to stay engaged even when on the move. This can help sustain interest and progress between troop meetings.
- **Create a Military Youth Program:** Some Scouting America councils have started offering military youth-specific programs, which recognize the unique challenges these families face. Having specialized support for military youth can make scouting more accessible and relevant to their needs.

## 6. Leverage Recognition and Incentives

- **Deployment/Service Recognition:** Create special recognition awards for scouts whose parents are deployed or actively serving, celebrating their sacrifices and resilience.
- **Rewards for Longevity:** Offer incentives such as achievement pins or certificates for scouts who stay with the troop over a long period of time, or for those who overcome significant challenges related to relocations and deployments.
- **Highlight Military History:** Include specific activities, such as merit badges or community service projects that honor veterans, active-duty service members, or the military lifestyle. Scouts can feel more connected if the program aligns with their family's values.

## 7. Consistent Communication and Transparency

- **Regular Updates:** Keep families informed about troop activities, upcoming events, and changes in schedules. Consistent communication helps military families stay on track, even if they are transitioning between locations.
- **Clear Expectations:** Outline clear expectations for participation and what is needed to remain engaged in scouting activities, understanding that military families often deal with unpredictability.

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- **Help with Logistics:** For families dealing with the logistics of moves, deployments, or other military-related challenges, offer assistance with transportation, event planning, and troop registration.

## 8. Recognize and Celebrate Military Youth

- **Patriotic Celebrations:** Host events around key military holidays such as Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Independence Day. Involve military youth in service projects, parades, or ceremonies that make them feel valued and honored.
- **Support for Deployed Parents:** Create "send-off" events or care packages for deployed parents, encouraging the scouts to contribute through writing letters, making crafts, or sending pictures. This fosters a connection between the scout, their parent, and the community.

## 9. Partnerships with Military Support Organizations

- **Collaboration with Military Support Services:** Work with military family support organizations such as the Army Community Service (ACS), Airman and Family Readiness Centers, or Marine Corps Family Programs. This partnership can provide additional resources for both scouts and their families, including opportunities for financial assistance, family counseling, or educational support.

## 10. Regular Evaluation and Adaptation

- **Feedback Surveys:** Collect feedback from military families on the effectiveness of the retention strategies. This ensures the program remains flexible and responsive to their unique needs.
- **Adapt the Plan Based on Input:** Regularly assess and refine the retention plan based on what is working and what challenges remain. Military families' needs evolve, and the plan should be dynamic enough to adapt to those changes.

By implementing these strategies, you can create a more supportive and adaptable Boy Scouts environment for military youth. The key is to provide stability, connection, and recognition while ensuring the program can flexibly respond to the unique demands of military life.