

Den Chief Leader's Guide

Introduction:

So now you have discovered that you are the proud leader of a Den that has one more member – a Den Chief! The only problem is that no one ever told you what a Den Chief does.

This short Guide is meant to give you a good idea of what Den Chiefs are and how they can help you in your role as Den Leader. In this Guide, we will briefly discuss the following topics:

- The Role of the Den Chief
- Where Den Chiefs come from & how do they know what to do?
- Your responsibility to the Den Chief
- Your Den Chief's responsibility to You & the Den
- What a Den Chief is NOT
- Communication with your Den Chief
- Using Den Chiefs at Pack Meetings
- Den Chiefs as links to Boy Scouting
- Den Chiefs Success Checklist
- Age and Maturity Level of Den Chiefs

Den Chiefs can be the best thing that ever happened to you, or they can simply present you with more work to do. If you learn how to use your Den Chief effectively, delegate responsibility to them, and then trust them to do the job you both agreed to, you might find that your job is much easier than you thought it would be.

So the first thing that you will want to do is to learn as much about Den Chiefs as possible. One of the best suggestions is for you to attend the Den Chief training course that the Den Chiefs themselves will be attending. That way you can meet many Den Chiefs and find out how they are being trained for their position.

The Role of the Den Chief:

Your Den Chief's primary role is to be your Den's Activities Leader. You will already have your hands full planning the year in such a way so as to accomplish the goals of your particular level: Wolf, Bear, or 1st/2nd year Webelos. You will probably plan to work on either Achievement or Elective work at your Den Meetings. Your typical meeting will have a game or puzzle of some sort aimed at the age of your boys. You will spend some time at each meeting working on items that the boys can get signed off in their books. You will want to teach the Cubs and Webelos some responsibilities. This can be done by consistently holding an opening flag ceremony, consistently collecting dues each week, holding uniform inspections regularly, and preparing the boys for the monthly Pack meeting. You'll also no doubt use the monthly themes to help guide ideas that will lead into the monthly Pack meeting.

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Where Do Den Chiefs Come From?

Always from Boy Scout Troops! And if you are lucky, your Den Chief will have gone through the Cub Scout program also. It's best if your Den Chief has attended a Council sponsored Den Chief Training course, which is usually offered at least once or twice per year. Boy Scouts who wish to serve as Den Chiefs should be picked by their Scoutmaster for their level of maturity. A Den Chief should never be a Boy Scout who has taken this role because he did not get elected to any other Troop position. And it's best if the Den Chief can start work with your Den in the September timeframe when your program is getting started for the year.

Your Den Chief should look at his role as being a one year commitment. You might want to speak with him early on about this commitment to see what he is willing to commit to. Many Boy Scout Troops elect their leaders every 6 months. So the Den Chief job is unusual in that regard. But the Boy Scout can get credit towards his rank for each 6 month term that he serves as a Den Chief.

Your Responsibility to the Den Chief:

Use him properly – don't ignore him and don't assign him the wrong job. You as the adult will want to decide how you schedule the activities and how much of the Scout books will be covered during meetings. The Den Chief will not be making these decisions. But he will have to know what you plan to do and what you would like to see him do to support your plan. One of the best ways to make sure that your Den Chief knows what he is supposed to do is for you to show him your overall plan for the year. That way he can understand the total scope of what you will be covering.

Most Cub Scout Packs and Dens also follow the suggested National themes much more closely than Boy Scout Troops do. This is because Scout Troops plan their calendars to schedule beginner campout trips, and beginner Backpacking trips and so on in a "graduated" fashion so as to build boys up towards a major Summer activity such as a 50 mile Backpacking trip in the mountains.

Just as you plan for the monthly Pack meeting, Boy Scout Troops plan for the monthly campout.

Because you will probably want to stay close to the National monthly themes, your Den Chief will need to know these themes and plan activities to support them. In addition, you do not want the Den Chief to plan activities that compete with the Achievement or Elective work, or with the Activity pin work. It's always a good idea if you can see what your Den Chief plans to do before the meeting so that you both have time to change the activity if it does not fit your meeting plan.

There are many places to get ideas for activities that will fit your meeting plans. Share the resource list that you use with your Den Chief. He should already have a long

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list of resources that he can refer to based on his own experience in Scouts. But there are many good leader reference books that have hundreds of ideas. And you can always encourage your Den Chief to attend a POW WOW event and get a copy of the POW WOW book. These books have a lot of ideas from people from all over who have used the ideas with their own Dens. Other books like the "How To Book" can be valuable references for new and different activities.

Make sure that your Den Chief is not always relying on just a few games or activities. If this happens, it's possible that the Den Chief might just be getting a little lazy! So it's important that you speak with your Den Chief and discuss the meeting plans with him each week so that neither one of you is surprised. It's also important to plan timing so that the activity doesn't use up 40 minutes of your meeting!

Although you and your Den Chief will decide upon the best time to develop your plan for the year, and a time to plan the weekly meetings, it is very important to do a "post mortem" on each meeting. Even though you and your Den Chief may have everything completely ready for the meeting at the start, there are many times when something happens and your plans do not work as you had hoped. And if something seems to work especially well, you might want to use the same concept in the future.

In essence, you and your Den Chief are both learning throughout the year. You are learning what works and what doesn't work. You may also find that after you work with your Den Chief for a while, you may decide to do things a little differently than originally planned. If, for example, you find that your Den Chief is very much a self starter and does a good job handling weekly activities without much input from you, then you can maybe pull back on lots of planning and just have short phone conversations each week just to make sure that you're both in synch for the upcoming meeting.

But there will no doubt be times when you find that a meeting is pretty much a "disaster". Nothing seemed to work, the boys were definitely not interested in the subject of the meeting, and you blew out the "Conduct Candle" in the first minute! This type of meeting is one that will definitely require some "debriefing".

If you do not touch base with your Den Chief every week – yes every week – you will discover that some problems that you may run into tend to keep happening and you never get time to resolve them. Taking care of them quickly will make for smoother meetings as the year goes on. Also, you only have to deal with single issues. If you wait too long, then you may have to hold a long meeting with your Den Chief to discuss a whole bunch of issues. And the trouble with this is that it's really hard to remember a whole bunch of things. It's better to work on single issues over time than to try and fix a lot of things all at once.

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Your Den Chief's Responsibility to You & the Den:

One of the most important examples that a Den Chief can give to the Cubs or Webelos in your Den is to be present at meetings on time! And quite frankly, you may want your Den Chief to be at meetings at least 15 minutes early to help setup for the meeting and also go over the meeting agenda.

It's also very important that Den Chiefs wear their uniforms completely and correctly. I realize that in many Cub and Webelos Dens it is not a requirement that boys must wear Scout pants, shirts, belts, socks, neckerchiefs, slides, and so on. But as the boys grow older, they learn that wearing a uniform is something that they can be very proud of. And it involves wearing the complete uniform once they reach Boy Scouts. Younger boys can learn a valuable lesson from the older boys when they see them showing respect for authority, respect in the way they dress, and in the way they handle themselves during meetings.

Finally, once you and your Den Chief have agreed upon an agenda for each meeting, it is important that you be able to depend upon your Den Chief to do his job. So he should understand what his job is, be prepared to take charge of his portion of each meeting, and make sure that he treats each boy in the Den with respect, sensitivity, and fairness. You may need to coach the Den Chief a bit on this last part, because many times you may have one or more aggressive boys in a Den and they tend to want to do everything. Since it is very important that every boy be given a chance to participate in all events and be able to learn from group activities, you need to make sure that no boy is being left out much of the time. Your Den Chief might not be as aware of this as you need to be.

What a Den Chief Is NOT:

A Den Chief is NOT another Cub Scout. It is your responsibility to make sure that he does not simply become another "one of the boys" in your Den. And quite frankly, it is important that he not be seen as a competitor to the Cubs and Webelos. If anything, he is more like a big brother than a fellow Den member.

A Den Chief is also NOT a Denner. The reasons why the positions of Denner and Assistant Denner exist is to give the Cubs and Webelos a chance to experience some leadership tasks. Even if they do not do the job perfectly (and of course they will never do it the way YOU would have done it), they MUST be allowed the chance to "Do Their Best"! If a Den Chief begins to take over the role of the Denner or his assistant, then once again the boys in the Den are losing a great chance to learn some new "people" skills. And as you well know, the ability to control and organize any group of people is not an easy task. If the boys experience the difficulty of trying to control the Den, they develop a little more feeling for why they should listen when someone else has that job. They can learn to appreciate the problems IF they are allowed to experience them first hand.

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Finally, a Den Chief is NOT an adult. They should not be given the role of "Den Leader" so the "you can have some time off". Their job is to be the Activities Leader at meetings. The younger boys must see the relationship between you and the Den Chief as a role model for the way boys should show respect for adults. Your Den Chief MUST show respect for you so that the Den can understand that even a teenage boy must show respect for adults and listen to their requests. It's amazing at how this simple example rubs off. The younger boys see lots of things that you may not see. Believe me, they will be watching what the older boy in their Den does all the time. Because "They think he's cool"! Or in today's parlance, maybe I should say, they "think he's RAD"!

Communication with Your Den Chief:

Planning meetings: Yearly, weekly, Pack meetings, outing (field trips). Including your Den Chief in your meeting planning means that you can ask him to prepare an opening activity to keep the boys busy when they first arrive. Many times the boys arrive and are antsy to get started and you are saying goodbye to parents and trying to wait until everyone arrives. So you don't have time to also be teaching an opening activity. This is a perfect chance to use your Den Chief effectively.

But don't wait until the meeting starts to tell your Den Chief that he has to "keep the Cub Scouts busy for 5 minutes"! Communication is KEY!

It's also important to constantly reinforce the fact that you do not want your Den Chief doing something that the Cubs or Webelos should be doing. The first thing that comes to mind here is that your Den has a Denner. This is an important position for Cubs and Webelos, because it gives them a chance to be leaders in the Den. And the Denner has a set of responsibilities which may include things like collecting dues. Don't have the Den Chief doing a job that should be done by the Denner (or Assistant Denner), or you'll be missing an opportunity to teach the younger boys some responsibility. Besides, you probably already have in mind some ideas for what you might like the Denner and his assistant to do.

Using Den Chiefs at Pack Meetings:

Pack meetings are great opportunities for boys to be recognized for all of the work they have been doing in their Dens and at home. It's also a time to meet the rest of the Pack and have lots of fun!

BUT, it is possible for things to get a little bit wild at times if there is not enough supervision. Generally parents will help watch the boys at Pack meetings as compared to dropping them off and leaving at Den meetings. But parents also get involved with talking and meeting other families.

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This would be a great opportunity to take advantage of the help that a Den Chief could provide at Pack meetings. In fact, good Den Chiefs could be available to the Cubmaster where they are needed most! And that may not even be by watching the Den that they normally work with! But just like anything else, things work best if they are planned in advance. So it's best if the Den Chief can meet with the Cubmaster at least one week before a Pack meeting and work out details as to what job the Den Chief could take on at the Pack meeting.

You may even have more than one Den Chief in your Pack. If this occurs, the Cubmaster can actually have a small "staff" helping him/her. This would really make the meetings run efficiently if the Den Chiefs are used properly.

Den Chiefs should not be used as Disciplinarians, but they can be used to "occupy" hyperactive boys. And keeping boys busy is a way to avoid the need for discipline in the first place.

Since you have Tiger Cubs, Cub Scouts, and Webelos present at the Pack meeting, you may have to divide up the activities for the age range of the boys. If so, this is another great way to have Den Chiefs supervise one activity while the Cubmaster handles maybe a bigger group, depending on how many boys are in each age group.

And of course since the Den Chiefs are Boy Scouts, they can be invaluable in graduation ceremonies where Webelos are transitioning into Boy Scout Troops – even when the Webelos may not be going into their Troop.

Den Chiefs as Links to Boy Scouting:

I have heard many times that boys drop out of Scouting because they get bored with the program. And this often happens between first and second year Webelos because the Scouts do not see much difference in the program. They do not get new books, new neckerchiefs, new slides, new uniforms, or other visible symbols. So you can invent some differences. We used to give the 2nd year Webelos each a red vest in the Pack I was in so that they could "look different" than the 1st year Webelos and also have "earned" something different because of their age. You could have the boys switch from the blue shirt to the khaki shirt from 1st to 2nd year Webelos. (That's about the age where they will outgrow the blue shirt anyway!)

But regardless of what differences you may invent, the last year of the Cub Scout program is a time when the boys are definitely ready for adventure. And of course this will most often involve the great outdoors. Unless you happen to be a very energetic and outdoors person yourself, one of your best opportunities to stimulate the interest of your Den is to use a Den Chief to "introduce" some of the Boy Scout program. Your 2nd year Webelos will possibly want to go on an overnight campout with a Boy Scout Troop, and they may love to go on some day hikes with Boy Scouts. Quite a bit of good information

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can be passed on to your Den by Boy Scouts if they get time to talk, time which an outing provides.

But many of your Cubs and Webelos may never even reach 2nd year Webelos unless they see an exciting reason to stay in Scouting. The Boy Scout that you may have as a Den Chief may be the one chance for many boys to actually learn about the Boy Scout program. And some of the activities that Boy Scouts tell the Cub Scouts and Webelos about may have their eyes popping out!

So if our goal is to see most boys graduate from Webelos into Boy Scouting, a Den Chief can be a very key means of instilling the excitement inside the boys to WANT to move on to Boy Scouting.

Your Checklist for Success:

- Always plan the Den Meetings in advance. Write down your plan and share it with your Assistant (could be a parent) and your Den Chief.
- Keep the boys occupied at all times: not just with busy work but with activities that fulfill Cub Scout & Webelos Scout purposes.
- Be sparing with your criticism; generous within your praise.
- Be fair & consistent with discipline. Don't permit one boy to do something that you would discipline another boy for doing.
- Treat each boy as a very special individual.
- Establish your rules and stick to them. (Have a visible "Den Code of Conduct"!)
- Begin and end meetings on time.
- Set a good example by wearing your uniform.
- Use the Cub Scout sign to get attention. Don't yell or shout.
- Give the boys a chance to let off steam. Plan Den meetings to alternate quiet activities with active ones.

Surprisingly enough, most Den Leaders find that if their Den has a Code of Conduct to follow, their home, their furniture, and their dignity remain in tact throughout their Cub Scout experience. Boys need to know just how far they can go, and the Den Code of Conduct will tell them this.

"Knowledge Brings the Responsibility of Choice"

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The Age and Maturity Level of Den Chiefs:

Age and level of maturity are important issues when deciding if a boy is ready to be a Den Chief. Normally, it is suggested that a boy should be 1st class rank or above to qualify for this job, for two reasons: 1) until Boy Scouts actually reach 1st Class rank, their primary focus should be to learn and complete all of the basic skills defined by the first three ranks, and 2) leadership tenure is not required for rank advancement until the rank of STAR.

So in the Boy Scout Handbook, you'll find that Scouts only earn credit for a leadership role if they take on jobs "after" they have earned 1st Class rank and while they are working on STAR rank or higher. It might be disappointing for a boy to take this job and then find out that it doesn't count towards rank advancement until he is at least a 1st Class Scout. In no way is this meant to imply that boys should not take on leadership roles within the Troop. In fact that is encouraged. And the main reason is to teach them and help them grow by using the methods of Boy Scouting.

Given the above background, the next important item that your Den Chief must check is whether or not his Scoutmaster feels that he should be doing this job. Many times Scoutmasters can see things that parents cannot see (my first hand experience proves this to be true!), and the Scoutmaster may also be looking to have the boy take on another role in the Troop. So it is recommended that boys who become Den Chiefs do so with the full approval of their Scoutmasters. This cannot be stressed enough, because sometimes younger boys may have a tendency to spend more time "having fun with a Den" and not "bonding" with their Troop! It's very important for Boy Scouts to be doing a lot of things with their Troop – campouts, community service, and so on. If it happens that a boy tries to avoid these things in favor of being with the younger boys most of the time, then he is missing the benefits of Boy Scouting.

So to determine if a boy is at the right age and maturity level, he should speak with his Scoutmaster to find out if the role of Den Chief would be good for him at the point he is at right now, or whether it would be better for him to wait a while for a job like this.

It is important for Scoutmasters to track their Den Chiefs to see if they are being used properly and to see if they know what they are doing. So a Scoutmaster should have a major say in whether a boy should become a Den Chief. By the way, it is NEVER appropriate for a boy to take on the role of Den Chief simply because he didn't get elected or appointed to any other position in the Troop.

This job will require a lot of work and have a major impact on whether the Cubs or Webelos develop an interest in Boy Scouting. So having a boy who is disappointed for not being elected to a Troop position be given this role of Den Chief is one of the worst possible things that could be done. Den Chiefs should be hand picked by the Scoutmaster to not only represent the Troop, but also to evaluate their ability to handle the responsibility.

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It is also important to realize that a Den Chief is making a major commitment for himself and his family – two meetings per week, Pack meetings, possibly Patrol meetings for his Troop that are separate from the Troop meeting, Courts of Honor, campouts, and some outings with his Den or Pack. The question is: can the boy and his family (drivers!) handle this type of commitment? It should be realized that if a boy's schoolwork or family life suffers because of this role, then maybe the role of Den Chief is a bad idea at this time. These two areas should assume higher priority in the boy's life than Scouting.

By the same token, there is actually the issue of "over qualification"! Some boys who are 16 and 17 years old and who may have already earned their Eagle rank may be interested in the job, especially if they have held almost every position in the Troop already. These boys however, are usually Juniors and Seniors in High School, and have major commitments outside of Scouts. So there may be a question as to whether they are willing or able to make a commitment to weekly Den meetings.

Be Careful – some boys have a habit of volunteering for everything at this age. Parents and Scoutmasters have to decide if it's reasonable.

A final note. Some parents who are also Den Leaders would like to have their own sons serve as Den Chiefs for their Den. There is no law against it, but consider these factors:

- 1) some parents may push their sons into this role so they can "get some relief" from all of the work with the Den,
- 2) it's best if a boy is not a Den Chief for a Den with his own brothers in the Den, This could breed favoritism or punishment by the Den Chief depending on his relationships at home that week. Neither attitude is appropriate, but both could exist over time. Other boys in the Den may resent a particular boy having "his" brother be the "big shot"!
- 3) as a Den Leader, a Den Chief who is also your son, may not listen to your requests as they would if the relationship was not parent/child.

So Den Chiefs can work with their parents – just be aware of the cautions above.