



## SCOUTS AND CHILD PROTECTION

### SCOUTS – PROUD AND PROFESSIONAL

**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, as Scouting volunteers may not have the appropriate qualifications necessary to provide counselling.**

#### CHILD PROTECTION IN SCOUTS

The NSW Branch has appointed an Assistant Chief Commissioner, with the task of overseeing child protection and the support of its members. The Commissioner is a qualified professional and has a number of consultants he can call upon, when needed, all who have special qualifications allied to the task.

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

#### 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 to them any issue that fall within their area of responsibility.

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

If someone goes directly to DoCS or the Police with a complaint, Scouts may not become aware of a child protection matter until official investigations and evidence gathering has taken place. This can often take months, even years, which prevents, Scouts from taking the necessary protective steps in the quickest possible time. *(Police cases are extremely rare, compared to the number of leaders)*

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 meet biannually to discuss our screening standards and procedures. Fortunately they have never had to make any changes and have asked to keep some of our material for their use and records. Scouts Deputy Chief Commissioner 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 were asked to make a formal submission to the Minister.

#### TRAINING AND RESOURCE FOR LEADERS.

An 8 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 and is an important part of our training program. You can read a copy in 'child protection' under the 'parent' tag on the Scouts NSW website.

Before they are appointed as a leader, each person undertakes specialised training, under the direction of skilled trainers. They cover subjects such as scouting skills; programming; First Aid; and the Scout system associated with the relevant 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 on their site. 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 primary 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 sex 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?”** (*When they say stranger, then just ask them to describe a stranger... in many cases the strangers' 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 suggest 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 it? “(soft, firm, angry).

Older children when confronted with drugs, alcohol, or asked to do something they feel is wrong, should add a reason to the NO such as “*I don't take risks – I don't like doing it – I would have to tell my parents “etc.*

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

## HOW TO DEAL WITH A CHILD EXPOSED TO A TRAUMA

Leaders are often approached, by parents, wanting advice as to how to assist their child. Especially when the child, on the way home from school or at sport etc, has been exposed to some trauma.

In today's world young people will be confronted with a number of traumatic incidents. No matter where the incident occurs there is a recommended way to support the people involved. Authorities advise, the research, and learning from our own experiences confirm that is to provide SUPPORT, leaving those rare cases where counselling is needed to the families' choice of qualified specialists and not left to non qualified clinicians.

In the first instance, after the trauma/incident, before they go to sleep that day, and as soon as practicable, they be encouraged to discuss how they felt at the time. This is not a time to go over the incident but more 'how they felt at the time and soon after'. Teachers; parents and Leaders should facilitate this and encourage the child to talk about it with other people involved. In this way they see their reactions are normal. You should restrict giving advice and simply listen, reassuring them that their reactions are normal, considering the circumstances. Talking to someone they see as a bigger brother, sister or Mum, with perhaps a shoulder to cry on or a hug, is helpful.

Today, on the media, we hear words such as debriefing – defusing. They are both forms of SUPPORT. Frequently post trauma/conflict reactions appear 24 to 72 hours after an event and in some cases even a good week. The symptoms could go from restlessness; sleep problems; moodiness; sometimes even bed wetting and nightmares. In those rare cases where, after a week, a child is still causing you concern then it's time to talk to your medical practitioner, or religious adviser. Get their advice as to a suitably qualified clinician trained in this type of work. 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 and is shown to be quite counterproductive.

## REGION OFFICES.

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**REMEMBER MOST YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EXTREMELY RESILIENT AND QUICKLY BOUNCE BACK**