

MOUNT DIABLO SILVERADO COUNCIL BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Merit Badge Counselor Aid

PURPOSE

The purpose of this aid is to provide council approved and registered merit badge counselors with an understanding of methods of counseling and of their role in the advancement program of Boy Scouts of America.

TARGET AUDIENCE

New and experienced merit badge counselors of the Mt. Diablo Silverado Council.

REFERENCES

Boy Scout Requirements 2093
Merit Badge pamphlets
Application for Merit Badge (Blue Card)
Boy Scout Handbook

INTRODUCTION

The Boy Scouts of America Merit Badge Program is an excellent introduction to fields that boys might never otherwise be exposed to.

- Some boys choose careers because of merit badge experiences.
- Some boys develop lifelong hobbies because of merit badge experiences.

Unfortunately, some counselors have a tendency to “give away” badges, while others develop their own “overly strict curriculum”.

Today, it is important to protect the boy and yourself while meeting together and exploring the merit badge you counsel.

THE MERIT BADGE PROGRAM

The program is one of Scouting’s basic character developing tools.

Earning merit badges gives boys the kind of self confidence that comes from overcoming difficulties to achieve a goal.

Boys learn career skills that may help them choose their life’s work.

Some merit badges develop physical fitness and others provide exposure to hobbies that may last lifetimes.

Working with an adult they may not know is a valuable experience for boys in later life.

A boy may be shy and fearful in this new situation so the counselor should assure that the counseling sessions are relaxed, informal and friendly.

Although the “buddy system” (buddy system described below) is used, each boy is judged on his own performance of requirements and should receive maximum benefit of the knowledge, skill, character and personal interest of the counselor.

Group instruction and orientation is encouraged where practical. However, the experience of each boy must include individual attention to his projects and abilities to fulfill the requirements.

In short, “NO giveaways or merit badge mills should be allowed to exist”. Also, NO unwarranted “endurance tests” are allowed.

THE MERIT BADGE SYSTEM

The Merit Badge Counselor is a subject matter expert in the badge that he/she counsels. Also, he/she is a person who has applied to and has been approved by the District to work with the boys.

His/her expertise can be gained from:

- An occupation and/or profession.
- Academic training.
- A hobby or special interest.
- Other related special training or experience.

The Merit Badge Counselor should have a copy and a working knowledge of the latest merit badge book in the area they are counselor for.

The Scoutmaster uses a Merit Badge Counselor’s list obtained during the recharter process or from the advancement committee to find and give the name, phone and address of an approved and registered Merit Badge Counselor to the boys paired up.

The boys who want to work on the badge (not their parents or Scoutmaster) should contact the counselor, who will work with the boys to set a date to meet. Part of the merit badge experience is to have boys learn to contact people they do not know and to set up meetings in a businesslike manner.

The boys should be encouraged to bring the following to the merit badge counseling session:

- The latest merit badge book.
- The merit badge application **signed by the Scoutmaster**.
- Projects they have started and/or completed.
- Any other indication of preparation (i.e. letter from Scoutmaster with dates of camp outs, hikes, collections, etc.).

There should be a preliminary meeting where the counselor explains what is expected and what the areas of study will be for the boys. Agreements on projects and dates to shoot for are also decided at this first meeting. The following tips and suggestions are also important for this first meeting:

- This first meeting can be with a boy and his “buddy” (buddy system explained below) or even the whole troop to generate interest.
- Some counselors have done the preliminary meeting on the phone. This is not recommended because it can lead to unfortunate misunderstandings later in the process.

- The boys should have the latest merit badge book for the badge being pursued. They can acquire the merit badge book as follows:
 - Buy it.
 - Borrow it from the public library.
 - Borrow it from the troop library.
 - Borrow it from a friend.

The number of counseling sessions needed to complete the badge requirements is dependent on the boy's progress and the preferences of the counselor.

The counselor may choose to have general overview meetings to start the process, including larger groups of scouts (activities of this nature can also help generate broader interest in the merit badge).

The counselor and the boys meet together until he/she has **all** the boys involved do **all** the requirements and is satisfied that **all** the boys have knowledge of the badge in question.

- The boys should be required to do and to know no more and no less than what is printed in the current requirements for the badge being worked on.
- The boys are to be **tested individually** even though there is always a buddy present.
- When the counselor is satisfied that the boy(s) meet the requirements of the badge, he/she should sign the merit badge application(s).

The merit badge counselor keeps his/her portion of the application.

The boys should turn in the remaining two portions of the application to the Scoutmaster.

The Troop Advancement Chairman submits the signed merit badge application to the Council Service Center and obtains the merit badge. The boys are then awarded the merit badge at the next troop meeting and/or the Court of Honor, whichever comes first.

In order to encourage scouts to complete their trail to First Class, our troop generally **does not encourage** scouts who have not yet earned the rank of Second Class, to work on merit badges.

According to the Advancement Guidelines, published by National BSA, there is no time limit on any merit badge unless such a limit is specified in the requirements of the badge. Boys have until the age of 18 to finish a partial.

- The counselor is the key, as a coach, to help with the discipline needed in this area.
- A good practice is to review the requirements that have been previously signed off, early when you get a boy with a partial.
 - It insures that the boy knows the material.
 - It serves as a good way to set the boy at ease.
 - This has shown to improve the boy's overall performance on the badge.

ROLE OF THE MERIT BADGE COUNSELOR

The Merit Badge Counselor's role is to bring about learning on the part of the Scout.

As a "coach", the counselor advises the Scout concerning steps he should take to fulfill the requirements for the merit badge.

As a "counselor", he evaluates the Scout's performance and determines whether or not the Scout has met the prescribed objectives in the requirements.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

A Scout must always have a buddy (Scout or adult) with him when meeting with a counselor.

Counselors must **not** agree to counsel a single boy without a buddy, for their own protection and the protection of the boy. If a situation arises where there is only one scout then another adult should be present and within eye sight.

The boy should tell his Scoutmaster that he is interested in a particular merit badge. The Scoutmaster should help pair boys up before signing the merit badge application cards.

Counselors should **not** counsel boys who do not have merit badge cards signed by the Scoutmaster.

The boys should be encouraged to wear class A uniforms for counseling sessions.

COUNSELING TECHNIQUES

Help the boys relax.

- Ask questions about how long the boys have been in Scouting, or what prompted them to want to work on the particular merit badge.
- Make the boys feel welcome.
- Show them examples of similar merit badge work, but be careful not to overwhelm them with your advanced knowledge.
- Show them examples (i.e. pictures of past projects etc.) of the work of other boys in the badge area.

Start out slow. For example, you might have the boys sand a piece of wood while you are getting the tools ready.

Review each requirement at the first meeting to assure the boys understand what is expected of them to earn the badge.

- This includes requiring that the boys do exactly what is required.
- If the requirement says demonstrate, then there must be a demonstration, not just a discussion.

A good format to follow is:

- Tell them what you are going to teach them (briefly introduce material).
- Teach them.
- Tell them what you have taught them (briefly review material).
- Have the boys tell you what they have understood from what you have taught them.
- Quiz them on the objectives of the lesson (i.e. the requirements from the merit badge book).
- Have them demonstrate the skills they have learned.
- Sign off the parts they complete as they complete them. This will provide prompt positive reinforcement for the boys.

It is acceptable for the boys to do more than what is required, but they cannot be required to do more than what is contained in the written merit badge requirements.

When a boy is wrong or does not understand a particular requirement, it is the duty of the counselor to help in the most positive way possible. This includes re teaching the idea or concept to the boy.

The counselor must be positive about correcting a boy.

For example “well John, you did a fine job up to this point. Let’s see if we can complete the rest of the requirements as well as you started out”. Follow this with genuine additional help.

Get the scouts to practice the required skills during the counseling sessions.