The Bear Den Leader

Cub Pack Program Guide | 3rd grade • 8–9 years old

A guide to best practices, not policy. Meant to be adapted to your pack and your council. Where anything here differs from current Scouting America policy, your council's guidance, or the Scout's handbook, those govern.

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IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE

Your den is 3rd grade, 8–9 years old. Meetings run about 60–75 minutes.

Six required adventures earn the rank, plus two electives of your den's choosing. They are already scheduled on the pack calendar — you do not have to design the year.

The adventure plans are written out meeting by meeting. Read next week's plan on the weekend, gather the supplies, and show up. That is the job.

Two registered adults at every meeting, and a registered female adult 21 or over any time girls are present. Every time, no exceptions.

1. Who you are working with

Bears can plan, build, and follow a multi-step project. They want responsibility and they want to be trusted with real tools and real jobs. They are also old enough to be bored by anything that feels babyish, and they will let you know.

START HANDING OVER THE MEETING

A Bear can run the opening, lead a game, teach a skill they already know, and take attendance. Every one of those is a job you no longer do, and a Scout who is more invested than they were last week.

Appoint a denner each month. Give them a real responsibility and let them do it imperfectly. The denner system is the first rung of the leadership ladder that runs through Scouts BSA.

2. The six required adventures

Every rank in Cub Scouting has six required adventures covering the same six themes. That is why the whole pack can work the same theme in the same month, and why the pack meeting ties the dens together. For Bear, they are:

Adventure	Theme	What it covers
Bobcat	Character and Leadership	The Scout Oath, Scout Law, sign, salute, handshake, and motto.
Bear Habitat	Outdoors	Trees, plants, wildlife, and how a habitat works — done outdoors, not at a table.
Paws for Action	Citizenship	Community, government, the flag, and a service project.
Fellowship	Family and Reverence	Faith, family traditions, and what duty to God means to this Scout.
Standing Tall	Personal Safety	Making good choices, standing up to pressure, and personal safety.
Bear Strong	Personal Fitness	Fitness, nutrition, and building a habit that lasts past the meeting.

- Six required adventures plus at least two electives earn the badge of rank.

- The two electives are your den's pick, not the pack's. The full elective list for every rank is at scouting.org/program-updates/cub-scout-elective-adventures. Archery, BB gun and slingshot are special electives — they can only be earned at a council or district program with certified range staff.
- Bobcat comes first. Every Scout at every rank earns it, and it is the same core: Oath, Law, sign, salute, handshake, motto.
- A Scout earns the rank for their current grade. They do not need the previous rank to earn the next one.
- You approve the requirements as the den leader. There is no test and no minimum standard of skill — the Scout does their best and participates.
- Always check the current requirements in the Scout's handbook. Requirements are revised from time to time and the handbook is the authority.

3. Your year at a glance

Straight from the pack calendar. Print this page and put it on the refrigerator.

Date	What	Focus
Aug 31, 2026	Back to the Pack	Recruiting night. Stand with a sign and collect names.
Sep 7, 2026	Labor Day	No Meeting
Sep 14, 2026	Den meeting	Bobcat — meeting 1 of 2
Sep 21, 2026	Den meeting	Bobcat — meeting 2 of 2
Sep 28, 2026	Pack meeting	Theme: Character and Leadership. Say the word "camp" to parents tonight. Each camp runs several sessions and they book up.
Oct 5, 2026	Parent and leader meeting	Bring your den report and supply needs. Summer camp: put two or three candidate weeks in front of the parents and pick one together.
Oct 12, 2026	Den meeting	Bear Habitat — meeting 1 of 2
Oct 19, 2026	Den meeting	Bear Habitat — meeting 2 of 2
Oct 26, 2026	Pack meeting	Theme: Outdoors
Nov 2, 2026	Parent and leader meeting	Bring your den report and supply needs. Summer camp: name the cost, and say out loud that campership help exists.
Nov 9, 2026	Den meeting	Paws for Action — meeting 1 of 2
Nov 16, 2026	Den meeting	Paws for Action — meeting 2 of 2
Nov 23, 2026	Thanksgiving Week	No Meeting
Nov 30, 2026	Pack meeting	Theme: Citizenship
Dec 7, 2026	Parent and leader meeting	Bring your den report and supply needs. Summer camp: give families the date they must answer by — ahead of camp's own deadline.
Dec 14, 2026	Den meeting	Fellowship — meeting 1 of 2
Dec 21, 2026	Pack meeting	Theme: Family and Reverence

Date	What	Focus
Dec 28, 2026	Winter Break	No Meeting
Jan 4, 2027	Winter Break	No Meeting
Jan 11, 2027	Den meeting	Fellowship — meeting 2 of 2
Jan 18, 2027	Pack meeting	Theme: Pinewood Derby
Jan 25, 2027	Parent and leader meeting	Bring your den report and supply needs. Summer camp registration is open. Collect the yes and hold the den's week together.
Feb 1, 2027	Den meeting	Standing Tall — meeting 1 of 2
Feb 8, 2027	Den meeting	Standing Tall — meeting 2 of 2
Feb 15, 2027	Pack meeting	Theme: Personal Safety. Blue and Gold banquet, with the Arrow of Light crossover the same night. Your den is recognized tonight; badges of rank come in April.
Feb 22, 2027	Parent and leader meeting	Bring your den report and supply needs. Summer camp: last call to register with the den. Chase the maybes by phone, not by email.
Mar 1, 2027	Den meeting	Bear Strong — meeting 1 of 2
Mar 8, 2027	Den meeting	Bear Strong — meeting 2 of 2
Mar 15, 2027	Spring Break	No Meeting
Mar 22, 2027	Pack meeting	Theme: Personal Fitness. Your den's last required adventure is done — tell families which two electives are left.
Mar 29, 2027	Parent and leader meeting	Bring your den report and supply needs. Summer camp: campership help, and get the health forms out to families.
Apr 5, 2027	Den meeting	Elective — your den's choice
Apr 12, 2027	Den meeting	Elective — your den's choice
Apr 19, 2027	Pack meeting	Theme: Elective. Rank advancement — your den's badges of rank are presented tonight.
Apr 26, 2027	Parent and leader meeting	Bring your den report and supply needs.
May 3, 2027	Summer event	End-of-year pack celebration.
Jun 7, 2027	Summer camp season	Webelos Camp at your council's Cub camp — Scouts may earn up to eight Webelos electives. Sign up as a den.
Jul 5, 2027	Summer camp season	Most council Cub camp sessions fall in June and early July. Pick the session your families can actually make and go as a den.
Aug 16, 2027	Parent and leader meeting	Bring your den report and supply needs.
Aug 30, 2027	Back to the Pack	Next year's recruiting night. Your den moves up a rank.

Every required adventure gets two den meetings — one to teach it, one to finish it and record it. Fellowship is the one that straddles the winter break: start it December 14 and finish it January 11. The two April dates are

electives, and two electives are required for the badge of rank. Pick them with the Scouts from the official list at scouting.org/program-updates/cub-scout-elective-adventures, and choose things you can actually run in your meeting space. Your den's sixth and last required adventure finishes March 8 and the two electives finish April 12, so the badge of rank is presented at the April 19 pack meeting, not at Blue and Gold in February. Have everything recorded by April 14 so the advancement chair can order it.

SUMMER CAMP IS WHERE NEXT YEAR'S ELECTIVES CAN GET EARNED

Your Bears go to Webelos Camp, because a Scout attends the camp for the rank they are moving into. Most camps run each session several times over, the bulk of it in June and early July, so a conflict with one week is not a conflict with all of them. Camp staff runs the program; you do not plan any of it.

Scouts may earn Aquanaut 1–6, Build It 1–4, Modular Design 1–5, Champions for Nature 1–5, Earth Rocks! 1–3, Let's Camp Webelos 4–7, and — if the extra sessions run — Yo-Yo 1–7 and Art Explosion 1–4 — four times the two electives the Webelos badge needs.

Camp publishes a list of possible achievements, not a guarantee. What each Scout earns depends on the sessions they attend and what they finish — you approve it and you record it.

The archery and BB shooting pins are earned at camp too, and camp is the only place a Cub Scout can earn them.

Registration opens in January and February, which makes October and November the months that matter: pick the week with your families, then name the cost. By January you are collecting answers you already know. Dens that register together go together.

4. How a den meeting runs

Every adventure plan you are given follows this shape. Once your den knows the shape, the meetings run themselves and you only have to prepare the middle part.

Part	Minutes	What happens
Before the meeting	15 before	Read the plan. Lay out supplies on the tables. Write the closing reminder on a board where parents will see it.
Gathering activity	As they arrive	Something on the table the moment the first Scout walks in. Nobody ever sits and waits. This single habit prevents most discipline problems.
Opening	5	Pledge of Allegiance, Scout Oath, Scout Law. Roll call and announcements. A Scout leads it, not you.
Adventure	30–35	The requirements for the month, done as activities. This is the meeting.
Homework	2	What gets done at home before next time. Say it, and send it in writing the same night.
Next meeting and reminders	2	Date, time, place, and what to bring. Say it out loud while the parents are in the room.
Closing thought	2	One short thought tying the night to a point of the Scout Law. End on the Scout sign, not on shouting.
After the meeting	10	Record attendance and advancement while it is fresh. Plan next week with your assistant.

RECORD ADVANCEMENT THE SAME NIGHT

The most common failure in Cub Scouting is not a bad meeting. It is a good meeting that never got recorded, and a Scout who does not get their badge in February because nobody wrote it down in October.

Ten minutes after every meeting, in the parking lot, on your phone. Then the advancement chair can order awards in time.

5. Getting started

- ❑ Complete Safeguarding Youth Training (SYT) at my.Scouting.org. Required before you register, and it expires every 12 months — put a reminder on your calendar now.
- ❑ Register as a den leader and be approved by the chartered organization.
- ❑ Complete Den Leader Position-Specific Training in the online Learn Center.
- ❑ Recruit a registered assistant den leader. Do this before the first meeting, not after you get sick in January.
- ❑ Get access to the pack's advancement system and confirm your den roster is right.
- ❑ Get the pack calendar and the adventure plans for the year from your Cubmaster.
- ❑ Collect contact information for every family, and set up one group text or email list.
- ❑ Confirm your meeting space, night, and time, and confirm it is on the pack calendar.
- ❑ Ask the committee how supplies are paid for and how you get reimbursed.

6. Your den supply kit

Keep this in one box and bring it every time. Individual adventures need their own supplies — those are listed in each adventure plan.

Always in the box	Get from the pack
U.S. flag and den flag	Scout handbooks for every Scout
Attendance and advancement sheet	Adventure plans for the year
First aid kit	Pack calendar, printed
Pencils, markers, scissors, tape, glue	Den supply budget or a way to get reimbursed
Construction paper and plain paper	Access to advancement records
Name tags for the first month	Awards ordered by the advancement chair
A ball or a beanbag for the two spare minutes	Family contact list
Emergency contact list for the den	Consent forms for outings

7. Making it easier on yourself

- Give them real jobs with real consequences. A Bear who is trusted rises to it.
- Denner and assistant denner: rotate the job monthly. This is where youth leadership actually starts.
- Multi-week projects work now. Start something in one meeting and finish it in the next.
- Bears notice when an activity is "for little kids." Pitch up, not down.
- Bear Habitat wants to happen outside. Plan around the weather rather than moving it indoors.

- Advancement check in January: with three ranks to go, this is where dens quietly fall behind.
- Winning is a Bear who has run part of a meeting and wants the next one. They come back in September asking when it is their turn again, and you come back because watching a nine-year-old get it right — badly first, then well — turned out to be the part of your week you were proudest of.

THE THREE HABITS THAT SEPARATE A DEN THAT LASTS FROM ONE THAT DOES NOT

1. Read next week's plan on the weekend, not in the car. Fifteen minutes on Sunday saves you an hour of improvising.
2. Send one message a week to families: what we did, what is next, what to bring. Same day, same channel, every week.
3. Never do the job alone. An assistant den leader and two committed parents is the difference between finishing the year and quitting in February.

8. Working with families

- Parents mostly drop off at this rank. Ask two or three by name to stay as regular helpers, for the year, with a specific job.
- Two registered adults, 21 or over, at every activity, and a registered female adult 21 or over any time girls are present. No one-on-one contact with a youth, in person or by message. Parents may observe any meeting at any time.
- Send the same weekly message on the same day. Families that know what is coming show up.
- Some requirements are meant to be done at home with a family. Assign them clearly and follow up once — do not assume silence means done.
- When a Scout stops coming, call the family. Not a text. Most of them come back if somebody notices they were gone.
- Be honest about cost and about camp early in the year, and quietly point families toward the pack's help if they need it.

9. When things go wrong

The problem	What to do
The meeting is chaos	You skipped the gathering activity, or an activity ran too long. Something on the table when they walk in, and change activities before they lose interest.
One Scout will not participate	Give them a job instead of a correction. Passing out supplies, holding the flag, being the timekeeper. Participation almost always follows responsibility.
A Scout is disruptive every week	Talk to the parent privately, early, and about the specific behavior rather than the child. Ask what works at home. Most of the time they will tell you.
Attendance is falling	Check two things: are meetings running long, and do families know the date of the next two? Fix those before anything else.
You are behind on adventures	Do not panic and do not double up. Combine a requirement into a pack event or an outing, and tell the advancement chair where you are.
You cannot make a meeting	Your assistant den leader runs it from the same printed plan. If you do not have one, that is this week's job.
You are burning out	Say so out loud at the leaders' meeting before you quit. Almost always the fix is one more adult, and nobody knew you needed one.

The problem	What to do
Home requirements are not getting done	Do them in the meeting instead. A requirement done at the den meeting counts the same as one done at home.

10. Your den, on one page

	Name	Phone / email
Den leader (you)		
Assistant den leader		
Parent helper		
Parent helper		
Cubmaster		
Committee chair		
Advancement chair		

Den meeting night and time: _____ Location: _____

Pack number: _____ Council / district: _____

Scouts in my den:

Scout	Family contact	Bobcat	Rank earned