



2020 Cub Scout Backyard Challenge



Learn the Outdoor Code

Category: Scout Skills

Difficulty: Intermediate

Description:

The Outdoor Code is one of the most important foundations of Scouting. Similar to the Scout Oath or Scout Law, **the Outdoor Code is your promise to care for the environment and leave no trace.** You will need to know and understand the Outdoor Code to earn adventures in Cub Scouting, yet too many scouts forget the meaning behind this promise later on in their Scouting careers. Every Scout who is spending time outdoors should be familiar with the Outdoor Code. It is equally important if you are just spending a few hours in your backyard or spending the weekend hiking or camping.

What is the Outdoor Code? Take a moment now to learn or re-familiarize yourself with the code. Read it aloud if that helps you better remember:

Outdoor Code

As an American, I will do my best to-
Be Clean in my outdoor manners,
Be Careful with fire,
Be Considerate in the outdoors, and
Be Conservation-minded

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When was the outdoor code established? The Outdoor Code was first publicized in March of 1954. Premiering in an edition of Boys' Life magazine, the Outdoor Code actually served as a replacement to the Outdoor Life Magazine Conservation Pledge (Shown below).



The Conservation Pledge was included in the Boy Scout Handbook (now BSA Scouts Handbook) from 1948-1954. **However, following February 1955, the Outdoor Code replaced the Conservation Pledge in the handbook, becoming an official requirement the very same year.** Although the Outdoor Code never achieved the same popularity as the Scout Oath or Scout Law, it has remained a cornerstone of Scouting and has seen very few revisions over the years. In fact, only the descriptions behind the code have been changed. **Below is the current Outdoor Code, as published in your Scout Book:**

The Outdoor Code

As an American, I will do my best to-

Be clean in my outdoor manners

- I will treat the outdoors as a heritage.
- I will take care of it for myself and others.
- I will keep my trash and garbage out of lakes, streams, fields, woods, and roadways.

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Be careful with fire

- I will prevent wildfire.
- I will build my fires only where they are appropriate.
- When I have finished using a fire, I will make sure it is cold out.
- I will leave a clean fire ring or remove all evidence of my fire.

Be considerate in the outdoors

- I will treat public and private property with respect.
- I will use low-impact methods of hiking and camping.

Be conservation minded

- I will learn how to practice good conservation of soil, waters, forests, minerals, grasslands, wildlife, and energy.
- I will urge others to do the same.

What the Outdoor Code Means to You...

Let us go a little deeper into each of the principles of the Outdoor Code. There are some questions to help you apply them to your own pack's activities. Hopefully, this will help you to better understand the concepts, and more easily use them the next t

1. **As an American, I will do my best to be clean in my outdoor manners:** This means to leave no trace. Literally no one should be able to tell you were even there. By being clean in the outdoors, you are making sure never to leave a mess, whether it's food scraps, environmental damage, or human waste. Here are some questions on ways of incorporating this first principle into your next outing:
 - Why should you carry out all your garbage? **"We want to leave no trace. Animals will dig it up"**
 - Are you allowed to bury or burn trash? **"No! pack it in, pack it out"**
 - Should we pick up trash left behind by other people? **"Yes, always carry a trash bag on any outing"**
 - Can we use soaps or cleaning materials that pollute the environment? **"No, always be aware of the cleaning products you use in nature"**

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- Should we leave a place cleaner than we found it? **“Absolutely!”** (make it a game for Scouts to collect the most garbage at the end of a campout)
2. As an American, I will do my best to be careful with fire. To be careful with fire means to respect all safety rules about fire. Being careful around fire is 100% for your safety and the other around you. One careless mistake around fire can start a forest fire, cost you your life, and take the lives of many others. By treating fire like a tool and handling it with respect, you are gaining more freedom to use fire in different ways. Here are some questions to help you be more careful with fire:
- How many water buckets should be “at the ready” when you have a fire? **“Two full buckets.”**
 - Can you ever leave an open flame unattended? **“Never, always attend to a flame”**
 - Should you have a buddy present when watching or tending a fire? **“Yes, always buddy up!”**
 - Is it correct to wear loose or baggy clothing when around fire? **“No. Loose clothing can ignite”**
 - What is the main cause of forest fires? **“Unattended or not put out campfires”**
 - Why check to make sure the ground is free of leaves and debris before you light a fire? **“They burn”**
 - How do you make sure a fire is cold out? **“Pour lots of water over it, mix and test for heat by touch”**

Although these may be typical fire safety rules, I wanted to quickly restate them because of how important this lesson is. Being careful with fire is in the Outdoor Code for a reason, so stay cautious!

3. As an American, I will do my best to be considerate in the outdoors. Nature exists for everyone. By being respectful and considerate in the outdoors, you can easily make sure that others will continue to enjoy the space. Everything that you do now affects scouts in the future and reducing your impact will go a long way.

Since you are the type of scout who’s considerate in nature, here are some questions to help hone your skills:

- Is tying ropes to tightly around trees safe for the tree? **“No, this can cause damage and leave permanent marks”**
- Should you pitch a tent over plant-life? **“Never, camp on durable surfaces only”**
- Are you allowed to be too loud in camp? **“Watch out, being too loud at a campsite can ruin the experience of other nearby campers and disturb animals”**

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- What do I do with all the sticks my scouts collect while on an outing? **“Collecting sticks is fine, but they should be dispersed into nature after an outing, instead of being left in one BIG pile”**
- Should any holes you make be filled in so that no one twists an ankle and hurts themselves later? **“Yes”**

A little bit of care will lead to huge payoffs and make the outdoor experience better for everyone. By following this point of the Outdoor Code, you encourage others to also keep nature as beautiful as they found it. This helps you the next time you decide to come back!

4. As an American, I will do my best to be conservation minded. Conservation is defined as the prevention of injury, decay, waste, or loss. By promising to be conservationminded, you are vowing to protect the natural environment. This could mean not taking anything out of anecosystem or reducing your use of chemicals or fire so as not to cause damage to an area.

This can also be interpreted as you helping to conserve our planet’s limited resources. If you have ever heard of the 3 R’s: Reduce, reuse, recycle, you know one of the best ways to be conservation minded. Reduce your consumption and amount of garbage that you create, reuse your old supplies and tools that still work, recycle anything that you absolutely need to dispose of.

Here are a few questions about ways you can be more conservation-minded in Scouting:

- Should you donate any of your old but usable gear to your pack instead of throwing it out. **“Yes”**
- Can a scout pick a bouquet of flowers on a hike? **“Please do not. Remember to leave what you find”**
- Can you use damaged troop equipment as an opportunity to teach important repair skills to scouts and leaders? **“Yes, you can! Reduce, Reuse, Recycle...”**
- Is there a way to reduce waste in our scouting program? **“Always! Plan, coordinate and evaluate”**
- Should your pack plan an ‘environmental awareness activity’ every six months? **“What a great idea! I’m glad you thought of this!!!”** (my pack made bird houses out of recycled materials, constructed bat houses, plant native flower seeds to help local wildlife.)

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Conclusion

The Outdoor Code provides a great roadmap to your behavior in nature. By leaving any environment better than you've found it, you take on the best characteristics of an individual in Scouting. **Although you may not need to think about the Outdoor Code as often as you do the Scout Oath or Law, never forget the principles that this code stands for.**

As a scout, it is your responsibility to find creative ways to help your pack live by the Outdoor Code. You can make a difference, and our planet is in dire need of standup people like you. **Do your part, help others do their part, and together, we can help keep our earth a great place for Scouting!**

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