10 Ways to Help Your Scouts Move to Virtual Scouting Activities & Advancement

By Chuck Blanchette, General Manager of NEBC

If you're concerned about quickly transitioning to the virtual classroom, you are not alone. It is a very rewarding step in the long run. We at the Spirit of Adventure Council are learning and growing everyday with the introduction of [Base Camp Online Merit Badge Classes](#).

Educators, Scouting parents, volunteers, and Scouts around the globe are settling in—at home—to finish out the school year in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic. For many, the digital classroom is a completely new environment. But there's good news! Studies show that learning online is just as effective as learning in the physical classroom, as long as you prepare yourself—and your students—to succeed. In this case, whether in a Scout meeting in person, or on an online format, you and your Scouts can continue working on advancement!

While you'll surely need to focus on how to adapt your lessons, materials, and homework to better suit the online classroom, it's also critical to think about how your Scouts may struggle to adjust—as individuals and as a group. As you begin your transition to online Scout meetings or Merit Badges, consider these **10 ways to become a better leader and resource for your Scouts** during this unprecedented time.

1. **Ensure Your Scouts Are Equipped Technically**
   - As quickly as you can, determine: Do your Scouts have the technology they need to fully participate in virtual meetings/learning? Does every Scout have access to a device that can perform the functions necessary for online learning, and does that device have the basic software installed to run classroom sessions?
   - You don't need to have all the technology answers, but you do need to be a resource for your Scouts. Ensuring that every Scout has full access to the resources they need and can overcome barriers at home to participate effectively online is critical so that no one feels excluded or left behind. Make sure that the parents are fully onboard with your plan of action as well.
   - The BSA's Cyber Chip program is a great resource as well for proper procedures with kids online, especially when involving youth protection. You can find all of the information you need, grade specific as well on this site: https://www.Scouting.org/training/youth-protection/cyber-chip/
2. **Give Voice to the Trauma of What Is Happening**
   - The COVID-19 virus—and the mandated social distancing it has necessitated—has created ongoing and escalating consequences and worries for your students. As an educator, you must initially meet them where they are psychologically. Give them space and time to voice the thoughts and emotions they are experiencing before delving into your lessons. Ask Scouts how they are doing. Otherwise, you'll be ignoring the whole reason you're making the transition online—the elephant in the virtual room, as it were—and missing an important moment to connect with your Scouts.

o   Leaders and parents play an important role in the wake of traumatic events—and many believe that role includes acknowledging that Scouts are going through emotional and psychological stress. In addressing the ongoing trauma of this pandemic, acknowledge the position you and your students are in and the emotions that come with it. You need to do that before you can ask them to carve out time to continue learning.

3. **Set Ground Rules Early On**
    o   From the beginning, establish—and sometimes reset—ground rules. You should still ask Scouts not to multitask or check their phones during meetings, for example. To enforce this, ask students to use video and keep their cameras on throughout class; it really makes a difference. Then get into whatever material you have planned for the day.
    o   Do a "meeting launch" that sets expectations for this new way of learning—you want to clarify, in detail, how the group will work together online. How should the group communicate and how often? How big should breakout groups be? Ask your Scouts what they think and take that into consideration as you establish new norms.

4. **Find New Ways to Check in with Scouts**
    o   Ensure that Scouts have ongoing opportunities to speak as a group about the new way things are happening out there—this isn't a once-and-done conversation. Early on, say something like, "It's a new world, we're not sure how long this is going to last, but for the rest of the time I want to make sure that everyone feels they have the setup and support they need."
    o   Remember, too, that with online teaching, there's not just one meeting time, one form of communication, or one medium of conveying messages. Make sure you communicate redundantly to avoid confusion and ensure that everyone has heard and understood you. Follow up with an email or announcement and have multiple touchpoints (through various media) to keep the conversation going after meetings and online events.

5. **Create an Effective Culture for Your Virtual Class**
    o   Building a great online meeting culture is very important, and very difficult to do—it requires you to actively work on it. Here are three effective steps to facilitate a supportive culture for your online classroom:
        ▪   Make sure Scouts always feel like they know what's going on. Communication is extremely important: send more emails or announcements, implement one-on-one conversations, and encourage more discussions.
        ▪   Take care to ensure that participants don't feel like they have less access to you than their peers do. Because everyone is at home, their methods of communicating with you may be different. Make sure you are accessible and available to everyone equally. Engage your Scouts more than ever and do it fairly. They need to feel like there's parity among them.
        ▪   Make sure you're balancing for inclusion and airtime. If you have Scouts who tend to dominate the conversation during in-person discussions, they're

newenglandbasecamp.org/online

going to dominate virtually as well. Make space for all Scouts to participate. Call on Scouts who are less inclined to speak up when other students are dominating class time.

6. **Diversify Modes to Enhance Engagement**
   o During your class sessions, diversify the modes. Every 20 minutes change how you are engaging your students. Consider using varied modes such as slides, videos, polls, lecture, reflection activities, and simulations. This practice enhances Scout engagement and breaks up your time in a productive way. You must create this new rhythm for yourself and your kids to set expectations for their engagement throughout the class.

7. **Recognize the Psychological Impact of Screen-Only Learning**
   o Without the benefit of face-to-face contact, leaders, parents, volunteers and students in online-only environments may feel isolated and lonely. If you and your Scouts were accustomed to having unplanned and informal "hallway" conversations before or after class, you now realize the importance of those interactions to your overall learning experience. Those conversations can have a direct impact on participation and on participant's sense of connection with you and each other, and they can easily go away with remote environments.

8. **Proactively Assist Struggling Scouts**
   o First, recognize the signs of a struggling Scout: they're withdrawn, they're communicating less. When you see them on video during class time, they are more inhibited. They aren't participating in class discussions. Then, talk to them; have a conversation—this participant may need more engagement and contact from others. Make sure they have what they need.
   o Scouts might be feeling that their sense of purpose and community is undermined; when school life is suspended, students—and teachers—can feel like they're no longer a part of something bigger than just themselves. As leaders, we need to help our Scouts with this, and part of that is being much more visible as a resource. Through video meetings, discussions, and other communication, be confident and calm. And above all, be available as a resource.

9. **Trust Your Scouts**
   o As you make the move to the virtual classroom and begin to teach your students online, keep this in mind: You have to trust your Scouts. This is an era when we should heed Ernest Hemingway's quote, "The way to make people trustworthy is to trust them" (Showalter). You can't always see what your Scouts are doing, but give them assignments, equip them to do their work, check in on them like you have in the past, and know that you're giving them important resources and support during a challenging time.

10. **Stay Positive**
    o Despite the trying circumstances that are prompting this move to digital learning, remember this important positive aspect: Scouts are developing virtual skills that will be helpful to them throughout their careers in the digital age. As long as you face this change head on and take advantage of the strengths of online learning, it

can absolutely be a successful experience for you, your Scouts, and your Scout's families.

References

BSA. Cyber Chip.
https://www.Scouting.org/training/youth-protection/cyber-chip/

Neely, T. (2020, March). *Transitioning to Virtual Learning. Classroom Management*
Showalter, A. (2020)
https://allanshowalter.com/2020/03/01/the-way-to-make-people-trustworthy-is-to-trust-them-ernest-hemingway/