

## Dog Scouts of America FAQ's

### **What is DSA all about?**

In my own words, DSA's mission is to promote responsible dog ownership, promote the use of positive training methods to help dogs be well-mannered and welcome members of the community, and to recognize and enhance the human-canine bond. Dogs enhance people's lives and DSA strives to promote this relationship. Teaching people about responsible dog ownership and positive training in turn enhances dogs' lives – it can help keep dogs out of shelters, promotes humane treatment of dogs, and makes dogs welcome in more public places. **In DSA, dogs help people, people help dogs, and the whole community benefits.** (We also have a TON of fun while we're at it.)

**“Socialize, Train, Neuter, and Contain.”** A quick motto for responsible dog ownership. The purpose of these four things is to ensure dogs and dog owners are good members of the community – far from a nuisance, your dog is an asset to the community! [FYI - Dogs are not required to be neutered to be part of DSA. DSA takes a common-sense approach where most dogs should be spayed/neutered in order to help reduce the number of unwanted dogs in shelters across the country, as well as to help curb problem behaviors that can cause dogs to be considered a nuisance.]

**The Dog Scout Laws** are a set of “laws” that help define what “responsible dog ownership” is. As part of the troop, you should be supportive of these laws. If you don't already have a copy, you can find it on the DSA website or I can provide a copy for you.

**The Dog Scout Motto is:** “Let us learn new things so that we may become more helpful.”

**The Dog Scout Parent's Motto is:** “Our dog's lives are much shorter than ours – let's help them enjoy their time with us as much as we can.”

### **What do troops do?**

Different troops can have their own personalities and focus on different things based on who is doing the work to plan events! Troop 161 usually has at least one activity per month – we try to mix it up and have done lots of the things below. You can also be a part of DSA without being in a troop, and you can do all of the merit badges by video!

Typical troop activities include:

- Troop meetings – can include training new behaviors or practicing old ones, games with your dog, informational presentations, helping our dogs work on their “social skills” and manners, etc. We try to keep it fun and hands-on but need to conduct some business too.
- Hikes / Dog Walks / Backpacking.
- “Training Days,” like trying Agility or Rally-Obedience, going swimming, attending a dog event, or working on merit badge activities. You can see all the merit badges and their requirements at [www.dogscouts.org](http://www.dogscouts.org).

- Community Service: Informational booths, teaching kids about dog safety and responsible dog ownership, therapy dog visits, training demonstrations, speaking to civic groups, and helping at shelters and rescues.
- Fundraising – for our troop, and on behalf of other organizations that help people and dogs (like the dogs ringing bells for the Salvation Army or raising money for animal shelters or police K9s).
- Working on achieving the Dog Scout title.
- “Arfs and crafts” – we haven’t done anything like this yet, but we could scrapbook, decorate frames for our dog photos, make our own agility jumps or weave poles, or other such things. If you’re the “crafty” type, maybe you could share your skills with us!
- If you have a skill you’d be willing to share with the group, or would like to organize an activity, trip, volunteer event, or training session, let me know!

### **What if my dog isn’t perfectly behaved?**

Mine aren’t either!!! Troop activities are a great place to learn and practice good manners. Our members understand that dogs are dogs, and sometimes they bark, growl, jump up, pull on the leash, etc. etc. etc. As long as you’re willing to do your best, follow rules, and keep everyone safe, please join us! You’re sure to find lots of help and support from other troop members.

### **What does it cost?**

**The only requirement for joining a troop is to be a member of Dog Scouts of America. If you’d like to visit an activity to check it out before joining, contact the Troop Leader.**

Individual membership is \$25, and it’s \$5 for each additional person – full info on pricing and benefits of membership is outlined on the DSA membership form, which can be found online or requested from any Troop Leader.

Other costs are optional. Participating in merit badge training activities is free, but if you want to make it “official” and get a merit badge or DSA certification, there are fees to cover recording / record-keeping, the cost of the badge itself, shipping, etc. Some troop activities might cost money, like attending a “bark in the park” baseball game, buying a clicker for a training activity, or chipping in for snacks at a meeting – Troop 161 uses an informal “pay-as-you-go” system for that kind of thing. We also do fundraising to cover our educational programs and donate money and equipment to other local charities. Those teaching troop activities are volunteers and aren’t expected to teach entire classes for free – you might want additional training or equipment at your own cost depending what your goals are (some of the badge requirements are very challenging.)

### **So is my dog a Dog Scout?**

**To be an official Dog Scout, you and your dog must pass the Dog Scout Test.** Dog Scouts earn the right to wear the Dog Scout uniform and earn merit badges, and can use the title of “DSA” at the end of their name. Your dog also gets an official DSA photo ID

and Dog Scout merit badge also. Earning the Dog Scout title is not required and you don't ever have to pass the test to be a part of a troop, but working toward it is a nice way to demonstrate your responsible dog ownership.

**You can register your dog as an official Cadet Scout by agreeing to uphold the Dog Scout Laws (responsible dog ownership) and paying a \$5 recording fee.** (No test.) You can register using the DSA membership form, and you can find the Dog Scout Laws on the DSA website.

**The Dog Scout test** is all about your dog being a welcome and well-mannered member of the community. To pass the Dog Scout test, your dog must heel/walk on a loose leash, sit, lie down, stay, come, leave-it, and there is also a “smart end of the leash” part for you to demonstrate responsible dog ownership (usually accomplished in a short class, plus general observations like you using positive training techniques and picking up after your dog). Part of Dog Scouts is supporting and helping each other – if your dog doesn't already know these things, don't worry! It's a great thing to work toward with your dog. Often, becoming a Dog Scout is a journey over time, with the dog and handler learning and building their relationship.

### **What's Dog Scout Camp?**

DSA also has summer camps in Michigan (where it all started). It's summer camp so it's rustic (think Boy Scout camp not Club Med), but it's basically a resort vacation for you and your dog complete with campfires and smores, tons of staff and instructors, lots of opportunities to earn badges, activities galore, fenced agility field, Splash Lake with canoes and kayaks, hiking trails, etc. They even cook all of your meals for you. My husband and I had a blast and are going again this year. See the DSA website for details. I'd like to organize a DSA Mini-Camp in the future, where we would have a 3-day camp right here in PA (same fun, a little less cost and travel).