

## Ideas to Improve Retention - From Unit Leaders in CST-15, March 2026

Here are practical, field-tested ideas that improve retention in Scouting America packs and troops. They are organized by theme, so they are easy to act on.

### Program quality and fun

- Make every meeting active. Limit sitting and listening. Games, hands on skills, and movement keep youth engaged.
- Plan one standout event each month that Scouts talk about at school. Campfires, hikes, derbies, lock ins, service with impact.
- End meetings with something memorable. A challenge, skit, reflection, or surprise works well.
- Let youth lead as much as possible, especially in troops. Visible youth leadership keeps older Scouts invested. Ownership is key.

### Early wins and progress

- Help new Scouts earn their first rank or badge quickly. Early success builds confidence.
- Track advancement closely and follow up when Scouts stall. Quietly remove barriers rather than waiting. Leaders are gate-openers, not gate-keepers.
- Celebrate advancement often and publicly, even small steps. Don't combine steps.

### Family engagement and communication

- Clearly explain what Scouting is and is not at the start. Families that understand the program stay longer. Over 80% of new families have no Scouting experience.
- Communicate consistently and simply. One platform, one weekly message, no surprises. Don't overwhelm with messaging. Always have a long range-calendar that is easy to access.
- Invite parents into the experience through service projects, camping, and courts of honor.
- Personally check in with families who miss a few meetings before absence becomes permanent.

### Strong onboarding

- Assign a buddy or mentor to every new Scout and family. People join friends, not organizations.
- Hold a new family orientation that explains uniforms, advancement, camping, and costs.
- For troops, involve older Scouts immediately in welcoming and teaching new members.
- Get every parent engaged as a volunteer is a small but important role where they can belong.

### Age appropriate programming

- For packs, keep meetings shorter and energetic. Cub Scouts should not sit for long. And they will not.
- For troops, offer increasing adventure as Scouts age. High adventure, leadership roles, and specialized outings matter for retention after age 13. Don't offer the same year of Scouting 7 times.
- Create clear paths for older Scouts such as NYLT, NAYLE, leadership teams, teaching roles, and advanced outdoor skills. Dual registration with a Crew of Ship is an option for some Scouts.

### Belonging and culture

- Build patrol identity in troops and den identity in packs. Names, flags, yells, and traditions matter.
- Watch for cliques and unkind behavior and address it early – don't put off crucial conversations. A Scout who does not feel welcome will leave. This goes for adults also.
- Celebrate service and character, not just advancement. Advancement is a means to an end, not the end.

### Leader support and sustainability

- Avoid leader burnout by sharing roles and keeping expectations realistic. Leaders have lives.
- Engage with other organizations. Look for synergy - don't be a leach.
- Train leaders so meetings run smoothly and confidently. Chaos drives families away.
- Plan calendars well in advance so families can commit. Consider school and religious calendars.

### Retention through transitions

- Strengthen pack to troop bridging with joint events, shared campouts, and familiar faces.
- Keep fifth graders engaged during the transition year with special responsibilities and recognition.
- Follow up personally with Scouts who age out or step away to invite them back for specific events.
- Never give up. Consider a unit alumni association.

### Feedback and continuous improvement

- Ask Scouts what they enjoy and what they would change, then act on it. (Stop/Start/Continue)
- Survey parents annually about communication, program quality, and scheduling.
- Treat every Scout who leaves as a learning opportunity, not a failure.



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**Helping Councils Bring Scouting to More Families**

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