



FAQ—Inclusive Scouting Award

What is the Inclusive Scouting Award?

Introduced in 2002, the Inclusive Scouting Award is a way to show support for those who are discriminated against by the current membership policies of the Boy Scouts of America. It identifies you as someone who disagrees with the membership policies and as an ally for those affected by it. As an ally, you are someone who is “safe” to approach and talk to without fear of being bullied or kicked out. In this way, it is modeled after the “safe space” programs used in high schools over the last decade, which have been shown to reduce stress for marginalized youth even if they never speak to someone; just knowing that an ally is present is a significant relief.

The two ropes of the square knot symbolize sexual orientation and religion, and the knot reflects ways in which the two issues are intertwined. One rope is silver and purple – colors the BSA reserves for religious emblems. The other rope is rainbow-colored – representative of diversity in general and widely used in LGBT communities as a symbol of pride and unity.

It’s usually worn on the uniform in the same manner as any other adult leadership awards, although it is unusual in that it is earned by the act of wearing it. By displaying this emblem, you set a positive example and help to create a friendlier and healthier environment for *everyone* in the Scouting program.

Who wears the ISA?

Anyone committed to standing for equality in Scouting may wear the ISA; this applies to youth and adult Scouts. Wearing the ISA sends a message to other Scouters that you support everyone in Scouting and that you are a safe person to talk to in a mature, responsible and confidential way. This is the responsibility that comes with the award. It is important that everyone wearing the ISA, particularly youth, is aware of the responsibility that they placed upon themselves by wearing it.

How can my child approach someone wearing the Inclusive Scouting Award badge when the only qualification is being unafraid to stand up for gay issues? A youth is not qualified to handle anything so sensitive unless they have gone through it themselves. I can see trained leaders wearing the badge, but not youth.

According to the American Psychological Association and other professional medical and psychological organizations, sexual orientation in and of itself is not a problem. The problems that gay adolescents experience are the results of isolation and social disapproval, and many similar “safe space” projects (often using stickers on classroom doors, lockers, etc.) have proved to be very successful in schools and other similar settings. In the words of one young man, the only thing they are looking for is “to know that you won’t wig out if I decide to talk to you.” If your child is capable of having a friend or acquaintance “come out” to them without “wiggling out,” then they’ve got all the qualifications that they need. Even without bringing up the topic, LGBT youth and youth with LGBT parents may make note of the patch and gain some confidence knowing that their peers are supportive. Sometimes, all a young person needs is a safe person to talk to, a handshake or pat on the back and a reassurance that it will be okay and get better.

Does wearing the ISA mean that someone is gay or atheist? Will my child be bullied for wearing it?

To the best of our knowledge, the majority of ISA wearers are not directly affected by these policies; they are allies. If you or your child is confronted under these assumptions, explain that the Inclusive Scouting Awards means simply that you can talk to the wearer without fear of being reported or



excluded. Taking a stand on a contentious issue is not without risks, and there are certainly those out there who believe that no one would stand up for such issues without having some “vested interest” (i.e. being secretly gay or atheist themselves). If suspicion of being gay could result in your child being bullied, then there may be deeper concerns about their Scouting peers and environment.

How can someone wearing the Inclusive Scouting Award be “safe” for a gay or questioning youth to approach if they haven’t had any training on dealing with these issues?

Most gay and bisexual youth report tremendous feelings of isolation because they so often do not know with whom they can simply share this important fact about themselves. For many reasons that are not hard to imagine, they are often not ready to be totally “out” and feel that they cannot risk telling someone if there’s a chance that person will respond poorly (such as telling the entire high school). Often times, being a “safe” person simply means listening and being supportive. Further, the Boy Scouts of America’s recent survey in February 2013 of youth members aged 16-18 showed that a “majority oppose the current...membership policy” and that “a majority of current Boy Scouts and Venturers” believe “the current policy does not represent a core value of Scouting.” Today’s young people are aware of issues that affect the gay community. Many of them have friends at school or family members who identify as gay. In short, today’s young people are well-equipped and prepared to be a safe ear of support for their fellow Scouts and friends who identify as gay.

Since the Inclusive Scouting Award is not an approved award, couldn’t my child get in trouble himself for wearing it or become the target of unwanted attention from the BSA?

Yes, that is a possibility. But, we have distributed over 20,000 Inclusive Scouting Awards. In that time, we’ve not heard of a single negative incident. In some cases, an individual was asked to remove the award due to a strict adherence to uniform guidelines. In these rare cases, it is worth noting that the right pocket is an official location for temporary insignia, as is the back of the merit badge sash for youth members. Additionally, we believe that the overwhelming majority of Scouts, Scout leaders, parents and others are well-intentioned, loving people who care about the well-being of the youth in their care. If an adult Scout leader takes issue with the award and your child is able to explain what it means and why it is important to them, many leaders are able to respect and honor your child’s maturity and loyalty to Scouting and his values.

Why is it called an award if you don’t have to do anything to earn it?

You earn this award by wearing it, by showing courage and by demonstrating conviction and fortitude. Each time you put on your uniform with the Inclusive Scouting Award sewn on it is one small, daily exercise in achievement. When you respond in a safe, respectful and caring way to those who approach you about the award, you are truly living out the ideals of the award and the true values of Scouting. By displaying this emblem, you set a positive example and help to create a friendlier and healthier environment for everyone in the Scouting program.

How can I get the badge for my son and myself to wear? How much do they cost?

You can get the badge by [filling out our order form](#). If you promise to put it on your uniform, we’ll send it to you for free, though a suggested donation of \$5 or more allows us to continue providing it at no cost to those who are less fortunate and helps us to defray the cost of producing the award, postage and other activities in our continued mission to create a safer, more inclusive Scouting program.



How should we respond while wearing the badge and someone questions us about what it is for and what it means?

You should tell others that the Inclusive Scouting Award means you support an inclusive and safe Scouting program for all people, regardless of sexual orientation and religion. You can explain the symbolism of the emblems colors and tell them that by wearing the award, you are signifying that you are an ally — a person who is safe to approach and talk to without fear of being kicked out, a safe ear and friend for your fellow Scouts and Scouters. You can learn more about the meaning of the Inclusive Scouting Award in other questions in this FAQ and on our [Inclusive Scouting Award page](#).

Are there ways for a parent or other non-Scout to show their support?

Absolutely! Scouts for Equality also has shirts and apparel available in [our store](#).

Our troop wants to wear this award as a group. How can we show our support without losing our charter or membership with BSA?

We have distributed over 20,000 Inclusive Scouting Awards. Several local councils and numerous Packs, Troops, and Crews have publicly decided to support inclusive policies. Some have even publicly adopted the Inclusive Scouting Award as a permanent part of the uniform or used their support for equality in Pack recruiting drives. To date, we have heard of no negative repercussions for these brave decisions in support of inclusion.

Other thoughts:

If you do decide to discuss the Inclusive Scouting Award with an entire unit, here are some tips we've heard from others who have discussed it with youth in Scouting - some of them as young as Cub Scouts.

- With younger Scouts in particular, frame it in terms of being accepting of all families. "Most families have a mom and a dad, but some families have two moms or two dads. For reasons that we don't really understand, the Boy Scouts does not allow some of those special families to participate. We wear this knot to show that our troop welcomes all families."

- The message often is less awkward when delivered by a youth, to youth - instead of from an adult. You could talk to your SPL ahead of time to see what he thinks. If he supports it, he could talk to the troop. Or he could talk to his patrol leaders, who could then talk to their patrols.

- Make sure everyone understands that you won't think less of them if they choose not to wear the patch. It's a personal decision, and it's only meaningful if they really believe in it.

- For older Scouts, keep in mind that it's highly unlikely someone has made it to age 13+ without a good understanding of the concept of sexual orientation. If you try to address it in a roundabout way with older youth, there's a chance that someone in the crowd will "clarify" for you - in terms that they choose, not you.

- When discussing it, keep in mind that half the knot represents religious discrimination. We don't focus on that aspect as much, but the discrimination is still there. And if someone is going to wear the knot, they should know the full meaning of it.