



Merit Badge Counselor Orientation

Southern Shores Field Service Council *of the* Michigan Crossroads Council
Boy Scouts of America

Training Objectives

- ✓ Understand the purpose of the merit badge program.
- ✓ Explain the use and understand the importance of the buddy system for merit badge counseling.
- ✓ Understand the merit badge process, including BSA policies and procedures.
- ✓ Understand the role of the Merit Badge Counselor.
- ✓ Understand effective methods of counseling and coaching.
- ✓ Understand the proper method of registration for Merit Badge Counselors.

Agenda

- ✓ What Are Merit Badges?
- ✓ Purpose of the Merit Badge Program
- ✓ Buddy System
- ✓ Merit Badge Process
- ✓ Role of the Counselor
- ✓ Counseling Techniques
- ✓ Registering as a Merit Badge Counselor
- ✓ Questions and Answers

A large, faint, light blue watermark of a merit badge emblem is centered in the background. The emblem features a triangular top section with a vertical line, a central rectangular section with vertical lines, and a bottom section with a curved, shield-like shape.

What Are Merit Badges?

Merit Badges Are Courses of Instruction for a Particular Subject

- ✓ 130 merit badges are offered, ranging from American Business to Woodwork.
- ✓ Each merit badge has specific, detailed requirements for completion.
- ✓ Scouts must earn a specified number of merit badges to earn the ranks of Star, Life, and Eagle (and Eagle Palms).
- ✓ The following merit badges require special qualifications and/or certifications to counsel:

Canoeing, Climbing, Lifesaving, Rifle Shooting, Rowing, SCUBA Diving, Shotgun Shooting, Snow Sports, Swimming, and Whitewater

- ✓ 21 merit badges are required for the rank of Eagle Scout, 12 of which are specifically mandated:

1. First Aid
2. Citizenship in the Community
3. Citizenship in the Nation
4. Citizenship in the World
5. Communications
6. Personal Fitness
7. Emergency Preparedness OR Lifesaving
8. Environmental Science
9. Personal Management
10. Swimming OR Hiking OR Cycling
11. Camping
12. Family Life

What Do They Look Like?

How Do I Tell Them Apart?

“Eagle-required” merit badges have a silver border



Citizenship
in the Nation

First Aid

Personal
Management

“Electives” have a green border



Dog Care

Orienteering

Wilderness
Survival

A large, faint, light blue watermark of a merit badge emblem is centered in the background. The emblem features a five-pointed star at the top, a central shield with a vertical line, and a curved banner at the bottom.

Purpose of the Merit Badge Program

Necessary for Advancement within the Scouting Program

- ✓ As one of the eight methods of Scouting, “Advancement” includes both merit badges and rank advancement.
- ✓ *Rank advancement* provides breadth of knowledge in many areas, including:
 - Learning Scout skills
 - *Earning merit badges*
 - Demonstrating leadership
 - Providing service
 - Living by the Scout Oath and Law
 - Participating in a Scoutmaster Conference
 - Participating in a unit Board of Review
- ✓ *Merit badges* provide depth of knowledge in a particular subject area.

But, also . . .

Provides Other Important Benefits to the Scout

- ✓ Furthers his knowledge base outside of school.
- ✓ Allows him to learn about subjects he might not otherwise be exposed to.
- ✓ Introduces him to potential career skills.
- ✓ Provides opportunities for:
 - Character-building (e.g., citizenship, service).
 - Physical fitness and hobbies that will give a lifetime of pleasure.
 - Becoming a more well-rounded person.
 - Interacting with knowledgeable adults they otherwise might not know.
- ✓ Builds self-confidence.



Buddy System

Designed to Protect Both the Scout and the Adult


- ✓ A Scout **MUST** have a buddy with him at **EACH** meeting with a Merit Badge Counselor.
- ✓ Buddies may be:
 - Another Scout
 - Parent or guardian
 - Brother / Sister
 - A Friend or another Relative
 - The Counselors spouse or children
- ✓ A Scout can **NEVER** meet with a Merit Badge Counselor **ALONE**.

Further Safeguards Have Been Established

- ✓ Merit Badge Counselors MUST:
 - Be 18 years old
 - Able to work with Scout aged boys (10 ½ to 18 y/o)
 - Register with the Southern Shores FSC as a Merit Badge Counselor.
 - Be proficient in the subject by Vocation, Avocation or Special Training or Experience.
 - Agree to submit to a background check.
 - Complete BSA Youth Protection Training.
 - Fill-out and submit all required forms
- ✓ Details on how to register are provided later in this presentation.

A large, faint, light blue outline of a merit badge is centered in the background. The badge features a triangular top section, a central rectangular section with vertical lines, and a bottom section with a curved, decorative border.

Merit Badge Process



When a Scout has decided he wants to work on a merit badge, he must follow these 4 steps:

STEP 1:

Meet with the Scoutmaster

- ✓ The Scout tells his *Unit Leader (Scoutmaster, etc.)* that he's interested in working on a merit badge.
- ✓ The Unit Leader gives the Scout:
 - An quick interview to determine his interest, enthusiasm, and preparedness.
 - A signed *Application for Merit Badge* (aka "Blue Card").
 - The name and phone number of a council approved Merit Badge Counselor(s).

STEP 2:

Contact the Counselor

- ✓ **The Scout and Counselor get the *current* merit badge pamphlet from the troop library or buy one at the Scout Shop.**
- ✓ **The Scout fills out all applicable sections of the Blue Card, and calls the counselor, and makes an appointment.**
- ✓ **The counselor should suggest that the Scout bring the following items:**
 - Current merit badge pamphlet
 - Scoutmaster signed Blue Card (and proof of any partial work already recorded for this merit badge)
 - Any projects he may have started
 - Any other indication of preparedness
- ✓ **At the first interview, the counselor and Scout discuss:**
 - All requirements that need to be completed, ensuring the Scout knows exactly what is expected
 - Short-term and long-term goals with dates of completion
 - Dates, times, and places for further meetings
- ✓ **The counselor completes applicable sections of the Blue Card.**
- ✓ **The buddy system **MUST** be followed to ensure youth protection.**


STEP 3: Complete the Requirements

- ✓ **The Scout completes the requirements exactly as stated – no more and no less.**
 - “If it says ‘show or demonstrate,’ that is what you must do. Just telling about it isn’t enough. The same thing holds true for such words as ‘make,’ ‘list,’ ‘in the field,’ and ‘collect,’ ‘identify,’ and ‘label’, etc.”
- ✓ **If the Scout has proper documentation that he previously completed some of the requirements with another counselor, it is not necessary to repeat these requirements; and he should not be asked to do so.**
- ✓ **The number of sessions between the Scout and the counselor during this period depends on the difficulty of the subject and the preparation and ability of the Scout.**
- ✓ **The Scout and counselor agree when the Scout will be examined (*either some requirements periodically or all requirements at the same time*).**
- ✓ **The buddy system **MUST** be followed in all follow-up meetings to ensure youth protection.**

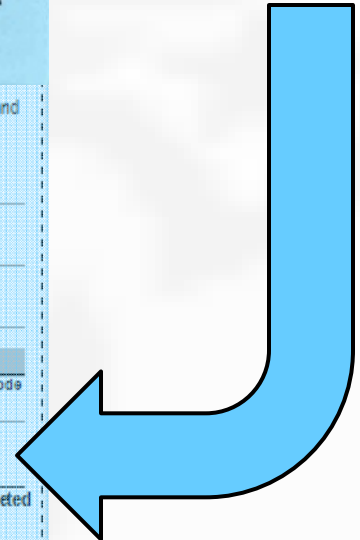
STEP 4: Get Proper Documentation

- ✓ On the back panel of the Blue Card, the counselor initials and dates requirements as they are completed.
- ✓ Once the merit badge is completed, the counselor signs and dates the "Applicant's Record" and "Counselor's Record" sections of the Blue Card.
- ✓ The counselor keeps Counselor's Record.
- ✓ The Scout keeps the remaining two sections.
- ✓ The Scout takes those sections and gives it to his troop leader for final sign-off, and subsequent posting to his records.

Blue Cards:

<p>Information for Applicant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A merit badge application can be approved only by a registered merit badge counselor. You must have a buddy with you (Scout buddy system) at each meeting with the merit badge counselor. Turn in your approved application to your unit leader. You will be awarded the merit badge emblem and certificate at a suitable occasion. <p>Information for Counselor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merit badge applications must be signed in advance by the applicant's unit leader. The Scout must have his buddy (Scout buddy system) in attendance at all instructional sessions. You may not change any requirement, but you may share your knowledge or experience that will make the counseling more interesting and valuable. <p>#34124A</p>  <p>7 30176 34124 8</p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Counselor initial</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Date of approval</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Requirement No. and letter</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Counselor initial</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Date of approval</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Requirement No. and letter</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Counselor initial										Date of approval										Requirement No. and letter										Counselor initial										Date of approval										Requirement No. and letter										<p>APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____</p> <p>is a registered <input type="checkbox"/> Boy Scout <input type="checkbox"/> Varsity Scout <input type="checkbox"/> Venturer of _____ Troop, team, crew, ship No. _____</p> <p>District _____</p> <p>Council _____</p> <p>and is qualified to begin working for merit badge noted on the reverse side.</p> <p>Date _____ Signature of unit leader _____</p> <p>BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA</p> <p>34124A 2003 Boy Scouts of America</p>
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<p>COUNSELOR'S RECORD</p> <p>Applicant _____</p> <p>Troop _____ Unit number _____ Troop, team, crew, ship</p> <p>Merit Badge _____</p> <p>Date completed _____</p> <p>Remarks: _____</p> <p>It is suggested that the counselor keep this record for at least 1 year in case any question is raised later in regard to this award.</p>	<p>APPLICANT'S RECORD</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Has given me his completed application for the _____</p> <p>Merit Badge _____</p> <p>Completed on _____ by _____ Date</p> <p>Signature of Counselor _____</p> <p>Signature of Unit Leader _____</p> <p>Note to Scout: Retain this copy for your permanent records.</p>	<p>The applicant has personally appeared before me and demonstrated to my satisfaction that he has met all requirements for the (please print)</p> <p>_____ Merit badge</p> <p>_____ Name of counselor</p> <p>_____ Address of counselor</p> <p>_____ City _____ Zip code _____</p> <p>_____ Telephone number of counselor _____</p> <p>X _____ Date Completed _____ Signature of counselor</p> <p>Checked and recorded: _____ Date Initials</p> <p>Certificate and badge presented _____ Date</p> <p>Applicant will turn in this portion to his unit leader for record posting.</p>																																																												

Backside!



Why the Blue Card Is Important

- ✓ It is the official completion record recognized by BSA prior to recording and presentation of the merit badge card by the troop.
- ✓ It is the FINAL arbiter of disputes if all other records are missing, including loss of the merit badge card that is presented with the badge.
- ✓ Scouts should keep Blue Cards and the presented merit badge cards for reference.
- ✓ Counselors should keep their copy of the Blue Card in the event a Scout should lose his copy or his merit badge card and need proof of completion.
- ✓ Upon completion, Scouts turn-in their Blue Cards to their Unit Leader. He/She may take this opportunity to congratulate the Scout upon his success in earning the Merit Badge, and speak with the Scout about the Merit Badge (what he liked, if it spurred any further interest, what Merit Badge he might like to tackle next, etc..)
- ✓ The Unit Leader then signs & returns the Scouts' copy of the Blue card to him, and turns the Units' copy over to the Units' Advancement personnel; for hardcopy archival of the Card & entry into BSA's National Advancement dBase.

Group Instruction Policy

To the fullest extent possible, the merit badge counseling relationship is a Counselor/Scout arrangement in which the boy is not only judged on his performance of the requirements, but receives maximum benefit from the knowledge, skill, character, and personal interest of this counselor.

Group instruction and orientation, however, are encouraged where special facilities and/or expert personnel make this most practical; or when Scouts are dependent on only a few counselors for assistance.

(Examples might include: Swimming, Rifle or Shotgun shooting, etc.)

Nevertheless, this group experience should be followed by attention to each individual candidate's projects and his ability to fulfill all requirements.



Role of the Counselor

Who Can Be a Merit Badge Counselor?

- ✓ Men or women of good character.
- ✓ Age 18 or older.
- ✓ Have the skills and education in the subjects they wish to teach, by Vocation (job), Avocation (hobby), and/or Special Training or Knowledge
- ✓ Able to work with Scout-age boys. (10 ½ to 18 y/o)
- ✓ Must register with the Boy Scouts of America as a Merit Badge Counselor AND have submitted the BSA Merit Badge Counselor Information form (BSA Form # 34405) indicating which merit badges he/she wishes to counsel.
- ✓ Does NOT have to be a registered BSA leader.
(ie: with a troop or crew)

The Counselor's Overall Role

- ✓ Provide the benefit of his or her knowledge.
- ✓ Help the Scout learn.
- ✓ Make the experience enjoyable.

The Counselor's Specific Roles

✓ **Counselor**

- Meets with the Scout and a buddy.
- Helps the Scout set short- and long-term goals.
- Follows-up with the Scout on his progress.
- Helps the Scout evaluate his work.
- Encourages the Scout to ask for help.

✓ **Coach**

- Teaches the Scout the skills required.
- Gives the Scout an opportunity to practice the skills.
- Takes a genuine interest in the projects and encourages completion.

The Counselor's Specific Roles

- ✓ **Examiner**
 - Ensures he/she has the most current requirements for the merit badge, and follows these requirements fairly and uniformly.
 - The current *Boy Scout Requirements* book (Item: 34765) is a source for the most up-to-date merit badge requirements.
 - Insists that the Scout does exactly what the requirements call for – *“no more and no less”*.

- ✓ **Representative of the Council**
 - Notifies the Council Advancement Committee's "Merit Badge Chairperson" if he/she no longer wants to be a Merit Badge Counselor.
 - Renews as a Merit Badge Counselor - Annually, via council protocols/procedures.
 - Get Youth Protection Training & follows youth protection guidelines. (www.myscouting.org) every 2 years, or less!
 - Follow all BSA policies.



Counseling Techniques

Set a Relaxing and Inviting Atmosphere

- ✓ This is very important!
- ✓ Ask some easy, general questions to put the Scout at ease:
 - "Where do you go to school?"
 - "What do you like to do?"
 - "How long have you been in Scouting?"
 - "How did you get interested in this merit badge?"
 - Assure them that you are there to "Help them earn this Merit Badge"!
- ✓ Younger Scouts (especially) may feel intimidated, especially if the counselor is a stranger to them.

Set Expectations. Provide the Benefit of Your Knowledge.

- ✓ At the first meeting:
 - Review each requirement to ensure that there is no confusion as to what the Scout must do. This will avoid later misunderstandings and frustration on both sides.
 - Make sure to ask the Scout if he has any questions and encourage him to contact you if he has future questions.

- ✓ When reviewing completed requirements:
 - You may find that the Scout needs help. You may help him as much as possible – provided he himself ultimately does the work.
 - While you may **instruct** for no more or no less than the requirements state, you should feel free to **coach** for more than is required, to provide a richer learning experience and to encourage a Scout's further interest in the subject. However, do not dwell on “over loading” the scout with more information than he needs.

- ✓ Be available when the Scout needs you.



Registering as a Merit Badge Counselor

Step 1:

Complete a BSA Adult Application AND a Disclosure/Authorization form.

- ✓ Include the council and district name at the top.
- ✓ For "position code," write "**42**."
- ✓ For "position (description)," write "***Merit Badge Counselor***."
- ✓ Complete the entire the form.
- ✓ Sign and date at the bottom.
- ✓ Provide your Social Security Number. This is mandatory. The application will not be processed without it.
- ✓ The Disclosure/Authorization Form is located on a separate page of the BSA Adult Application.
- ✓ SEE EXAMPLE FORM from the Councils webpage

Step 2:

Complete a BSA Merit Badge Counselor Information Form (#34405)

- ✓ Include all personal information requested.
- ✓ List the merit badge(s) you want to teach.
 - IMPORTANT: Provide a brief summary of your qualifications in the box provided for Vocation, Avocation, or Special Training. Use the back of the form or an attachment if necessary.
 - This is how the council will determine your proficiency to teach a badge.
 - Remember, placing a simple "X" or a "Yes/No" on the Form, will result in your application being rejected.
- ✓ Indicate whether you want to work only with a specific unit or any unit within the Council.
 - *NOTE: If you check "Within the Council", rest assured that you will NOT be expected to counsel a Scout in Ann Arbor, if you live in South Haven! Your AREA is still a consideration for you and your specific (and your closest) "Community Scouting Districts".*
- ✓ Sign and date at the bottom.

Step 3:

Include a copy of your BSA Youth Protection Certificate

- ✓ You can visit www.myscouting.org to obtain Youth Protection Certification
 - If you are already certified, you can print out a copy of your current Certificate here, too.
- ✓ An On-Line training session must be completed.
- ✓ Upon successful completion, you will be allowed to print a copy of your certificate
- ✓ Include a copy of this Certificate, with your Application
- ✓ You MUST have a current Certificate, which cannot be more than 2 years old.
- ✓ If your certification is Out-of-Date (or close to it) you should renew, prior to applying to be a Merit Badge Counselor.

Step 4:

Submit Application to your local Council Service Center.

- ✓ Send the complete application via E-Mail, FAX or US Postal, to:

Kalamazoo Scout Service Center

1035 W. Maple St.

Kalamazoo, MI 49008

P: (269) 343-4687 F: (269) 343-3311

Ann Arbor Scout Service Center

1979 Huron Parkway

Ann Arbor, MI 48104

P: (734) 971-7100 F: (734) 971-5043

- ✓ There is NO FEE to register as a Merit Badge Counselor.
- ✓ Include ALL required Forms:
 - Your BSA Adult Application, the Disclosure/Authorization Form, a copy of your Youth Protection Certificate, the Merit Badge Counselor Information form.
- ✓ The Council "Merit Badge Committee" will review your application.
- ✓ You will be notified of your approval status
- ✓ You CANNOT counsel scouts until you're notified of your approval.
- ✓ Your approval status should take less than 45 days, however, could take as long as 60-90 days.

Important:

A separate BSA Adult Application
(along w/ the associative aforementioned forms)
must be submitted by

Anyone

who wants to become a registered
Merit Badge Counselor


*regardless of whether that person
is already a registered BSA Scout Leader.*

(YES – We know it seems redundant!)

However:

Currently Registered

Merit Badge Counselors who want to
add additional Merit Badges
to the list of those that they already
teach, need only to submit a new
Merit Badge Counselor Information
form (BSA Form # 34405)



Questions and Answers

Why does it matter that Merit Badge Counselors be registered separately?

1. Although it may seem redundant...quite simply, "it is a BSA policy."
2. Because Merit Badge Counselor is a completely separate position from a unit or Community Scouting District position you might already hold.
3. Because official Merit Badge Counselor records are maintained by the Field Service Council, not the unit.
4. Because the Field Service Council must approve all MB Counselors.
5. Because BSA requires a background check of all adults who participate in Scouting.
6. Because a Scout is Trustworthy. Someone from your units advancement committee attests to the following statement, when reporting your units' advancements and inputting it into BSA's National database, that:

"I certify that the following record of advancement is correct and that it meets the standards and requirements of the Boy Scouts of America, and that *Merit Badge Counselors are registered adult members of the BSA.*"

Even if I only want to work with Scouts in my troop, do I still have to register as a Merit Badge Counselor?

✓ Yes.

Is there a limit to the number of merit badges a person can register to counsel?

- ✓ No. The only limit is by qualification – counselors must be qualified by vocation (job), avocation (hobby) and/or by Special Training/Knowledge or Certification(s).
- ✓ It is important that applicants provide a short summary of why they believe they are qualified, so that the Field Service Councils "Merit Badge Committee" (*the team who reviews and approves Merit Badge Counselors*) has enough information on which to judge an applicant's merits.

Remember...simply placing an "X" or a "Yes/No" on Merit Badge Counselor Information Form # 34405, will garner a rejection!

Does a Scout need to be a certain rank before he can begin working on merit badges?

- ✓ No. For most merit badges, a Scout can work on any Merit Badge(s), at any time; subject to approval by his Scoutmaster.

- ✓ Sometimes, there may also be some *peculiar* considerations:
EXAMPLE:
 - *Earning the First Aid merit badge, is requirement #1 for the Emergency Preparedness merit badge.*
 - *However, the scout may be able to begin working on Emergency Preparedness merit badge; realizing that he will only be earning "a Partial" on E-Prep.*
 - *Then, upon earning First Aid merit badge, his "partial" for E-Prep, is "automatically" completed – BUT he still must have an approved Emergency Preparedness MB Counselor sign-off, for requirement #1.*

Is there a time limit, from start to finish, for completing a merit badge?

- ✓ The only time limit is the Scout's 18th birthday.*
- ✓ There is no BSA policy that stipulates that a Scout must earn all requirements for a merit badge within a stipulated time period
(ie: within 6 months, or he must start all over again)

* The only exception relates to disabled Scouts with prior approval, via the procedures outlined in BSA's Advancement Policies and Procedures Guide.

Can Scouts work on more than one merit badge at a time?

- ✓ Yes. There is no limitation on how many merit badges a Scout can work on at any given time, subject to following the proper process.

Can Scouts work with you, as their counselor, for a lot of their merit badges?

- ✓ Yes. "There is No Limit on the number of merit badges a youth may earn from one counselor."

SPECIAL NOTE & POINT OF CONSIDERATION:

The Scout should, however, be encouraged to work with as many different Merit Badge Counselors as possible; as it adds to the scouts growth in dealing with different adults, personalities, and breadth of knowledge.

Can a knowledgeable Scout be a Merit Badge Counselor?

- ✓ No. The minimum age for a Merit Badge Counselor is 18.
- ✓ A Scout may *assist* in merit badge sessions, but a registered adult counselor must supervise these sessions, and always be “In-Charge” of ensuring all advancement criteria has been met.

Can you “sign-off” as the Merit Badge Counselor, for a Merit Badge that your NOT registered for, but that “you’ve brought in an expert” to teach?

EXAMPLE:

You are personal friends with the Dean of Aviation Sciences at the local University. He/She is NOT a registered Merit Badge Counselor, however, they have agreed to present the “Aviation” Merit Badge to a group of Scouts. Upon completion you are planning to “Sign-off” on Blue Cards”.

- ✓ Answer: No.
- ✓ Only council registered Merit Badge Counselors may teach & “sign-Off” on Blue Cards

Note: You should be talking to the Dean to encourage them to Register as a Merit Badge Counselor!

Can a person be a Merit Badge Counselor for his/her son?

- ✓ Yes. “An approved Merit Badge Counselor may counsel any youth member, including his or her own son, ward, or relative.”
- ✓ Since one of the benefits of the merit badge program is association with adults with whom the Scout might not be acquainted, many troops routinely suggest that a Scout select a Merit Badge Counselor other than a parent.
- ✓ However, an excellent way to involve parents (as Merit Badge Counselors) and their sons is for the parent to teach a group session where his or her son is involved with other Scouts.
- ✓ It is also acknowledged that in more rural unit settings, that alternative Merit Badge Counselors may be “many miles away” from the Scout, whereby a counselor from that particular units leadership (including a parent) may be the best choice, to be chosen to be that particular Scouts’ Merit Badge Counselor.

How do I handle “partials” that were completed with another counselor?

- ✓ If the previous counselor signed off the Scout, this indicates that the requirement was done to his/ her satisfaction.
- ✓ Therefore, the Scout is Not required to Re-do the requirement; and they should not be asked to do so.

Section 7.0.4.6 of BSA's Guide to Advancement states:

“Once a Registered and Approved Counselor has passed a Scout on requirements for a Merit Badge, it cannot be taken away. Nor, does unit leadership have the authority to retract approval, or take the badge away. Even if a Counselor were found to be improperly documented, it would be a rare occasion when a Scout would be penalized for the mistake of an adult volunteer.”

References:

- ✓ *BSA's "Guide to Advancement" # 614448*
- ✓ *BSA's "A Guide to Merit Badge Counseling" # 34532C*
- ✓ *Application for Merit Badge Counselor #34405*
- ✓ *Individual Merit Badge Pamphlets*
- ✓ *The Boy Scout Handbook*
- ✓ *The Scoutmaster Handbook*
- ✓ *Various Boy Scout Requirements*
- ✓ *Various BSA Policies & Procedures*

Thanks!
for Making a Difference
in the Life of a Boy!



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