

Tips for making First Aid merit badge lessons last

By Mark Ray

Photographs by Dennis Chamberlin

Descending New Hampshire's Mount Monadnock in October 2015, a hiker named Linda slipped and twisted her ankle. She might have been in serious trouble, but instead she was in luck. Not long after her accident, members of Troop 9 from Weymouth, MA, found her, splinted her leg and carted her down the mountain — a four-hour trip — using a fireman's carry. "They started pulling out their kits, and that's when I realized they were Boy Scouts," she told Fox 25 in Boston the next day. "They were just great."



The emergency-room doctor who treated Linda was surprised at the quality of care she had received, but Troop 9 assistant Scoutmaster Mike Jaklitsch, M.D., wasn't. A thoracic surgeon with Brigham and Women's Hospital, Jaklitsch makes sure his Scouts are always ready to use their first-aid skills. As he explained to *Scouting* magazine, he takes a "use it or lose it" approach to this important badge.

Learn and Earn

Troop 9's emphasis on first aid starts almost as soon as Scouts join the troop. Each March, the troop participates in Old Colony Council's Merit Badge University, a three-weekend event where new Scouts are strongly encouraged to earn the First Aid merit badge. Jaklitsch says the class, which takes a total of six hours, is taught by nurses, doctors and EMTs, and includes plenty of hands-on practice with bandages, CPR mannequins and other training tools.

Relearn and Teach

But that class is just the beginning. To complete the First Aid merit badge, Scouts must also complete the first-aid requirements for the Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class ranks. (That's actually the first requirement, but it doesn't have to be completed first.) In Troop 9, the teachers for those requirements are older Scouts. "We really emphasize being boy-led, so it is really important that we have first-aid instructors who are 14, 15, 16 years old and not 56-year-old men," Jaklitsch says.

That doesn't mean just any Scout can teach those skills. Instead, Jaklitsch must certify Scouts who want to be Troop 9 "medics." In less than three hours, interested Scouts must show him they have mastered the skills and can teach them using Scouting's EDGE method. "If they go through all that, they get a pin that looks like an ambulance they can wear on their hat," he says. "It's this little 49-cent piece of swag, but it's enough to make them want to do it."

Learn as You Go

Finally, the troop views every incident that occurs on an outing as a teachable moment. "We're a big enough troop that there are always some injuries in the course of a year," Jaklitsch says. "We use that as an opportunity at dinnertime or the campfire to say, 'Hey, remember when Bill had the ankle [injury] today? What did we do? What could we have done better?'"

Discussions like that — and the training that precedes them — help keep skills fresh. "It's constant repetition," Jaklitsch says. "I don't think first aid can really stick if you just do it once a year."

