

Totin' Chip

TROOP 23 BROOKLYN · [HTTPS://WWW.T23B.ORG/ADVANCEMENTS/AWARDS/TOTIN-CHIP](https://www.t23b.org/advancements/awards/totin-chip)



The Totin' Chip is a Scouting America certification that gives a Scout the right to carry and use woods tools: a pocketknife, a saw and an ax. To earn it, you show a leader that you can handle, care for and use each one safely — and you take on a short set of promises about how you behave with them around other people. It can be taken away again.

It matters in two places. On a Troop 23 outing, a Scout without a Totin' Chip does not carry a woods tool, and uses one only under an instructor's eye while he is earning the chip. And on service projects, including Eagle projects, Scouting America's tool-use guidelines let a Scout use a pocketknife or wood-carving knife only once he has earned it.

This is the guide Troop 23 teaches from, in the order of the session, and each section names the requirement it covers. Read it before the campout — the session itself is for doing. It also comes as a printable copy, together with the sign-off sheet and the instructor guide. Its partner for fire is the Firem'n Chit.

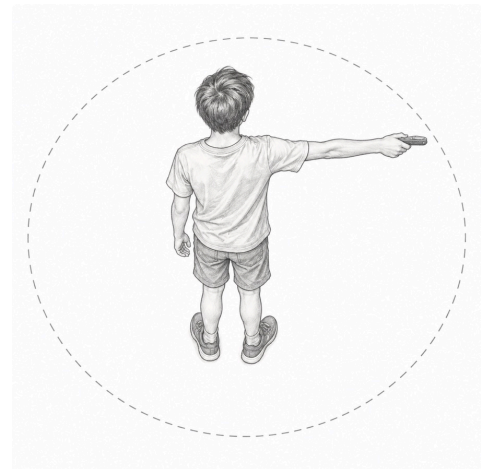
Your Safety Circle

Before you open a blade or pick up a saw or an ax, check your safety circle. Hold the closed tool at arm's length and turn slowly all the way around. Nobody should be inside that circle, and nothing the tool could catch — a branch overhead, a guy line, a tent. If someone steps into your circle while you are working, stop until they are out of it.

A tool is a tool, not a toy. No throwing, no flipping, no tricks, no tool in your hand while you are fooling around, and a knife or an ax is never used as a hammer or a pry bar. That is requirement 3, and it is shown over the whole session, not in a single moment.

And one habit for every tool: when you hand it to someone, you do not let go until they say "Thank you." That word means they have a firm grip on it.

Requirements 3 and 4.

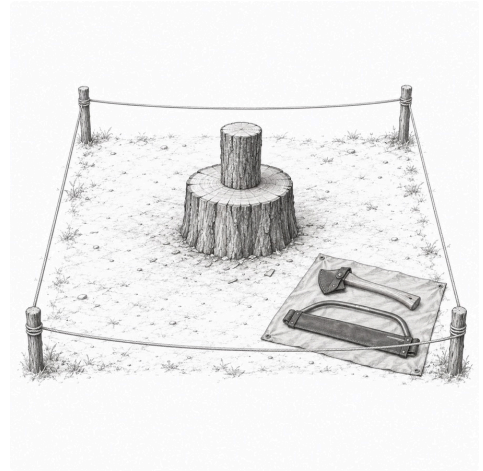


The Axe Yard

Saw and ax work at a campsite happens in an axe yard: a patch of ground roped off with stakes and cord, cleared of brush, with room to swing. Only the person working is inside. Anyone else asks before stepping in, and waits if told to.

Tools that are not in use lie sheathed on a tarp inside the yard — never in the grass. Gloves and eye protection go on for saw and ax work. When you finish, rake the chips and bark out of the yard and put the tools away.

Requirement 4.



The Pocketknife

A good Scout knife is simple: one or two blades that lock open, made of steel that does not rust easily. More gadgets do not make it a better knife.

- Open and close it with your fingers clear of the edge, and keep the blade closed except while you are cutting.
- Cut away from yourself and away from anyone near you.
- Close the blade before you hand the knife to anyone.
- Do not pry with the point, and never strike the knife with anything — a blade snaps.
- After cutting food, wash it, rinse it and dry it. Keep the inside free of dirt, and put a drop of light oil on the hinge now and then.
- Follow the rules about knives at school and anywhere else that bans them.

Requirement 2.



Sharpening and the Fuzz Stick

A sharp knife is safer than a dull one: it cuts with less force, so it slips less. Sharpen on a whetstone, holding the blade at a low, steady angle and keeping that same angle on every stroke and on both sides. To check, look straight at the edge in good light — a dull edge shines, a sharp one shows no line of light. Our note on when and how to sharpen a pocketknife goes into more detail.

Then make a fuzz stick. Take a dry, straight stick and shave long, thin curls down it, stopping each one before it comes off, so the curls stay on the stick in a bunch. It is the best tinder there is, and the knife skill the Firem'n Chit needs.

Requirement 2.

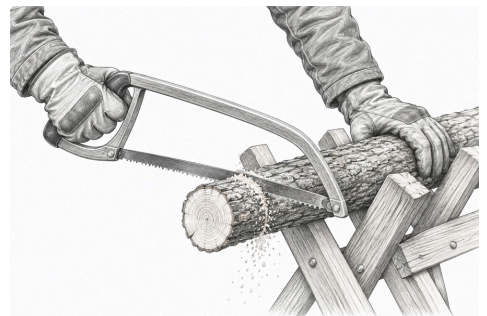


The Saw

For cutting firewood, the saw is usually the right tool: it cuts a log through faster than an ax and is easier to control. Camp saws come as folding saws, whose blade folds into the handle, and bow saws, whose blade is held tight in a metal frame.

- Brace the wood on something solid — a log, a sawbuck, the chopping block — so it cannot roll, and keep your other hand well away from the blade's path.
- Use long, smooth strokes and let the weight of the saw do the cutting. Forcing it makes it bind.
- Do not let the teeth touch the ground: soil and stones dull them fast.
- Keep the saw sheathed when it is not cutting, and carry it and pass it with the blade turned away.
- Cutting a limb from a standing tree — and only with permission — saw a short way up from underneath first, then cut down from the top, close to the trunk. The undercut keeps the falling limb from tearing a strip of bark off the tree.

Requirement 2.



The Ax

Check the ax before you use it. If the head is loose, the handle is cracked or the edge is dull, it is not used until it is fixed.

Split on a chopping block — a wide, flat round of log — never on rock or concrete, and never let the edge go into the ground. Stand the piece upright on the block, set your feet apart and firm, and look for a crack in the end of the wood to aim at. Raise the ax and let its weight bring it down; you guide it, you do not force it. If the piece sticks on the blade, lift it off and stand it up again — never swing with wood stuck on the ax.

For small sticks there is a safer way. Rest the edge on the end of the stick, lift both together, and bring them down onto the block as one; then twist the ax to open the split.

Requirement 2.



Carrying and Passing the Ax

Carry the ax sheathed, holding the handle just below the head, with the edge turned out away from your body and your arm hanging at your side. Never carry it on your shoulder.

To pass it, keep the sheath on, turn the edge away from both of you, and hold it out handle first. Let go only after the other person says "Thank you."

When you are done, the ax goes back into its sheath and back with the troop gear. It is never left lying around camp. An ax is sharpened with a file and with gloves on — ask to be shown before you try it.

Requirements 2 and 4.



Never at a Person

"I will not use or point a knife in a threatening manner."

This requirement is different from the others. It is a promise about how you behave with a knife around people, and it cannot be demonstrated the way a cut can. A knife is never pointed or waved at anyone — not in an argument, not as a joke. You say this one in your own words at the session, and leaders watch for it on that campout and on every one after.

Some older printed cards and web pages leave this requirement out. Scoutbook, where the chip is recorded, has it, so we teach it, and Troop 23's own cards carry it.

Requirement 5.

Trees, Property and the Outdoor Code

Cut living or dead trees only with permission and for a good reason. At a campsite, firewood comes from dead and down wood, where the camp allows gathering it; a standing tree, alive or dead, is cut only after asking a leader, who checks with the camp or the owner. Never carve on trees, picnic tables or shelters.

Requirement 7 is the Outdoor Code: *"As an American, I will do my best to be clean in my outdoor manners, be careful with fire, be considerate in the outdoors, and be conservation-minded."* With a knife or an ax in your hand that means: clean up your chips, leave the trees standing, keep your tools off other people's things, and use only the wood you need. You will be asked to say the code and tell what one line of it means.

Requirements 6 and 7.

Saw and Ax Work on Our Campouts



How You Earn It

The chip is taught on a campout, in an axe yard, with the troop's own tools, by an adult leader or by a Scout who holds the card. Every Scout handles every tool. Bring your handbook, and have the knife, saw and ax pages read before you arrive.

There is no written test. You show each requirement by doing it, and the instructor asks you questions out loud as you work — the same list every time, written out with answers, so every Scout is checked against the same thing. The list is in the instructor guide.

Each requirement is initialed as you show it. The card is issued when all seven are done: a Scoutmaster or Assistant Scoutmaster and the Advancement Chair sign it, and it is recorded in Scoutbook. Anything not finished on one campout is finished on the next — what is signed stays signed.

Scouting America's own text says only that the Totin' Rights can be taken away; how is left to each troop. In Troop 23 a corner comes off the card for each safety slip. With all four corners gone, the card goes back to the

Scoutmaster and you show the requirements again before you use a woods tool on a troop outing. The rule is printed on the back of our cards.

Tenderfoot 3d and the Firem'n Chit

The same demonstrations cover a Tenderfoot requirement, which is signed separately:

- **3d.** Demonstrate proper care, sharpening, and use of the knife, saw, and ax. Describe when each should be used.

And the knife leads straight to the fire: Second Class requirement 2b asks a Scout to prepare tinder, kindling and fuel wood with a pocketknife, and a saw or ax if needed. That fire is the Firem'n Chit. The rest of each rank is on our rank pages, and the other awards a Scout can earn are on Awards.

The Seven Requirements, Word for Word

This is the wording in Scoutbook, where Scouting America records the Totin' Chip.

"This certification grants a Scout the right to carry and use woods tools. The Scout must show their Scout leader, or someone designated by their leader, that the Scout understands their responsibility to do the following:"

1. Read and understand woods tools use and safety rules from the Scouts BSA handbooks.
2. Demonstrate proper handling, care, and use of the pocket knife, ax, and saw.
3. Use knife, ax, and saw as tools, not playthings.
4. Respect all safety rules to protect others.
5. I will not use or point a knife in a threatening manner.
6. Respect property. Cut living and dead trees only with permission and good reason.
7. Subscribe to the Outdoor Code.

"The Scout's 'Totin' Rights' can be taken away if they fail in their responsibility."

Where each one is covered in this guide: 1 — the whole guide, and the woods tools pages of your handbook; 2 — The Pocketknife, Sharpening and the Fuzz Stick, The Saw, The Ax; 3 and 4 — Your Safety Circle and The Axe Yard; 5 — Never at a Person; 6 and 7 — Trees, Property and the Outdoor Code. The [scouting.org](https://www.scouting.org) page lists six of these; requirement 5 is the one it does not have.