YOUTH MEMBERSHIP & ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION



ENROLL → WELCOME → ENGAGE → DEVELOP → RETAIN → LEAD

NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP & SQUADRON ACTIVITIES

Active Squadrons = Active Members.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AT A GLANCE

A practical starting plan for every squadron — use the full guide for more ideas.

Guidance only: Recommendations from the SAL National Membership & Squadron Activities Committee are optional, not directives or requirements.

1

WELCOME

Personally greet each young Son and his family. Explain what the SAL does, introduce him to members, and share the date of an upcoming youth-friendly activity.

2

CONNECT

Help him learn about the parent or grandparent whose military service makes him eligible. Invite the family to share a story or photo and participate in a patriotic activity together.

3

ENGAGE

Invite him directly to a hands-on activity: make cards for veterans, assist with a food drive, place flags on graves, or help at an American Legion Family event.

4

INVOLVE

Ask what he enjoys and what he would like to try. Give him a specific, age-appropriate job—welcoming guests, handing out supplies, or assisting with a project.

5

DEVELOP

Build friendships and skills over time. Encourage teamwork, public speaking, planning, and service; give teens greater responsibility as their confidence grows.

6

RETAIN & LEAD

Recognize his contributions, keep in touch with his family, and personally invite him back. As he grows, help him mentor younger members and take on leadership roles.

THE FIRST 90 DAYS: MAKE THE CONNECTION

Welcome him and learn his family service story.
Invite him to one activity and give him one meaningful job.
Recognize his participation and personally invite him back.

START SMALL: ONE YOUNG MEMBER. ONE INVITATION. ONE ACTIVITY.

The goal is not just an annual renewal—it is a young Son who wants to stay involved.

Purpose

Youth membership is more than adding a name to a roster. It is an opportunity to connect an eligible son or grandson to his family's military heritage, give him a place to belong, introduce him to service, and help him grow into a future leader of the Sons of The American Legion. **Enrollment is the beginning - not the goal.**

HERITAGE	BELONGING	SERVICE	GROWTH	LEADERSHIP	OUR FUTURE

Our responsibility is to help a young Son understand why he belongs, experience the mission for himself, develop friendships and skills, and eventually choose to carry that mission forward.

1 Start With Our Families

Some of our best opportunities to grow youth membership are already within our American Legion Family. Encourage members to identify eligible sons and grandsons and invite them into an experience - not simply into a dues transaction.

- American Legion Family Day and family events
- Post open houses and youth-friendly activities
- Community and veterans service projects
- Memorial Day and Veterans Day activities
- Squadron recruitment opportunities

Show families what a young Son can do, learn, experience, and become through involvement.

2 Make Membership a Family Experience

Youth membership can create meaningful opportunities for generations of a family to participate in the American Legion Family together. A young Son may serve alongside a parent or grandparent - volunteering together, placing flags together, attending patriotic activities, or working side by side on a community project.

- Create activities that parents, grandparents, and youth can do together
- Encourage parents and grandparents to share family military stories
- Invite eligible family members to learn about opportunities throughout the American Legion Family
- Use service and patriotic activities to create shared family memories

When generations serve together, membership becomes more than belonging to an organization - it becomes a family tradition.

3 Make Enrollment the Beginning

When a young member joins, personally welcome him and his family. Help him understand the Sons of The American Legion, why the organization exists, and the veteran through whom he is eligible.

- Explain his connection to the veteran who makes him eligible
- Introduce him to other members and youth
- Give the family an upcoming activity immediately
- Explain how Sons serve veterans, families, youth, and communities

A membership card identifies him as a Son. Participation helps him understand what that means.

4 Give Youth Something Meaningful to Do

Young members need hands-on opportunities appropriate for their age and abilities. The objective is to let them experience service rather than simply hear adults talk about it.

- Make cards or care packages for veterans
- Help with food or toy drives
- Assist at Post or American Legion Family events
- Place flags on veterans' graves
- Participate in patriotic programs
- Help with appropriate fundraisers and community projects

Small acts of service can create a lasting sense of purpose and belonging.

5 Make It Fun and Build Friendships

Youth involvement should include camaraderie as well as service. Family picnics, bowling, fishing, games, holiday activities, youth events, and other family-friendly gatherings give young Sons opportunities to build friendships and positive memories connected to the organization.

A young member who enjoys being there is far more likely to want to come back.

6 Give Youth a Voice

Ask younger members what interests them and what they would like to do. Their answers can help a squadron develop activities that actually appeal to the youth it is trying to engage.

- What activities interest you?
- What would you like to do at the Post?
- What kind of service would you enjoy?
- What would make you want to invite another young member?

Giving youth a voice creates ownership, confidence, and belonging.

7 Grow Responsibility as They Grow

A young Son should not remain a spectator as he gets older. Give him increasing responsibility based on age, maturity, and interest.

- Lead the Pledge of Allegiance
- Assist with a patriotic ceremony
- Help organize a youth or service activity
- Welcome families at an event
- Present a donation or speak about a project
- Help a younger member participate

PARTICIPATE -> ASSIST -> TAKE RESPONSIBILITY -> LEAD

8 Don't Make Meetings the Only Youth Experience

Business meetings have a purpose, but they should not be the only way a young member experiences the SAL. An 8-, 12-, or 16-year-old may connect first through service, friendship, patriotism, family activities, and hands-on projects.

Create the connection first. Teach the organization as the member grows.

9 Partner With Parents and Grandparents

Youth engagement depends heavily on the adults who bring young members to activities and reinforce the experience at home. Communicate clearly and invite parents and grandparents to participate alongside them when appropriate.

- Provide dates, times, locations, and expectations
- Explain what the young member will be doing
- Give adequate notice for family schedules
- Follow applicable youth-protection practices

Families are partners in helping a young Son develop his own connection to the SAL.

10 Give Every Youth Member a Connection

Consider identifying a responsible member to serve as a youth contact or mentor. The purpose is simple: make sure young members and their families are personally welcomed, invited, and remembered.

- Welcome new youth members
- Introduce them to other members

- Share upcoming youth-friendly opportunities
- Learn their interests
- Encourage them to return

A personal invitation can be the difference between a name on a roster and a young member who belongs.

11 Recognize Youth Contributions

Recognition reinforces that a young member's contribution mattered. Celebrate volunteer service, patriotic participation, recruitment, leadership, milestones, and other accomplishments in age-appropriate ways.

- Certificates or simple awards
- Recognition at an event or meeting
- Newsletter recognition
- Social-media recognition when appropriate and permitted

Recognition builds confidence and encourages the next step.

12 Record Youth Service

The service performed by youth members is part of the impact of the Sons of The American Legion. Record appropriate volunteer hours, donations, veterans service, community service, and other qualifying activities on the Squadron Consolidated Report when applicable.

Every hour matters - and youth service should be part of the story we tell about our impact.

13 Prepare Teen Members for Leadership

Teen members are approaching the point when they can take greater ownership of their SAL experience. Give them opportunities to learn leadership, communication, project planning, membership, fundraising, ceremonies, meeting procedures, and squadron operations.

Don't wait until age 18 to ask a young Son to become involved. Develop tomorrow's leaders while they are still growing.

14 Build a Member Who Wants to Stay

For many youth members, a parent or grandparent pays the dues. That may preserve continuous membership, but our larger goal is to develop a young man who eventually chooses for himself to remain a Son.

When his memories include honoring veterans, serving his community, understanding his family's military heritage, making friends, and being trusted with responsibility, his membership has personal meaning.

15 Every Squadron Can Build the Future

Youth engagement does not require a large budget or a large youth membership. If a squadron has one young member, give that one member something meaningful to do. Partner with the Post and other parts of the American Legion Family when appropriate.

One engaged young Son today can become one of the leaders carrying our mission tomorrow.

16 Connect Him to His Family's Service Story

Help each youth member learn about the parent or grandparent through whom he is eligible. Family heritage is one of the things that makes youth membership in the SAL unique.

- Branch of military service
- When and where the veteran served
- Photos, stories, medals, or keepsakes
- What that service meant to the family

Understanding his priceless heritage gives a young Son a personal reason to carry it forward.

17 Match Opportunities to Age and Readiness

Youth is not one age group. Activities and responsibilities should grow with the member.

- Younger youth: cards for veterans, flags, simple collections, family activities
- Middle-school age: service projects, event assistance, patriotic programs, teamwork
- Teen members: planning, speaking, recruiting, budgeting, mentoring, and leadership

Give every age a next step.

18 Develop Skills Through Youth Service

Participation can intentionally help young members develop skills they will use throughout life.

- Leadership and teamwork
- Organization and project planning
- Public speaking and communication
- Budgeting and fundraising
- Problem-solving and responsibility

The SAL can be a place where a young man learns by doing.

19 Use SAL Youth Recognition Programs

Existing SAL programs such as the Ten Ideals and the Five-Star Award/Five Point Program of Service can provide goals and recognition for young members. Squadrons should become familiar with these programs and use them when appropriate.

Youth recognition should reinforce growth, citizenship, service, leadership, and knowledge of our organization.

20 Open the Door to American Legion Family Youth Opportunities

Help young Sons and their families learn about appropriate American Legion Family youth programs and opportunities. Their connection to the SAL can become a gateway to broader experiences in citizenship, education, service, and community involvement.

- Boys State and civic education opportunities
- Oratorical and educational programs
- American Legion Baseball and youth activities
- Children & Youth and community-service programs

Expose young members to opportunities that help them learn, grow, and discover where they fit.

21 Let Youth Help Recruit Youth

An involved older youth member can be a powerful ambassador. Encourage him to understand eligibility, talk about what he does in the SAL, and invite eligible friends or relatives to participate in an activity.

The best youth recruitment message may simply be another young Son saying: Come do this with us.

The First 90 Days: Turn Enrollment Into Engagement

1	**WELCOME HIM**
2	**LEARN HIS FAMILY'S SERVICE STORY**
3	**INVITE HIM TO ONE YOUTH-FRIENDLY ACTIVITY**
4	**GIVE HIM ONE MEANINGFUL JOB**
5	**CONNECT HIM WITH OTHER YOUTH**
6	**RECOGNIZE HIS PARTICIPATION**
7	**PERSONALLY INVITE HIM BACK**

For Parents & Grandparents
You are an important partner in helping a young Son build his own connection to the organization.

Bring him to activities when possible. Tell him about the veteran through whom he is eligible. Serve alongside him. Encourage him to try new things, build friendships, and gradually accept responsibility.

The goal is not simply to renew his dues each year. The goal is to help him grow into a member who understands why he belongs and chooses to carry the mission forward.

The Youth Development Role of Membership & Squadron Activities

RECRUIT	Identify eligible youth and show families what becoming a Son can offer.
ENGAGE	Give young members meaningful, age-appropriate opportunities to participate.
DEVELOP	Build skills, confidence, relationships, responsibility, and understanding of the mission.
RETAIN & LEAD	Help young Sons grow into members who choose to stay involved and eventually lead.

We aren't recruiting youth simply to increase today's membership. We're engaging them to build tomorrow's Sons of The American Legion.

A Youth Engagement Check for Every Squadron

1. Does each young Son know the family service story behind his eligibility?
2. Has he been personally invited to a youth-friendly activity?
3. Has he been given something meaningful and age-appropriate to do?
4. Has anyone asked what interests him?
5. Is his responsibility growing as he grows?
6. Are we helping him see himself as part of the future of the SAL?

Our youth are more than our youngest members. They are the future of our organization.

DON'T JUST ENROLL OUR YOUTH - ENGAGE THEM.

Help them understand their heritage. Give them a place to belong. Let them serve. Help them grow. Prepare them to lead.

Active Squadrons = Active Members.