



# Stages of Development and Age Sections

## Introduction

Scouting operates in developmental age sections, whereby the age section is created around the changing needs of young people as they grow and develop through the Youth Programme in a specific target age group. During this step of the process, it is important to understand two crucial questions:

1. How do young people in the culturally specific contexts of the country actually need to learn, grow, and develop?
2. How do these developmental needs correspond to a target age group that allows for these needs to be addressed?

These questions are essential to understanding how young people develop and the best way to enable them to grow as individuals through the Youth programme. When designing or reviewing your NSO's Youth Programme, it is important to ask if the existing age sections are fit for purpose and address the developmental needs of young people, as well as considering the age groups favoured by the school system and social institutes in your country.

In the beginning, the Scout Method was designed for teenagers aged 12 to 16. It was for young people of this age that Baden-Powell decided to organise the first experimental camp on Brownsea Island in 1907. A short time later, the need to extend the Movement to younger children was identified. The Cubs age section was established, which at the beginning integrated children aged 8 to 11. Later, the Rover age section was created for young adults aged 17 to 20.

Scouting at this time identified three main age ranges: childhood (circa 7/8–11/12), adolescence (circa 11/12–16/17), and youth (circa 16/17–21/22). It was therefore well adapted to the developmental needs of young people of the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century. Many NSOs in the world keep this division of three age sections. Others have incorporated a fourth age section, between the Scout section and the Rover section (some call it Venturers or Senior Scouts). In some NSOs there is the inclusion of younger childhood sections (circa 6–8); these sections may be known as Beavers, Keas, Joeys, etc. In short, Scouting today caters to young people from a range of different ages and many NSOs have developed new ways to share the Scouting experience with more young people.

Here in this crucial chapter we aim to understand and answer the questions posed to determine why and how young people develop. In doing this, you can adapt an age section for your NSO to suit the needs of young people in the specific cultural context of your country.



## Understanding the development of young people

As previously mentioned, it is important that we understand how young people develop and grow as individuals. From here we can then answer how the Scouting Youth Programme can adapt to meet these changing developmental needs through targeted age groups.

In simple terms, we could define evolutionary development as the processes of change at all levels that occur throughout life. It is a product both of our relationship with the environment that surrounds us, and our genetic predispositions.

We could also view it as an ordered sequence of changes in the morphological and functional differentiation, where changes in the psychological and biological structures are integrated with learning and socio-emotional changes.

In both definitions, it seems that what we bring at birth (genetic predispositions) and the environment in which we develop, mutually influence the change we experience in the evolutionary stages we go through.

In both definitions we see how development is not the result of a single factor or type of factors. On the contrary, it is considered that there are multiple factors that intervene in it and that, broadly speaking, we could classify these as genetic factors (internal or endogenous) and environmental factors (external or exogenous).

### Areas of developmental research

In the context of Scouting, we use the areas of personal growth SPICES (social, physical, intellectual, character, emotional, and spiritual) as areas of development in young people. While we use these areas of personal growth through a non-formal education lens, it is also important to note the range of information and research from other areas of development. SPICES fit well within these areas, and, in the context of carrying out research for developing a target age range, these are more common areas of research:

Cognitive	How young people think and learn
Psychosocial	Social and emotional development
Physical Development	Gross and fine motor development

### Cognitive development

The area of cognitive development simply refers to how young people think and learn. Cognitive development focuses on how young people process information, conceptual resources, perceptual skills, language learning, and other such factors that help them understand the world around them.



Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that young people move through four different stages of cognitive development.<sup>1</sup>

1. Sensorimotor stage: birth to 2 years
2. Preoperational stage: ages 2 to 7
3. Concrete operational stage: ages 7 to 11
4. Formal operational stage: ages 12 and up

An important factor in developing the target age groups for the Youth Programme is understanding different stages of cognitive development in young people, and at a later stage be able to tailor learning opportunities to meet their growing cognitive developmental needs.

### **Psychosocial development**

Psychosocial development refers to the social and emotional development of young people. This involves not only changes in behavioural development over time, but also the social cognitive development of young people and the perception of not just their own social behaviours, thought processes, judgments, etc., but those of others around them.

Erik Erickson's eight stages of psychosocial development theory is widely regarded and refers to eight stages of personality development<sup>2</sup>. The stages, in essence, refer to the social interactions and relationships built between people, believing that at each stage people experience a conflict that serves as a turning point in their own development.

1. Trust vs. Mistrust
2. Autonomy vs. Shame
3. Initiative vs. Guilt
4. Industry vs. Inferiority
5. Identity vs. Role Confusion
6. Intimacy vs. Isolation
7. Generativity vs. Stagnation
8. Ego Integrity vs. Despair

This understanding of how young people interact with one another at different life stages is an important step in creating a targeted developmental age group, noting that further steps, such as the application of the Scout Method, are crucial in ensuring that elements such as the team system can be properly applied to each section, cater to the social needs of the targeted group, and allow young people to further their own social and emotional development.

### **Physical development**

Physical development in young people involves developing control over the physical body, particularly muscles and physical coordination. Often this area focuses widely on gross and fine motor development and that which relates to puberty. Essentially, gross motor development refers to the use of large body movements and fine motor development refers to the use of smaller, precise body movements.

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<sup>1</sup> Piaget's theory of cognitive development

<sup>2</sup> Erik Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development



These physical developmental needs in young people occur at different rates and are determined by a number of internal biological and external influential factors. When structuring the targeted age groups, consider the rates of physical development and how the application of the Scout Method can be applied to differing developmental age groups.

FIGURE 1: TEAM-ECD SCHEMATIC

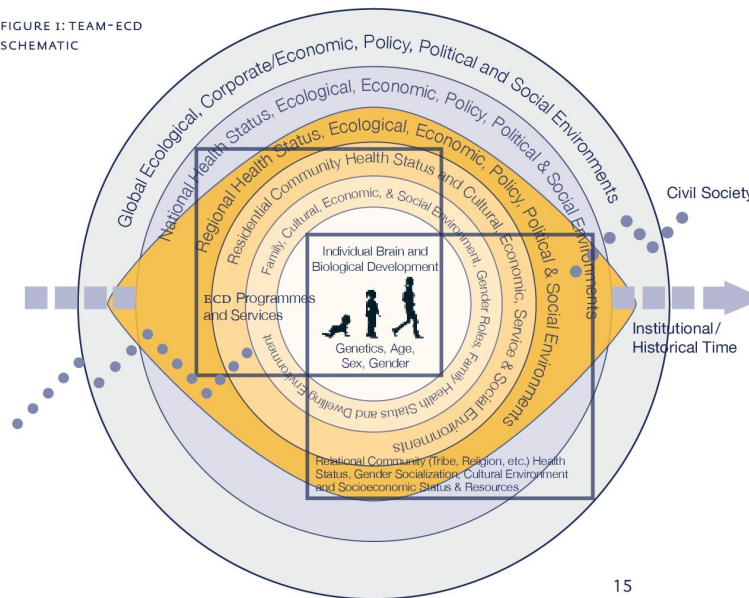


Fig.1

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## Factors in the development of young people

Although certain constant factors can be observed, the stages of development are not universal. Socio-economic factors have an impact on the psychological and physiological factors, creating different rhythms and steps according to the culture and social conditions. Therefore, depending on the selected criteria (physiological, social, cultural, economic, etc.), the stages of development can be analysed from different points of view. In short, when looking at the development of age sections, we must analyse the rate at which young people mature in the context of the specific country in which the NSO operates.

- **Socio-economic contexts**

The life experiences of young people are shaped by wider social and economic contexts. These experiences impact the way young people develop, be it through a challenging economic situation, natural disaster, war, poverty, or changing political system; it can have an impact on their development and how they perceive the world in which they live.

- **Cultural contexts**

All aspects of young people's lives take place within specific cultural contexts. Though complex and dynamic, the cultural contexts of people have a profound impact on their development. This could be the ethnic culture with which young people identify; the organisational culture of your NSO, or other institutions such as schools or early learning centres; and youth subcultures that young people increasingly identify with.



The many cultural contexts of a country are an important factor in the development of age sections, especially in a world that is increasingly multicultural and diverse. It is important to ensure all young people feel safe and included.

- **Environmental contexts**

The environment in which young people live is also a factor that can impact their development. This again is very complex and should take into consideration many environmental factors such as pollutants, chemical exposure, temperature, climate, and altitude.

These environmental aspects can contribute to the widening of the gap and timing of the onset of puberty and possibly link to obesity. These factors should be considered within the context of your country when designing or reviewing your NSO's Youth Programme.

### **Broad stages of development**

In the following, we take a brief look at five broad stages in the development of young people. When establishing the age section for your Youth Programme, your NSO will have to get a more detailed picture (and understanding) of how young people in their specific context develop across the various areas.

- **Early childhood**

In early childhood the ability of a child to cooperate within a group is very limited. This is an important question to consider if you are planning to develop a programme for a Pre-Cubs section (Beavers, Joeys, Keas ... etc.). Some of the key elements of the Scout Method (e.g. the team system) cannot really be implemented before late childhood.

- **Late childhood**

Late childhood ranges from early childhood until the onset of puberty and is characterised by a certain level of stability. It is even called "mature childhood". The child feels comfortable in their body, demonstrates intellectual curiosity, accepts the authority of adults, and is easily integrated into a group. This is the age of the Cub Scout age section.

- **Puberty**

Stability is disturbed by the onset of puberty, which varies a lot, but in most places occurs at some point between 9 and 14 years (earlier for girls than boys). This brings numerous changes, both on a personal level (an acceleration in physical growth and a new logical reasoning stage) as well as socially (the end of primary school and the beginning of secondary school in many countries). This is what some psychologists call the "crisis of early adolescence"<sup>3</sup>, and it is shown through rejecting the laws of childhood, challenging the authority of adults, being attracted to smaller social groups, etc.

- **Adolescence**

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<sup>3</sup> Erik Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development





After puberty, with the acquisition of sexual maturity, the establishment of gender identity, and the development of abstract logical reasoning, a new stage is reached, that of adolescence. However, the restructuring phase that began with puberty, continues until a new balance is progressively reached. From the onset of puberty, a rather unstable stage is experienced during which the rhythms of development vary widely depending on gender (maturity is reached more quickly by females) and the influence of social and cultural factors. It is also important to beware of other factors such as what rights young people are entitled to under the law of a country once they reach a certain age, including at what age a young person legally becomes an adult in your country. This can raise *Safe from Harm* implications in the structure of the particular age section and the interaction with peers. After this, young adulthood begins, and during this time the biggest challenge may be the inclination to take adult roles and be fully integrated into society.

- **Young adulthood**

Young adulthood can also be the beginning of a new phase of independence with new challenges to be faced. It often signifies the time when the young person develops a greater understanding of themselves through the decisions they will make concerning their lives. Whether it is in university education, the beginning of an internship or apprenticeship, or in the world of employment, young people's decisions will often have consequences for the future, impacting themselves and others.

Some will choose to be leaders in Scouting and follow a training path which will contribute to their continual development. Our focus here are those young people who wish to continue to be participants or recipients of Scouting's Youth Programme, as they will be the members of the last age section.

### **Fundamental processes in the development of young people**

- **Development is a dynamic construction process.** The child is not passive, limited to receiving information from the environment. On the contrary, they are an active agent of their own development, which they construct in constant interaction with the environment. The child learns by exploring and acting in the environment, which in turn produces a continuous change in them and their formation of new structures of thought and relationship.
- **Development is an adaptive process.** One of the purposes of development is adaptation to the physical environment. In this interactive process, the child gradually adapts to the environment in which they live and from which they receive information. .
- **Development is a cross-cutting process.** On the one hand, development takes place across different areas (physical, emotional, spiritual, social, etc.) following a parallel evolution. It is also true that certain areas have more weight at some ages than others. On the other hand, it is a cross-cutting process because it occurs through the interaction of many different factors, both individual or genetic, external or environmental. The child is born with a potential for learning and development determined by genetic inheritance, but environmental conditions can favour or hinder their development.



- **Development is a continuous process.** Each new achievement of the child is an extension of the skills that they already possess. This is known as scaffolding. The child needs scaffolding, i.e., knowledge and skills that they already dominate and on which they rely to build new learning, so they become an active agent for their own development.
- **Development is an individual process.** The different achievements that occur in the development process do not all happen at exactly the same age. Age is an approximate reference in which the different characteristics and abilities appear, since each person is a unique and unrepeatable being with their own history, characteristics, rhythm of learning, interests, and needs.

## Developmental age sections

As mentioned earlier, the original early system of Scouting comprised three age sections:

- Cub Scouts, from circa 7/8 to 11/12 years old
- Scouts, from circa 11/12 to 16/17 years of age
- Rovers, from circa 16/17 to 21/22 years of age

This system has been in use for a long time and can still be found in many countries. It corresponds to three main stages of development:

- Childhood
- Adolescence
- Youth

The Scout age sections originally had the broadest range of ages (5–6 years of a difference). This age section formed the original core of the Movement and was the backbone for the rest. In addition, this age section implemented more extensively one of the fundamental elements of the Scout Method: the small group system or team system.



## Different models



Diagram 1 - traditional age section system



Diagram 2 - The Scout section is divided into two sections



Diagram 3 - A «pre-Cub» section added



Diagram 4 - Inclusive of all age sections models

Fig.2

These models show different examples of targeted age sections. This is not to say that these age groups are necessary as many NSOs operate different models for different age groups.

The World Youth Programme Policy recognises that Scouting programmes broadly operate from the ages of 5 to 26 within the context of most NSOs. Each targeted age group must be the best model to fit the country of context. Your NSO must decide based on research, data, and due diligence at what point an age section starts and finishes.

The Guidelines for the Rover Scout Section emphasise the importance of ending the Rover Scouts section at a specific age (20, 22, 25). This age will differ from country to country, taking into consideration the cultural, economic, and social factors.

“... Scouting’s role is to support young people’s personal development until they reach adulthood. So the programme we offer shouldn’t end before reaching that state, because it would be ‘incomplete’....At the same time we have to consider that it also seems inappropriate to continue to provide an educational programme to “‘fully-developed’ people that already have found their own place in their community.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Empowering Young Adults: Guidelines for The Rover Scout Section, WOSM, 2009





At the other end of the age range, the Scout Method can be used with young children that are at a developmentally appropriate level. There needs to be an understanding of the concept of making a personal commitment to a code of conduct through an appropriately worded Scout Promise and accompanying Scout Law as well as the ability to exercise leadership within a small group.<sup>5</sup>

### Selection criteria for well-adapted age-section models

**a. Total duration of the Scout experience.** We have seen that Scouting was originally created for the age range of 12–16. The age sections of Cubs and Rovers were created later, extending the total experience within the Scout Movement from 5 to 12 years. This trend has been accentuated over the years and in some countries now reaches 15 or more years.

This duration is theoretical, since in reality only a small proportion of young people remain throughout the period. Competition from other activities, increased educational demands and unforeseen events (relocation, school changes, etc.) often prevent young people from prolonging their stay.

**b. Balance between the age sections.** A decision must be made as to the number of developmental age sections your NSO will implement, and based on prior research into the developmental areas of young people in your country, into what age brackets the sections will fit. This also has implications for the application of the Scout Method and the learning opportunities for each developmental age section.

Some NSOs report that with the theoretical extension of the age sections to include pre-cubs, the majority of their membership resides in the younger age sections as opposed to other sections. This could be due to a variety of reasons such as additional adult support in the sections, parental choice for participation in the Youth Programme, or the Youth Programme content favouring a younger target audience.

In terms of the age span, your NSO should also consider a balance between the different age sections. As presented in the last model (fig.2) and although some NSOs have extended the Rover Section up to 26 years old, this may create a disproportion, having a 8/9-year age span in comparison with the previous age sections.

**c. The importance of the senior section.** It is also the case that high numbers in the younger age sections can influence the popularity of your older age sections, and your NSO risks becoming a children's organisation rather than a youth organisation. As Scouting aims to help young people take a creative role in society, it is important to have a focus on development in your last age section.

Regardless, there are many considerations to developing targeted age sections that will have implications on other aspects of your NSO, such as the application of the Scout Method, the quality of the Youth Programme, or the growth of your NSO. This step in the GPS informs other critical steps in the Youth Programme development and highlights the importance of your NSO carrying out due diligence so its decision about targeted age groups is an informed one.

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<sup>5</sup> The Essential Characteristics of Scouting, WOSM, 2019



**d. The implementation of the team system.** In all age sections, young people are organised in small teams, under the responsibility of their own leadership. The intention of this system, as Baden-Powell himself explained, is to give young people a maximum amount of responsibility while allowing them to fully develop their own interests and to develop their leadership skills.

The implementation of all elements of the Scout Method depends on the average developmental stage of the young people in the section. The team system, however, is also highly dependent on the maturity within the team. The twenty-first-century Leadership in Scouting model describes leadership as a collaborative process, and, like all collaborative processes, it depends on the social dynamics of the team.

A larger span of maturity will give the older, more mature and experienced Scouts, a greater authority, creating a risk that the opinions of younger members could be less appreciated. A smaller age span within the section risks creating a team where no-one has the authority to facilitate the leadership process and ensure that all members of the team are given a voice in leading the team.

**e. Age section transitions:** Once your NSO has selected a targeted age group, it is important to then identify at what points young people will transition between different age sections. The common developmental areas/behavioural indicators can show when a young person is ready to progress through to the next age section. As we saw earlier when outlining developmental stages, this maturity is likely to come earlier for girls than for boys. The process of someone leaving changes the dynamics of the peer groups within the current section. As mature young people transition through to the next section, it opens up more developmental opportunities for other members of the current peer groups in the team system.

Some NSOs report a decline in membership retention when young people transition through to another section. This can be due to many factors, such as the culture of the section they are moving into, a lack of interest in the new section programme, difficulty in adapting to a new team dynamic and making new friends, etc.

The moment of transition can be challenging for a young person. Your NSO should identify these potential challenging factors and address them through a flexible transitional process so that no young person is disadvantaged. The transition process to the following age section should always be about meeting the developmental needs of the young person as opposed to meeting the preferences of adult leaders or fitting in with another section's programme.

The flexible transitional process may also consider an age sections overlap, as shown in Figure 3:

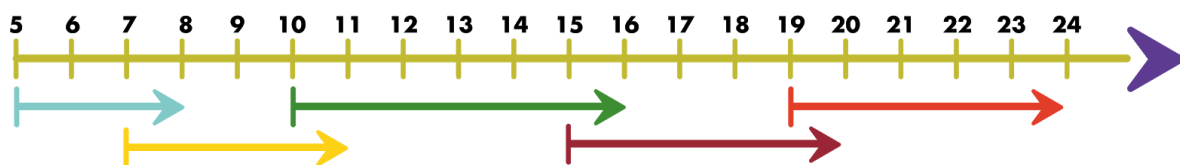


Fig.3



## Organisational factors

Deciding when an age section should start and finish is an important decision for your NSO to make, one that takes into account not only the developmental factors as described earlier, but other organisational factors such as the following:

- **Adults in Scouting and training** must be a consideration when deciding how many age sections and at what age to begin and end. Your NSO should consider if its current Adults in Scouting and training policies and processes are equipped to assist the development and implementation of the Youth Programme for the age sections as required.

Consider if new training frameworks are required for assisting with younger or older age sections, what competencies and behaviours do adults need to facilitate the Youth Programme with a new age section, and what materials are needed to support the new age section.

- **Governance** is also important to consider. Does the concept for the development and implementation of a new age section have any implications from a governance perspective in terms of policy changes or organisational support to the newly created or updated section?

This could be in terms of *Safe from Harm* policies and procedures. Consider it also from a legal perspective. If a new age group is entitled to certain rights at a certain age, then these can also be factored into policy or procedural changes to best support the new developmental age section.

- **Organisational growth** may also be affected. Thinking back to the beginning of the chapter and looking at the purpose of a new age section, it is important to ascertain the impact this will have on the organisational growth of your NSO. This might be to support the retention of young people in the Youth Programme or to create a new section to widen the opportunities available to young people through Scouting. The widening of a developmental age section may only work if your NSO then retains more young people and they stay for a longer time within the Scouting Youth Programme.
- **Age section support will be needed.** – The development and implementation of a new age section will require ongoing support, both from an operational point of view in the local groups and communities, but also from the national perspective of your NSO in terms of programme content creation, materials, and training. This ongoing support to the newly created section(s) is important to ensure their success, ongoing developmental opportunities, and programme balance. It is also important that this support is balanced with that for other age sections, ensuring the support and programme quality give the best opportunities available to young people.



## Annex 3

# Age Span of the Section and the Implementation of the Team System

As described in step 4 of the GPS, young people in all age sections are organised in small teams, following the Scout Method. Due to the impact on the social dynamics of the small team, the total age span within each section therefore has a great impact on the implementation of the team system in the age section, making it important to consider this aspect when setting up the age sections.

The team system can be described from two parameters:

### **1. Peer group**

The small team brings together young people who are close in age, share common interests, and cooperate together. This horizontal dimension allows young people to live in a horizontal relationship (peer group).

### **2. Team leader role**

The small team has members with some older than the others. They are responsible for facilitating a collaborative process for guiding the team towards achieving a common goal or shared purpose.<sup>6</sup> They also share their experience and knowledge with the others in the team. This creates a different type of relationship based on a certain level of asymmetry: the relationship between younger and older members, newcomers and experienced members, or those young people with more skills and those with fewer skills. Some members of the team may have more authority through experience, maturity, accumulated knowledge, a formal role in the team, etc., than some of the others in the team. Through coaching, mentoring, and facilitation of leadership they can pass this knowledge on to other members of the team.

The team system, therefore, creates a double system of education: peer-to-peer education through cooperation and collaboration within a peer group (learning through interaction and mutual influence); and asymmetric education through the sharing of experience and knowledge from the oldest to the youngest (coaching and mentoring).

These two aspects – peer group and team leader role – need to be balanced carefully to achieve the educational purpose of the team system and enhance the leadership capacity of young people. The interchangeable roles of leaders and participants stand out, the former empowered by the latter, the latter as involved as the former.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Referring to the 21st Century Leadership in Scouting, WOSM, 2014

<sup>7</sup> Referring to the 21st Century Leadership in Scouting, WOSM, 2014



### Horizontal teams

If the emphasis is placed on the peer group, the teams will be formed by young people of the same or very close age. This will create a stronger emphasis on peer-to-peer education, which tends to be characterised by the greater spontaneity of a more equal group of peers. As a result, the role of the team leader when facilitating the leadership process will be weaker due to the small difference in levels of maturity and experience between the team leader and the other members of the team.

### Vertical teams

If the emphasis is placed on the team leader role, there will be a tendency to give the responsibility of guiding the team to an older young person who has already gained more experience. This will weaken the strength of the peer-to-peer education aspect and focus on asymmetric education, which tends to be more structured and organised. There will be a big difference in age and interests between team members and the peer group aspect might even disappear.

There are risks of two negative consequences. First, if the oldest and the youngest have widely different interests, it will be difficult to develop interesting activities for everyone. From the moment it is easier to offer activities for the youngest, the oldest will lose interest and leave the group.

In some NSOs that have a very broad system of age sections (Figure 4), especially in the Scout age section, there is reportedly a loss of members in the oldest part of the age range. Only those who can take the role of team leader remain. However, as a result of the age difference, these young team leaders tend to exercise a lot of authority over younger members. This results in imbalances in decision-making and sharing of responsibilities within the small group. This way of working runs the risk of being authoritarian and undemocratic, failing to meet the educational needs of both young and elderly members. Applying the concept of leadership by facilitation is important here.

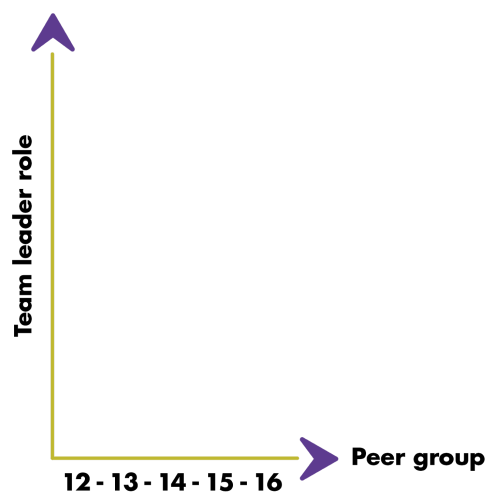


Fig.4





Second, if the age difference within an age section is small (Figure 5) a, the size of the peer group will be dominant. In this case, there will be more common interests within the team. It will be easier to organise activities and the team will function in a more democratic way allowing all members to take part in decision-making and sharing responsibilities. On the other hand, a large proportion of the team each year will be newcomers and it will be difficult to transmit experience, learning and "traditions".

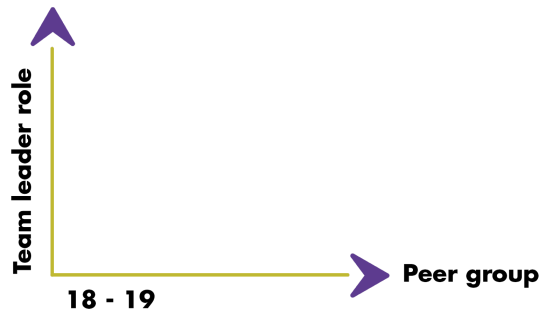


Fig.5

Within each age group, Scouting does not seek to form homogeneous groups, but on the contrary, to play on differences. The age difference between the youngest and oldest is limited in order to bring together young people of the same developmental stage and with similar characteristics in terms of interests and maturity. This makes it possible to form peer groups.

At the same time, the age difference is enough to have young people with varying levels of experience and competence. This allows for the operation of a peer-to peer tutoring system, a key element for a cooperative learning environment.<sup>8</sup>

It is also important to consider the aspect of coeducation in the implementation of the team system. The age mix can impact not just the targeted age group, but the team system dynamics can also change through this process.

Therefore, it is necessary to be attentive to maintain a balance between these two aspects: team leader role and peer group (Figure 6).



<sup>8</sup> The Essential Characteristic of Scouting, WOSM, 2019