Woodsman Achievement: A Guide for Dads

Grace Troop TX-0139 • Grace Presbyterian Church, Houston

Thanks for walking your son through the Woodsman achievement. This guide is for Trailmen of Mountain Lion rank or older (4th grade and up). Work through it one-on-one, at your own pace. Teach each item, let your son show you he can do it, and check it off.

This guide follows the official **Trail Life USA Woodsman Requirements** (Document ID 528, last updated 11/1/2025), for Mountain Lions Outdoor Skills Core Step 05, Edge Tools, used to earn the Woodsman Card. The 11 numbered items below are its checklist, in its order.

How it works at our troop

- Your son goes through each of the 11 items below with you or a leader.
- Each item gets checked off on his profile at **gracetraillife.org**.
- Once every item is checked, **one parent gives consent** on the website, and then the **Troopmaster or TML gives consent**.
- After that, he has earned the Woodsman achievement and **may carry a knife at troop events**.
- Trail Life USA offers the **Woodsman Card** at its online store, which he can carry as proof.

Before you start

“A knife is NOT a toy.”

Have your son repeat this phrase back to you several times before he ever picks up a knife, and remind him of it often during training and outings. A knife is a tool: use it only when it is needed. Never to show off, and never when angry. Remembering that a knife is a tool helps him make good decisions about using it.

A good first knife: A folding knife makes the best first knife, because it is smaller, lighter, and can be safely carried in a pocket.

1. A tool, not a toy ☐ Done Date: _____

- He can tell you, in his own words, why a knife is a tool and not a toy.

He demonstrates: He explains why a knife is a tool, not a toy.

Part 1: Where can I carry a knife?

2. Where and when to carry a knife ☐ Done Date: _____

- A knife is brought out and used **only with a Trail Guide’s or parent’s permission**, and under close supervision.
- Appropriate places: a Trail Life USA meeting, a campout, or another outdoor event.
- Inappropriate places: **never** carry a knife to school or to the store.

He demonstrates: He adequately explains where and when it is appropriate to carry a knife.

Part 2: How do I use a knife?

3. The Safety Circle ☐ Done Date: _____

- Before opening a knife, he becomes aware of his surroundings so he won't injure others.
- He holds the **closed** knife at arm's length and slowly spins around in a circle. If he can turn without bumping anyone, that is his safe zone.
- Never walk or run with an open knife. Stay still when using a knife in the safety circle.

He demonstrates: He establishes and demonstrates the Safety Circle.

4. Passing and receiving an open knife ☐ Done Date: _____

- A knife that folds is always **closed** before passing.
- To pass an open knife: hold it by the blade, with the cutting edge facing away from the hand, and present the handle to the other person.
- The person receiving it says, **"Thank you, I have it."** so the passer knows he has control of the knife.

He demonstrates: He properly passes **and** receives an open knife, and says "Thank you, I have it." when receiving.

5. Opening and closing a folding knife ☐ Done Date: _____

(a) Grip the handle with the thumb and fingertips of the non-dominant hand, so no fingers are in the way of the blade opening.

(b) Put the thumbnail of the dominant hand into the groove on the back of the blade.

(c) Pull the blade out as far as possible, so it won't snap back.

(d) Use the dominant hand to pull back on the thick point of the blade to lock it into place.

(e) Reverse the process to close it, gripping with thumb and fingertips so no fingers are in the way of the blade closing.

He demonstrates: He has mastered safely opening and closing a folding knife.

6. Cutting safely (practice by carving a bar of soap) ☐ Done Date: _____

(a) Double-check that the blade is locked in the open position.

(b) Grip the handle with thumb and fingertips so no fingers are in the way of the blade closing.

(c) Cut away from your body.

(d) Don't use too much force.

He demonstrates: He shows proficiency cutting with his knife in a safe manner, following all four steps.

Part 3: How do I care for my knife?

7. Why a dull knife is dangerous ☐ Done Date: _____

- A dull knife doesn't slice cleanly, so you must use more force. With extra force the tool isn't doing the work, and the knife can slip or twist out of control.
- Cuts from a dull knife are usually worse and harder for the body to heal.

He demonstrates: He explains why a dull knife is a dangerous knife.

8. Sharpening with a stone ☐ Done Date: _____

- Show him how to sharpen the blade with a sharpening stone. (Trail Life suggests the basic method at artofmanliness.com, “How to Sharpen a Pocket Knife.”)

He demonstrates: He sharpens a knife with a sharpening stone.

9. Oiling the blade ☐ Done Date: _____

- Keep the blade oiled so it opens smoothly. Show where to put the oil and how much.

He demonstrates: He oils his blade.

10. Cleaning and drying ☐ Done Date: _____

- Clean and dry the knife after each use. After cleaning, put the blade in the closed position.

He demonstrates: He cleans and dries his knife after use, then closes it.

11. Storing it safely ☐ Done Date: _____

- In the beginning, he hands his knife to a Trail Guide or parent whenever it isn’t in use.
- After learning is complete, he takes responsibility to fold the knife and put it away in a safe place.

He demonstrates: He can tell you why safely storing his knife matters.

Knife safety: privilege and revocation

Trail Life USA says that by earning the Woodsman Card, a Trailman “has earned the privilege of being able to carry and use his own pocket knife at patrol or Troop events.” It is a privilege, not a permanent right. It can be taken away when he uses a knife unsafely or irresponsibly.

How it works at our troop

- Any registered adult leader may take his knife or other cutting tool on the spot when he sees it used unsafely or irresponsibly.
- Leaders record each infraction on his Woodsman page in the troop app. We don’t use physical cards.
- **1st offense:** a verbal warning.
- **2nd and 3rd offenses:** each one cuts a corner, recorded by a leader on his Woodsman page.
- **4th offense:** he loses the privilege of carrying his knife.
- If the privilege is taken, he earns the Woodsman again from the beginning. He goes back through the training, shows each skill again, and gets a new parent consent and leader sign-off.
- All discipline is constructive and Christian, and aimed at restoring the Trailman. Trail Life USA’s Child Safety policy says discipline “should always be based on the betterment of the child, never the result of anger, and should never belittle, insult, or demean the child.” It is never physical.
- If safety requires it, leaders may send a Trailman home.

Sources: Trail Life USA Woodsman Card (shop.traillifeusa.com); Child Safety Youth Protection Policies, Doc 130, updated 12/08/2025. The warning and revocation steps are Grace Troop TX-0139 practice, not a Trail Life USA national rule.

Questions and answers

Ask your son these questions in any order. He should be able to answer in his own words. The answer key is in the right column.

#	Question	Answer key
1	What is a knife: a tool or a toy?	*A tool. A knife is NOT a toy.*
2	When should you use a knife?	*Only when it is needed. Never to show off or when angry.*
3	When and where may you bring out and use a knife?	*Only with a Trail Guide's or parent's permission, under close supervision, at a Trail Life USA meeting, campout, or other outdoor event.*
4	Where should you never carry a knife?	*To school or to the store.*
5	How do you set up your Safety Circle?	*Hold the closed knife at arm's length and slowly spin around. If you don't bump anyone, that's your safe zone.*
6	Can you walk or run with an open knife?	*No. Never walk or run with an open knife; stay still when using it.*
7	What must you do before passing a folding knife?	*Close it.*
8	How do you pass an open knife?	*Hold it by the blade with the cutting edge facing away from your hand, and present the handle.*
9	What do you say when you receive a knife?	*"Thank you, I have it."*
10	How do you hold the handle when opening or closing?	*With your thumb and fingertips, so no fingers are in the way of the blade.*
11	Why do you pull the blade out as far as it goes?	*So it won't snap back, and so it locks into place.*
12	What are the four steps for cutting?	*Double-check the blade is locked open, grip with thumb and fingertips so no fingers are in the way of the blade closing, cut away from your body, and don't use too much force.*
13	Why is a dull knife a dangerous knife?	*It takes more force, so it can slip or twist, and the cuts are usually worse and harder to heal.*
14	What do you use to sharpen a knife?	*A sharpening stone.*
15	Why do you keep the blade oiled?	*So it opens smoothly.*
16	What do you do after each use?	*Clean and dry the knife, then close it.*
17	What do you do with your knife when you're not using it?	*At first, hand it to a Trail Guide or parent. Once you've learned, fold it and put it away in a safe place.*
18	Why is a folding knife the best first knife?	*It's smaller and lighter, and can be safely carried in a pocket.*

Sign-off: Woodsman Achievement

Check each item once your son has shown it to you, and write the date.

☐	1. Explains why a knife is a tool, not a toy	Date: _____
☐	2. Explains where and when it is appropriate to carry a knife	Date: _____
☐	3. Establishes and demonstrates the Safety Circle	Date: _____
☐	4. Demonstrates passing and receiving an open knife	Date: _____
☐	5. Has mastered safely opening and closing a folding knife	Date: _____
☐	6. Cuts with his knife in a safe manner (soap carving)	Date: _____
☐	7. Explains why a dull knife is a dangerous knife	Date: _____
☐	8. Sharpens a knife with a sharpening stone	Date: _____
☐	9. Oils his blade	Date: _____
☐	10. Cleans and dries his knife after use	Date: _____
☐	11. Relays the importance of safely storing his knife	Date: _____
☐	Questions and answers reviewed	Date: _____

Trailman's name _____

Parent's signature _____ Date _____

Troopmaster / TML signature _____ Date _____

Also check off each item and give consent on gracetraillife.org.

Once every item is checked on the website, one parent gives consent, then the Troopmaster or TML gives consent. Your son has then earned the Woodsman achievement and may carry a knife at troop events.