

Title: A Scoutmaster's Brief Introduction to Special Needs

Presented by the Greater Colorado Council Special Needs Committee
ScoutingColorado.org/SpecialNeeds

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Welcome to our Scoutmaster's Brief Introduction to Special Needs, brought to you by the Greater Colorado Council Special Needs Committee.

This is a brief discussion of special needs Scouting. In this presentation, we will discuss a variety of online resources that can be of help to you. But the only one you need to make a note of is our website, ColoradoScouting.org/SpecialNeeds. We'll explain shortly how you get to other helpful links from there. [pause]

[click] Part 1: Be Prepared for Special Needs

The first duty of a Scoutmaster is to ensure the health, safety and well-being of their Scouts, including those with special needs. About one youth in four falls into this category. So the question is not whether there are such Scouts in your troop, but who they are, what their needs might be, and whether they require special attention. This video gives you a quick start toward asking and answering these questions.

[don't click] Review health records (AHMRs) as they arrive.

As each youth joins, have a careful look at their Annual Health and Medical Record, which is [required for all Scouting activities](#). Information about prescriptions and allergies on these records provides important clues about special needs.

It's not your job to diagnose or treat conditions, and you shouldn't even discuss confidential information--such as diagnoses--except with those who need to know. But you must have a practical understanding of issues that may arise to ensure the youth's safety and wellbeing.

Consider, for example, the consequences if a youth fails to take prescribed medications. It can be quite dangerous if someone with a condition such as epilepsy or diabetes does not receive a scheduled dose. Other conditions, such as an allergy that can cause anaphylactic shock, may require emergency medication. In all cases, medication must be at hand and properly applied when needed.

When attending BSA and council sponsored camps and bases, you need to follow their procedures. But for unit level activities, you must take positive steps to ensure that necessary medicines are available and properly applied. Per [Safe Scouting medication policies](#), "All medication is the responsibility of either the individual taking the medication or that individual's parent or guardian..." But also, "most medications should be kept by an adult with some or full control of the process ... [and] stored securely..."

[click] Offer safekeeping for meds.

We therefore encourage every troop to offer safekeeping for youths' medications during outings. Collect the meds before departure. Verify these are unexpired, in sufficient supply, and have arrived in their original containers. Dispense each dose when the youth requests it at the prescribed time.

This approach will require exceptions. For example, when a parent is present on the excursion, the family is solely responsible for overseeing the medications. And, if a youth is able, they should carry their own emergency medications, such as EpiPens or inhalers, and know how to use them. In such cases, the unit may still wish to verify that the youth brings those medications in proper working order.

Families may request additional help, such as reminders for the youth to take medication, guidance when to take it, or help with procedures such as injections. But no adult leader can be required to oversee that a youth takes medication or to otherwise get involved in its use. Adult leaders may negotiate such accommodations when willing. While these are typically oral agreements, they should be as clearly understood as if written, and ironed out before departure.

[click] Address special needs during new member orientation.

Lastly, address special needs as part of new member orientation, for example,

- Emphasize your receptiveness to youths with special needs.
- Encourage prompt collection of AHMRs.
- Explain your safekeeping policy for medications. and
- Offer an open door policy for families that want to meet up to talk with you.

[pause; click] Part 2: Know Your Scout

Identify youths with special needs as soon as possible. The medical record provides important clues, but not all such youths take prescription drugs or have diagnoses. And their needs may not be visibly apparent. For example, a youth may be shy, or vulnerable, or lacking in self-confidence. Yet not all such needs require special treatment or accommodation on the unit's part. You must first discover what the needs are and then determine if they require accommodation.

The family is your best source of information about a youth's needs and how best to work with them. Some families will be forthcoming, but others will be reluctant to talk for fear others will stigmatize, bully, or exclude their youth.

Meeting with the family.

Best practice is to have an open door policy and, as part of New Member Orientation, encourage each family to meet with you in private for a Joining Conference. This meeting explores the youth's needs and aspirations in Scouting. It is like a Scoutmaster Conference but with parental involvement. It can even serve as Scoutmaster Conference for Scout rank if the youth is ready. Review the youth's AHMR beforehand and come prepared to broach any medical concerns you have that the parents don't bring up.

For youths that have special needs, explore how their school addresses them. Do they have an Individualized Education Program or 504 Plan? If so, the troop may need to make similar accommodations to those the school provides.

The private setting of this conference helps you explore sensitive considerations, such as the level of parental involvement that may be necessary, or accommodations the troop might need to make. This conference is an excellent opportunity to connect with parents, especially those who cannot attend unit functions often.

[click] Exploring the Know Your Scout outline.

The BSA's Know Your Scout form provides some important questions to explore during initial discussions with the family. You can use it to jot down notes, but if you do, protect those notes with the same level of confidentiality you provide the youth's [Annual Medical and Health Record](#).

When you ask what important information leaders should know, explore what's best for that particular youth. How best to motivate them? Or to console them when anxious or upset? What goals might they have? Do they aspire to attain Eagle rank?

[click] Getting advice.

Don't be shy about getting advice, especially if you're unfamiliar with special needs. If you have a volunteer who serves as troop's medical officer, they're an obvious place to start, as are your unit committee and commissioner. And we're glad to help too.

[click] Learning More about Special Needs.

Identifying someone's needs is the first step in addressing them. But you may encounter issues that are outside the realm of your personal knowledge and experience. In such cases, you'll want to read up on special needs or get trained.

[click] Training page.

To locate online resources, start from our special needs training page: bring up our homepage, ScoutingColorado.org/SpecialNeeds, then select the Training tab. That page points to the complete text of this presentation, as well as all the resources it mentions. You won't have to take notes just to track down those references.

[click] Scouting.org resources and training.

BSA's [Serving Scouts with Disabilities](#) page points to a wealth of resources. These include a variety of training modules for planning, advancement, specific disabilities such as autism and ADHD, and so on. We suggest you start your investigations with the [Serving Youth with Disabilities](#) training bundle. It contains, among other things,

1. The presentation NDA 101 Serving Scouts with Special Needs, which provides a quick introduction to the topic.
2. Guide to Working with Scouts with Disabilities, which provides a good overview.
3. Scouting for Youth with Disabilities, a more comprehensive reference that covers details about specific disabilities, camping, advancement, etc.
4. Guide to Advancement 2021, which states the official BSA policies and guidelines for advancement, to include accommodations for special needs.

[click] [AbleScouts.org](#) & Inclusion Toolbox.

The AbleScouts [website also provides much useful information. That includes its Toolbox](#) modules, for example, the [Unit Leader's Role Supporting Scouts with a Disability](#). This module describes how the youth and adult leaders work together to accommodate special needs. It stresses the need to strike a proper balance when assisting the youth. Make necessary accommodations but do not impose help, or permit the youth to rely on others for things they can do. The Toolbox also reveals how those with ADHD and autism spectrum disorders experience the world.

[click] More GCC resources.

You'll find further information at other tabs of our website, ScoutingColorado.org/SpecialNeeds.

- Our Homepage provides general information about our team and mission, and how to contact us.
- The General Resources page contains information about special needs in general, including national and local organizations, and additional information about special needs and Scouting.

- Our Resources by Disability page lists national and local resources that relate to specific disabilities.

[click] Part 3. Accommodate when Necessary

Experiences at school and home may suggest accommodations that will be necessary for a youth to take part in the troop. But you still want their experience to be as inclusive as possible.

Inclusiveness.

Most youths having special needs don't want to be singled out for special attention or treatment. Strive to treat them the same as other Scouts. Refer to them by their names, and if you must speak of their disability, use "people-first language." For example, you would refer to a youth as "a person who has ADHD" rather than "an ADHD person."

[click] Accommodations in advancement.

Scouting makes allowances for disabilities that impede advancement. A Scoutmaster can allow simple modifications very close to existing requirements, while more extensive changes require council approval. To learn more about these policies and procedures, refer to the advancement-related materials on the BSA's Serving Scouts with Disabilities page.

[click] Other accommodations.

You may also need to compensate for disabilities in the day-to-day operations of the troop. A Scout may require particular attention, for example, because of difficulty with eye contact, a dangerous food allergy, or a short attention span. As with advancement, you don't want to make special provisions unless that youth cannot themselves compensate. But others in the troop must understand and honor those needs when you do.

[click] Engaging the troop.

Ideally, you'll learn of such concerns from working with the family and be prepared to address them before they arise during troop activities. Often, young Scouts with special needs will have a lengthier period of anxiety about inclusion in the troop than those who lack unique needs. Coach the youth leadership about how best to engage these youths and to ease their transition.

Their peers may not be as aware of special needs as you might think. Scouts may grumble about the conduct of individuals who have special needs--especially the hyperactivity arising from ADHD and the emotional sensitivity of ASD. Consider such complaints opportunities to provide a new perspective on how others experience life and how one should respond. Prioritize your disabilities awareness plans to address issues the troop currently faces.

[click] Part 4. Be Special Needs Friendly

Build disabilities awareness into your program.

Cultivate a troop culture that's receptive to special needs. Ideally, you'll have the troop on board with this before youths arrive that require special attention. Work with your SPL to build Disabilities Awareness into your annual program. For example, do exercises that simulate disabilities, or teach the

Disabilities Awareness Merit Badge. Show this video to your committee. Consider doing a special needs event at Camporee. Or, do service projects that benefit the disabled.

[click] Make the most of Scoutmaster's minutes.

A Scoutmaster's minute presents a great opportunity to heighten disabilities awareness, whether to address an issue that arose during the meeting or to promote awareness overall. Remind the troop that to accommodate disabilities in a kind and helpful way is very much in the Scout spirit.

[click] Recruit youth with special needs.

Advertise in your recruiting if your unit has experience with specific disabilities or you actively support special needs. State this in your posting to beascout.org, make it clear in your New Member Orientation, and recruit from special needs programs nearby, such as in schools. And let us know you do, so we can help kids with special needs find welcoming units.

[click] Credits

That concludes our brief introduction to special needs. Thank you for your time! Please contact us with questions you may have, or suggestions about how we can better support special needs at Greater Colorado Council.

[pause and count to 5]