



Guidelines for Specific Types of Special Needs & Disabilities¹

I. Leadership Techniques

- Wise leaders expect problems but do not consider them overwhelming. Keep a confidential record of each youth for background information. Though you may view the Scout with a disability as an individual with significant differences, he really is not one. All boys have different needs. The wise leader will recognize this and *be prepared* to help.
- Leaders should make a personal visit to the parents and the new Scout with a disability to learn about the Scout, his physical limitations, his abilities and preferences, and whether he knows any of the other boys in the troop. Some youths with disabilities will try to do more than they are capable of doing, just to “fit in” with the rest of the boys, which could result in unnecessary frustration.
- Many youths with disabilities have special physical or health needs. Parents, visiting nurses, special education teachers, physical therapists, doctors, and other agencies can help make you more familiar with the nature of the disability. Get parent permission before contacting health care persons.
- Accept the Scout as a person and give him the same respect that you expect from him. This will be much easier to do if you know the Scout, his parents, his background, and his likes and dislikes. Remember, any behavior of his that presents difficulties is a force that can be redirected into more acceptable pathways—rather than erased and rebuilt.
- Example is a wonderful tool. Demonstrate personal discipline with respect, punctuality, accuracy, conscientiousness, dignity, and dependability.
- Become involved with the Scout in your care. Let him know that you care for him, difficulties and all. A small word of praise or a pat on the back for a job well done can mean a lot to a boy who receives little elsewhere. Judge accomplishment by what the Scout can do, not by what someone says he must do or by what you think he cannot do.
- Rewarding achievement will likely cause that behavior to be repeated. Reward can be in the form of a thank-you, a recognition made by the group for helping the group perform at a higher level, a badge, a prize, or a chance to go on a trip. Focus rewards on proper behavior and achievement.
- Do not let the Scout or parents use the disability as an excuse for not trying. Expect the Scout to give his best effort.

¹ Source: B.S.A. Guide to Working with Scouts with Special Needs & DisABILITIES, 2013 printing

II. Providing Encouragement

- Reward more than you criticize, in order to build self-esteem.
- Praise immediately any and all good behavior and performance.
- Change rewards if they are not effective in motivating behavioral improvement.
- Find ways to encourage the Scout.
- Teach the Scout to reward himself. This encourages him to think positively about himself.

III. Giving Instruction to Youth With Disabilities

- Maintain eye contact during verbal instruction (except when the Scout's culture finds this inappropriate).
 - Make directions clear and concise. Be consistent with instructions.
 - Simplify complex directions. Give one or two steps at a time.
 - Make sure the Scout comprehends the instructions before beginning the task.
 - Repeat instructions in a calm, positive manner, if needed.
 - Help the Scout feel comfortable with seeking assistance.
- ### IV. Providing Supervision and Discipline
- As a leader, you must be a number of things to each boy: a friend, authority figure, reviewer, disciplinarian, resource, and teacher.
 - Listening is an important technique that means giving the Scout an opportunity to express himself. Whether as a part of the group or in private conversation, be patient, be understanding, and take seriously what the Scout has to say. Keep yourself attuned to what he is saying; use phrases like, "You really feel that way?" or "If I understand you right. . . ."
 - Avoid ridicule and criticism. Remember, all children have difficulty staying in control.
 - Remain calm, state the infraction of the rule, and avoid debating or arguing with the Scout.
 - Have preestablished consequences for misbehavior for all Scouts.
 - When a Scout is behaving in an unacceptable manner, try the "time out" strategy or redirect his behavior. Administer consequences immediately, and monitor proper behavior frequently.
 - Make sure the discipline fits the offense and is not unduly harsh.
 - Enforce troop rules consistently.
 - Do not reward inappropriate behavior. Praise when the Scout exerts real effort, even if unsuccessful, and/or when he shows improvement over a previous performance. Never praise falsely.
 - Do not accept blaming others as an excuse for poor performance. Make it clear that you expect the Scout to answer for his own behavior.
 - Behavior is a form of communication. Look for what the behavior is saying (i.e., does the Scout want attention?).

Guidelines for Special needs and disabilities Specific types:

If a Scout or Scouter has any of the following disabilities, these ideas might be helpful. Always ask if he or she needs, or wants, help. Ask how you can help.

Mobility Impairments

- Remember that people who use adaptive equipment (wheelchairs, crutches, etc.) often consider their equipment an extension of their bodies.
- Never move equipment out of the person's reach.
- Before you go out with someone who has a mobility impairment, make sure facilities at the destination are accessible.
- Never pat a person in a wheelchair on the head. This is a sign of disrespect for adults.
- When helping, ask how equipment works if you are unfamiliar with it.
- Prevent strained necks by standing a few feet away when talking to someone in a wheelchair.
- Find a place to sit down for long talks.

Hearing Loss

- Make sure the person is looking at you before you begin to talk.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Use gestures to help make your points.
- Ask for directions to be repeated, or watch to make sure directions were understood correctly.
- Use visual demonstration to assist verbal direction.
- In a large group, remember that it's important for only one person to speak at a time.
- Speakers should never stand with their backs to the sun or light when addressing people with hearing loss.
- Shouting at a person who is deaf very seldom helps. It distorts your speech and makes lip reading difficult.

Vision Impairments

- Identify yourself to people with vision impairments by speaking up.
- Offer your arm, but don't try to lead the person.
- Volunteer information by reading aloud signs, news, changing street lights, or warnings about street construction. When you stop helping, announce your departure.
- If you meet someone who has a guide dog, never distract the dog by petting or feeding it; keep other pets away.
- If you meet someone who is using a white cane, don't touch the cane. If the cane should touch you, step out of the way and allow the person to pass.

Speech/Language Disorders

- Stay calm. The person with the speech disorder has been in this situation before.
- Don't shout. People with speech disorders often have perfect hearing.
- Be patient. People with speech disorders want to be understood as badly as you want to understand.
- Don't interrupt by finishing sentences or supplying words.
- Give your full attention.
- Ask short questions that can be answered by a simple yes or no.
- Ask people with speech disorders to repeat themselves if you don't understand.
- Avoid noisy situations. Background noise makes communication hard for everyone.

- Model slow speech with short phrases. Cognitive Disabilities People whose mental performance is affected may learn slowly and have a hard time using their knowledge.
- Be clear and concise.
- Don't use complex sentences or difficult words.
- Don't talk down to the person. "Baby talk" won't make you easier to understand.
- Don't take advantage. Never ask the person to do anything you wouldn't do yourself.
- Be understanding. People with below-average mental performance are often aware of their limitations, but they have the same needs and desires as those without the disability.

Social/Emotional Impairments

People with social/emotional impairments have disorders of the mind that can make daily life difficult.

- If someone is obviously upset, stay calm. People with mental illness are rarely violent.
- Offer to get help. Offer to contact a family member, friend, or counselor.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Provide consistent, predictable structure. Be patient. Allow extra time for activities.
- Provide a visual schedule using words and pictures. All Scouts will find this useful. Don't put times in the schedule because a Scout with autism may expect you to follow it to the minute!
- Let the Scout know about transitions early by saying, "In five minutes we'll be ending this activity and starting another." Give the Scout information about new activities ahead of time.
- Break up tasks into smaller steps.
- Alert the Scout's parents if there is going to be an activity that may cause sensory difficulties for their son. Consider moving noisy activities outside where the noise can dissipate. If the Scout has issues with food taste and texture, carefully plan the menus around these issues so the Scout can eat the same things as other members of the unit as much as possible.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Troop leaders have a positive effect on children with attention deficit disorder (ADD). Here are some ways leaders can help.

- Structure Scout meeting time, activities, and rules so that the Scout with ADD knows what to expect. Post a calendar of events.
- Be positive. Praise appropriate behavior and completion of tasks to help build the Scout's self-esteem.
- Be realistic about behavior and assignments. Many children with ADD simply can't sit for long periods or follow detailed instructions. Make learning interesting with plenty of hands-on activities.
- Monitor behavior through charts that explain expectations for behavior and rewards for reaching goals. This system of positive reinforcement can help the Scout stay focused.
- Test the Scout's knowledge and not just his ability to take tests. Testing orally or in several short testing sessions might help.
- Begin a formal achievement program. Weekly reports to parents could increase their involvement.
- Work closely with parents and members of the education team. People working together can make a big difference.
- Be sensitive to the Scout about taking his medication. Avoid statements such as, "Johnny, go take a pill."
- Simplify complex directions. Give one or two steps at a time.

Learning Disabilities

- Learning disabilities (including minimal brain damage, perceptual disabilities, communication disorders, and others) are usually disorders of the central nervous system that interfere with basic learning functions.
- Listen and observe carefully to find clues as to how this Scout approaches problems and what his difficulties are.
- Remember that praise and encouragement can help build self-esteem.
- Let other troop members use their friendship and support to show the Scout that he belongs.
- Use short, direct instructions that help the Scout know what is expected of him.
- As much as possible, stay with a regular troop schedule, allowing the Scout to help with assigned duties.