



# **Guide for Serving Scouts with Disabilities**

## **Benefits for serving Scouts with disabilities.**

Kids with disabilities often get more out of the program than other kids do. Here are some ways they benefit:

1. Youth with special needs are often more driven to achieve, and they probably have fewer outlets to satisfy this natural desire.
2. Youth with special needs often like chances for socialization. Scouting puts them in the middle of natural peer groups: the patrol and troop.
3. Youth with special needs are often sheltered from things that may be difficult or frustrating to them. Scouting, however, could help them develop coping skills that may be helpful later in life.

Scouts (and Scouters) without disabilities benefit when Scouts with disabilities are fully integrated into the Troop program. They begin to see the individuals behind the labels, they learn how to work with people who are different from themselves, and they develop a more realistic view of their own abilities-or lack there of.

### **Working with Scouts with Disabilities**

The best guide to working with Scouts who have disabilities is to use good common sense. It's obvious that a Scout in a wheelchair may have problems fulfilling a hiking requirement, but it may not be so obvious when it comes to the difficulties of a Scout with a learning disability. Begin with the Scout and his parents; seek guidance from them on how to best work with the Scout.

Each Scout will be different, so no single plan will work for every Scout. If the troop is short on personnel, ask the Scouts parents to help, or assign one or more skilled older Scout to be of assistance.

The basic premise of Scouting for youth with disabilities is that every boy wants to participate fully and be treated and respected like every other member of the troop. Scouts with disabilities should be given opportunities to camp, hike, and take part in other patrol and troop activities. Most camp operations will work with the troop leadership to design a program for Scouts with disabilities if given adequate advance notice.

Many Scouts with disabilities can accomplish the basic skills of Scouting, but may require extra time to learn them. Working with these youth will require patience and understanding on the part of your leaders and other Scouts. A clear and open understanding should exist between the troop leadership and the parents or guardians of the Scout with a disability.

Before a Scout with a disability joins a troop, the Scoutmaster with (parental permission) should explain to the members of the troop what they should expect. Explain the disability, the treatment, and any likely reactions that might occur. Stress that the new Scout should be treated like any other new Scout but that troop members should be sensitive to his needs.

### **Parents' Prejoining Conference**

Prior to joining a troop, parents and the Scout should meet with the Scout leader to explain the perspective Scouts special needs. The Scout should be present at the pre-joining conference so that he clearly understands the expectations of him, his parents, and the troop. Allow him to speak for himself as much as possible. The following are some of the issues that should be discussed.

### **General Characteristics**

The Scout leader should attempt to obtain a general picture of the Scout's strengths and weaknesses. The leader should be aware of special needs that might arise at meetings, campouts, field trips, etc. Because most Scout troops do not have assistant leaders who have expertise in working with Scouts with disabilities, a parent may be required to attend troop activities, especially those activities that might require strenuous physical effort or that occur over an extended period of time.

### ***Physical Disabilities***

Physical limitations should be discussed with the parents and Scout. The Annual Health and Medical Record Form should be filled out and kept on file with the Unit.

### ***Mental Capabilities***

The Scout leader should be advised by the parents of their son's capabilities. The Scout leader should know the Scout's present grade level and his reading, listening, and mathematical abilities.

### ***Medication***

While it is the responsibility of the Scout and/or his parent or guardian to ensure that he takes his prescription medication correctly, the Scout leader should be aware of what medication the Scout takes regularly. A Scout leader, after obtaining a written permission and instructions for administering any medications, can agree to accept the responsibility of making sure a Scout takes the necessary medication at the appropriate time, but BSA policy does not mandate or encourage the Scout leader to do so.

### ***Discipline***

Parents should be asked about any behavioral issues. Troop rules should be discussed with the parents and the Scout. The Scout leader should explain disciplinary procedures to the parents. Have rules in writing for parents and Scouts.

### ***Diet and Eating problems***

Any special diets or restrictions, and any chewing or swallowing problems, should be explained to the Scout leader. If a special diet is necessary, food for campouts should be provided by the parents.

### ***Living skills***

The Scout's ability to attend to his personal needs, and any special help he might require in this area, should be discussed with parents.

### ***Transportation***

Transportation to and from troop meetings is the parents' responsibility. Carpooling with other parents is suggested but should be arranged among parents.

### ***Unit operation***

The Scout leader should explain the Scouting program and emphasize why advancement (at whatever rate possible) is important to the Scout. Parents should be encouraged to reinforce their son's activities.

### ***Emergency procedures***

Parents must inform the Scout leader of the name and phone number of their son's doctor. His medical history should be discussed in full. Appropriate medical permissions should be obtained.

## **General guidelines for working with Scouts with special needs**

### **Leadership techniques**

Here are some general guidelines that will help you be a more effective leader.

1. Though you may view the Scout with the 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.

2. Learn about the Scout, his physical limitations, his abilities and preferences, and whether he knows any of the other boys in the troupe. Some young people with disabilities will try to do more than they are capable of doing, just to fit in with others, which could result in unnecessary frustration.
3. Accept the Scout as a person and give him the same respect that you expect from him. Remember, any behavior of his that presents difficulties is a force that can be redirected into more acceptable pathways-rather than erased and rebuilt.
4. Example is a wonderful tool. Demonstrate personal discipline with respect, punctuality, accuracy, conscientiousness, dignity, and dependability.
5. Become involved with the Scout's life. Let him know that you care for him as a whole person. A small word of praise for a job well done can mean a lot to boy who receives little elsewhere.
6. Rewarding achievement will likely cause that behavior to be repeated. Reward can be in the form of a thank you or recognition by the group for helping the group perform at a high-level. Focus rewards on proper behavior and achievement.
7. Do not let the Scout or parents use a disability as an excuse for not trying. Expect the Scout to give his best effort.

### **Providing encouragement**

1. Reward more than you criticize, in order to build self-esteem.
2. Praise immediately any and all good behavior and performance.
3. Change your words if they had effective and motivating behavioral improvement.
4. Find ways to encourage the Scout.
5. Teach the Scout to reward himself. This encourages him to think positively about himself.

### **Giving instruction to youth with disabilities**

1. Maintain eye contact during verbal instruction.
2. Make directions clear and concise. Be consistent with instructions.
3. Simplify complex directions. Give one or two steps at a time.
4. Make sure the Scout comprehends the instructions before beginning the task.
5. Repeat instructions in a calm, positive manner, if needed.
6. Help the Scout feel comfortable with seeking assistance.

### **Providing supervision and discipline**

1. Listening is an important technique that means giving the Scout an opportunity to express himself. Be patient, be understanding, and take seriously what the Scout has to say.
2. Avoid ridicule and criticism.
3. Remain calm, stating the infraction of the rule, and avoid debating or arguing with the Scout.
4. Have pre-established consequences for misbehavior for all Scouts. Enforce troop rules consistently.
5. When a Scout is behaving in an unacceptable manner, try to redirect his behavior.
6. Administer consequences immediately and affirm proper behavior frequently.
7. Make sure the discipline fits the offense and is not unduly harsh.
8. Do not except blaming others as an excuse for poor performance. Make it clear that you expect the Scout to answer for his own behavior.
9. Behavior is a form of communication. Look for what the behavior is saying i.e. does the Scout want attention? Does the Scout not understand the rules?

For guidelines on specific types of special needs and disabilities please review the Scoutmasters handbook, pages 153 through 154.

## **Advancement for Scouts with Disabilities**

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Two forms of accommodation are available for Scouts with disabilities: registration beyond the age of eligibility and alternative requirements.

### **Registration beyond the age of eligibility**

Under normal circumstances, a young man's time as a Boy Scout ends at 18; after that time, he may no longer work on Boy Scout advancement. However, if the Scout has permanent and severe disability, the council executive board may approve his registration beyond age 18. This is a permanent arrangement, not an extension of time to earn a rank.

To register a Scout beyond the age of eligibility, the following documents must be assembled and submitted to the local Council. The Request for Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility, No. 512-935, should be used in this process.

1. A letter from a parent or guardian describing the disability and its severity and permanence, and petitioning the Council for approval of registration beyond the age of eligibility.
2. A completed youth membership application or proof of current membership.
3. A completed and signed Annual Health and Medical Record form (parts A and C).
4. A signed statement from a qualified health professional attesting to the nature of the disability, its severity, and permanent limitations connected with it. For physical disabilities, this must be a licensed physician; for developmental or cognitive issues, a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist, or as appropriate, A neurologist or other medical professional in a specialty related to the disability would suffice.
5. A letter from the Unit leader advocating and supporting the registration.
6. Other supporting documentation such as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), treatment summaries, etc.; these are optional, but can make a difference in the decision.

The request for registration beyond the age of eligibility must be approved by the Council Executive Board, but the Board may delegate the process to the Council Operating Committee or other group of responsible volunteers at the Council level

### **Modified Advancement Requirements**

Many Scouts with disabilities may have difficulty completing the requirements to advance in Scouting. If a Scout's disability hinders him in completing a particular requirement or merit badge, than he may wish to apply for alternative requirements for Tenderfoot through First Class ranks, or for an alternative merit badge.

This is a separate process from registration beyond the age of eligibility. Some Scouts could complete the standard advancement requirements if they had more time; others could reach the rank of Eagle by their 18th birthday if they could pursue alternative requirements; some might need both forms of accommodation.

### **Alternative requirements for tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class ranks**

A Scout who has a permanent physical or mental disability and is unable to complete all of the requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class, or First Class rank may submit a request to the Council Advancement Committee to complete alternative requirements.

To keep Scouts with disabilities as much in the advancement mainstream as possible, some advancement accommodation may be required. Thus, a Scout in a wheelchair can meet the requirements for hiking by making a trip to a place of interest in his community. Giving more time and permitting the use of special aids are other ways leaders can help Scouts with disabilities in their efforts to advance. The substitute should provide a similar learning experience to the original requirement.

***The following are procedures for applying for alternative requirements.***

**Step 1 - Do as many standard requirements as possible.**

Before applying for alternative requirements, the Scout must complete as many of the standard requirements as his ability permits. He must do his very best to develop himself to the limit of his abilities and resources.

**Step 2 - Gather supporting letters and statements**

In addition to supporting letters from the Unit leader, a parent or guardian, and the Scout, the request must include a written statement from a qualified health professional. A clear and concise medical statement concerning the Scouts disabilities must be submitted by a licensed healthcare provider. It must state the disability is permanent (or a long-term temporary disability) and outline what physical activity the Scout may not be capable of completing. In the case of a cognitive disability, an evaluation statement should be submitted by a certified educational administrator relating the ability level to the Scout.

**Step 3 - Prepare a request for alternative requirements**

A written request must be submitted to the Council Advancement Committee for the Scout to work on alternative requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class ranks. The request should include the standard requirements the Scout has completed and the suggested alternative requirements for those requirements the Scout cannot complete. This request should be detailed enough to give the Advancement Committee sufficient information to make a decision. The request should be prepared by the Scout, his parents, and his Scoutmaster. A copy of the medical statement in step two should be included.

**Step 4 - the Advancement Committee reviews the request**

The Council Advancement Committee should review the request, utilizing the expertise of professional persons involved in Scouting for people with disabilities. The Advancement Committee may want to interview the Scout, the parents, and a leader to fully understand the request and to make a fair determination. The decision of the Advancement Committee should be recorded and delivered to the Scout in the Scoutmaster.

Alternative requirements for Star, Life, and Eagle are not available. However, Scouts may request permission to pursue alternative merit badges, as described in the next section.

**Alternative merit badges for the Eagle Scout rank**

Though individual requirements for merit badges may not be modified or substituted. Scouts with special needs may request approval for alternative badges they can complete. This is allowable on the basis of one entire badge for another. Merit badges are awarded only when all requirements are met as stated. Any alternatives must present the same challenge and learning level as those they replace.

***Follow this procedure to request alternative merit badges.***

1. A clear and concise medical statement concerning the Scouts disabilities must be made by a licensed healthcare provider, or an evaluation statement must be certified by the educational administrator.
2. The candidate must earn as many of the required merit badges as his ability permits.
3. A candidate must complete as many of the requirements of the required merit badges as his ability permits.
4. The Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges, No. 512–730, must be completed prior to qualifying for alternative merit badges.
5. The alternative merit badges chosen must demand as much effort as the required merit badges.
6. When alternatives chosen involve physical activity, the activities must be approved by the Scouts licensed healthcare provider.

7. The Unit leader in the Board of Review must explain that to attain the Eagle Scout rank, a candidate is expected to do his best and developing himself to the limit of his resources.
8. The application must be approved by the Council Advancement Committee, utilizing the expertise of professional persons involved in Scouting for people with disabilities.
9. The candidate's application for Eagle Scout rank must be made on his Eagle Scout Rank Application, with the Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges attached.

### **Challenges you may face**

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Parental assistance is very important, but there are some who don't want to acknowledge a disability or simply choose not to help. Their support and involvement is essential. If you encounter an unhelpful parent, diplomacy is critical and you may want to request help from the Council Disabilities Awareness Committee.

Many parents of children who have special needs may have been protecting and over-compensating them throughout their lives – helping to overcome the obstacles they face. Leaders must listen to parents, gain trust, and work with them to provide the best possible experience. This will mean helping parents to let go somewhat and increase their sons level of independence. This can be a delicate issue.

Sometimes, due to the lack of contact or expertise, other members of the Unit – youth or adult – maybe uncomfortable with the Scout who has a disability. Work together to defuse any misunderstandings or difficult situations. We need to help Scouts and leaders learned the best approach in case were special needs must be met.

The goal is to include Scouts who have special needs in as many activities as possible. There may be, however, activities that are beyond their capabilities will be on the Unit's ability to safely support. This situation is not unique to Scouts with disabilities, and most will understand. Just use common sense, and do your best to include everyone as often as possible.