

Serving Scouts with DisAbilities

Copperhead Virtual Round Table

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Course Objective

"1 in 10 children in the USA have a disability or condition that limits their functional skills." –Centers for Disease Control 2010

Help leaders understand what it may be like to have various disabilities. Encourage leadership to create a positive and inclusive program for ALL youth in their units.

- We all know that Scouting is good for our youth. But the child with disabilities often gets more out of the program than the “abled” youth do. Youth with special needs are often more driven to achieve and they probably have fewer outlets to satisfy this natural desire.
- Youth with special needs are often sheltered from things that may be difficult or frustrating to them. They often have parents or medical personnel around to make them content and comfortable. Scouting, however, can help develop the coping skills that may be helpful later in life. Our programs offer youth with disabilities an opportunity to tackle kid-sized challenges, and to work with others of their age.

What is a disability?

A disability is a real and long-term condition that impairs functioning in one or more of the following areas:

- Physical...can affect mobility/dexterity
- Cognitive...can affect mental speed and modes of understanding
- Emotional...can affect mood and stability
- Social...can affect self-perception and delay inclusion

Many disabilities are invisible. Most youth with a disability cannot be identified based on how they look.

If you see a Scout who struggles with a social or life skill, look for ways to support him or her, even if he or she has not been diagnosed or no one has shared a diagnosis with you.

Be aware that a Scout can have a combination of disabilities (comorbidity)

Examples of Disabilities – (not an exhaustive list, just some examples)

Physical - Cerebral Palsy (CP), Epilepsy, Vision, Hearing, Loss of Limb, [Prosthetic](#)

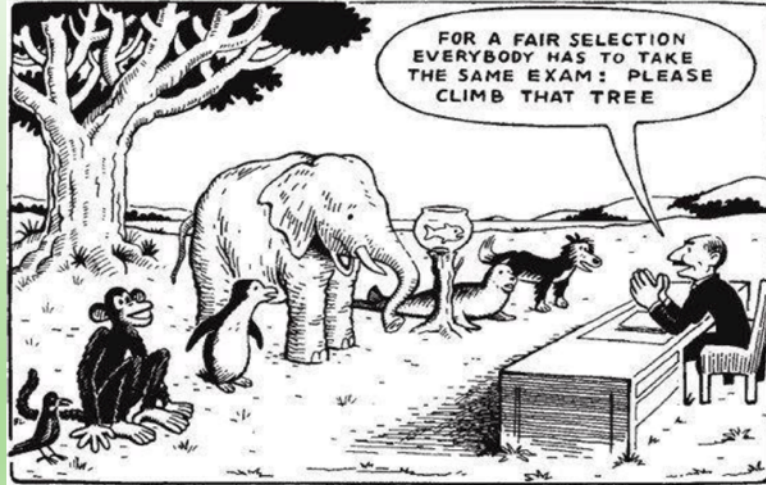
Learning - Dyslexia (reading), Dysgraphia (writing)

Cognitive or Developmental – Intellectual, Autism Spectrum

Emotional - Bipolar disorder, Depression, Anxiety

Social - ADHD

Everybody is a genius.
But if you judge a fish by
its ability to climb a tree,
it will live its whole life
believing that it is stupid.
- Albert Einstein



A Scout Needs a Leader...

- **With a positive overall outlook**
- **Who cares about the success of youth**
- **Who is focused on finding solutions to challenges**
- **Who models encourages and empowers**
- **Who sees a person, not a diagnosis**

A Scout needs and desires a leader.

A leader that accepts all. Remember youth follow by our example – verbal and non-verbal expressions.

Leaders of Scouts who have disabilities report that one of the areas of greatest improvement is social skills. This not only applies to the youth with disabilities, but also to the other youth who have the opportunity to work with them.

- Of the 53.9 million school-aged children (aged 5 to 17) in the U.S. about 2.8 million (5.2 %) were reported to have a disability in 2010. For many of these children, the kinds of disabilities they experience may require special approaches to providing education or other accommodations.

• (2010 US Census)

- In 2020 the CDC estimated that **1 in 54** children is diagnosed with Autism.

Boys were more than 4 times as likely to be identified with ASD than girls.

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Looking at the CDC website today, there has been a slight increase of children between the ages of 3 to 17 diagnosed with any developmental disorders of about 1.25% based on data between the 2014 and 2016.

No increase in data for children with autism or intellectual disabilities was noted between 2014 and 2016 .

Fact remains that more boys than girls are diagnosed with these disabilities and that has been consistent across the data.

Have a Joining Conference

- Ask about strengths.
- Ask about parental concerns or anxieties.
- Ask about trigger situations.
- Ask what adaptations work at home.
- Do not ask for the diagnosis.
- If diagnosis is provided, be reassuring.

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.

Begin with the Scout and his parents or guardian; seek guidance from them on how best to work with the Scout with special needs. The parents can help you to understand the Scout’s medical history as well as his capabilities, his strengths and weaknesses, and way they can support you as his leader. This will help you become aware of special needs that might arise at Troop meetings, patrol work, and campouts. To the fullest extent possible, Scouts with disabilities should be given opportunities to camp, hike and take part in all activities.

It is helpful to have a joining conference (initial talk) with every Scout, disabled or not, and his parents. Remember to be mindful of confidentiality.

If appropriate to do so, include the youth in the joining conference with his parents. For Cub Scout--aged boys, meeting just with the parents is OK. For Boy Scout and Venturing--aged youth, including the youth in the initial talk is usually appropriate; however, this is just a guideline, not a rule.

Parents should control what you and other leaders may know or share. If they confide in you, ask their permission before telling anyone else. You may not learn the actual diagnosis, but it is more important to know the behaviors the Scout may exhibit.

Asking parents for suggestions on how to handle disruptions will help you know which appropriate action to take. This also shows parents you are willing to listen and work with them on what’s best for their son or daughter.

There are many contributing factors that may cause inappropriate behaviors among Scouts with or without a disability. By knowing these factors in advance, you can mediate with the Scout and prevent some of these episodes from occurring. Contributing factors may include loud abrupt noises, whistles, PA systems, bright lights, changes in tones, changes in routine, and so forth.

Partner with Parents

- Meet regularly with parents.
- Praise successes and encourage.
- Encourage parents to become leaders.
- Suggest parents may need to attend meetings or outings to assist.

As you begin to understand a youth's disability, you may observe behaviors you should discuss with his parents. Don't wait for inappropriate behaviors to occur. Reach out and talk to the parents. Building an initial foundation of trust will help later.

One should understand that all youth, whether disabled or not, grow into maturity, and their behaviors change along the process. Most difficult behaviors lessen with maturity but there are some that become more extreme.

If you need to talk to parents or youth about a specific situation, make this an opportunity to be empathetic (have handout ready to distribute.) This way no one feels antagonized. A positive approach would be to say, *"I want to make sure the Scout is experiencing all that Scouting has to offer"* or *"How can I make it a success for the Scout?"* Focus on the behavior you want to change, not the person.

Do not rely on a parent always being able to attend meetings or outings as this may develop into a requirement for the Scout's active participation in the unit. In doing so, one places the burden on the parent to handle the inappropriate behavior instead of making this a learning experience for leaders and Scouts in the unit. There may be times, however, when a parent or caregiver must be present at meetings or outings. This will need to be addressed on an individual basis. **It will be important to watch this process closely to avoid hindering the Scouts development of independence.****

Partner with the Scout

- Communicate respectfully with the Scout.
- Assume the Scout can understand and handle the disability.
- Encourage the Scout to help create solutions.
- Encourage self-advocacy.
- Confidentiality NO gossiping



•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.

If you meet one person with autism...

Cub Scout Dennis tells us about his Autism: [Video Here](#)

After this video, share anyone's observations. Note the spinner tool. These were popular a couple of years ago. EVERYONE had to have one, but these tools could be a saving grace for those with sensory issues. Just as the name suggests, fidget tools help greatly with anxiety and stress.

Examples of Fidget or Calming Tools:

- Soft pieces of fabric or very soft stuffed toys
- Sticky tack
- Rough surfaces such as sandpaper, seashells, Velcro pieces
- Spinners
- Beads or marbles in small sacks or encased in netting
- Bean bags
- Stress balls (an uninflated balloon filled with rice or sand)

These items can be kept in a pocket and pulled out when the Scout is stressed or needs comfort

A bit of experience....

- Pair of sunglasses or regular reading glasses smeared with lotion on all areas of the lenses
- A hand mirror that has a stand or a prop for you to lean it on plus a piece of paper and a pen
- Four band aids that fit over the tips of your fingers
- And we will do a little reading...



Low vision: read something you see at hand or read the screen again. NO cheating. Reflect on your experience. Point to make is how can we make the Scouting world better for these Scouts. Simple easy fixes? Scout materials were available on Book Share but have not been updated. That means there probably hasn't been a need for them . Squeaky wheel gets the oil!

Dysgraphia: Get the mirror set up so that you can draw a smiley face with details or a Scout saying looking ONLY IN THE MIRROR as you draw/write. Then look at what you did. Reflection...the delay of writing? The frustration/ giggling....covering up! All typical feelings for one who cannot get the words on the page.

Loss of dexterity with fingers bandaged. Try your phone. Try buttoning, zippering, going through a pad of paper page by page. Unwrapping a candy wrapper. Anything that is intense fine motor Reflect on what ways we can help our Scouts or Scouters with slow movement, poor fine motor control

Experience reading the book **CDB** by W. Steig. It can be purchased on Amazon. Try to read the first two or three pages to get warmed up. Then work on some harder pages.

Reflect on how frustrating it is to read something that looks so simple. Then discuss your desire to WANT to be able to understand what you are reading. Notice how much the picture clues helped you. How can we help our Scouts and Scouters who have a hard time reading? We certainly don't want to set them up for failure!

Accept the Scout as a person and give them the same respect that you expect from them.

This will be much easier to do if you know the Scout, their parents, their background, and likes and dislikes.

Living the Scout Oath and Law

Empower your Scouts by your example.....

**Your Scouts learn by the way you
walk the walk and talk the talk!**

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Live the Scout Oath and Law – demonstrate it in your leadership

- “Just Like You!” – *Video*

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SHAC.org website
resources pull down tab
click on special needs