

ABILITIES DIGEST

Prepared. For Life.® Vol. 2, No. 2

Spring 2015



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Enabling Units

A Scout with Autism – Where to Start?



One in every 42 boys has Autism, a developmental disability. It isn't diagnosed until most youth reach grade school and even then, common neurobiological disorders like ADHD/ADD may be diagnosed first. Thus, an ever increasing number of units have at least one Scout on the Autism spectrum. so leaders should get to know the family, too.

Step One: The Scout's family fills out an Individual Scout Profile.

The Individual Scout Profile (ISP) is a worksheet developed by Autism Empowerment and the Autism and Scouting program to help leaders learn each Scout's strengths, challenges, and learning style. Some leaders ask all Scout families to fill out the ISP as it provides clues to potential sensory challenges and attention needed to medical, health, and safety issues that will ensure a good experience for each Scout in the unit. The ISP is accessible at www.AutismandScouting.org.

Step Two: The Parents or Caregiver and Unit Leader Meet

Once the Scout with autism joins Scouting, the unit leader should arrange a meeting with the parents or caregiver to get to know the family, and discuss their son's completed ISP form. Parents are experts on their son's autism.

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The initial discussion prepares the leader for any sensory or learning challenges he needs to be aware of, and think about ways to help the Scout regardless of his diagnosis. By establishing a positive connection with the Scout's family, leaders show they care and want the Scout to succeed. Leaders and parents should have this goal in mind. Preface the meeting by letting them know you are interested in helping their child have a positive experience, not keeping him out of Scouting. Follow the Five Ps in addition to the motto "Be Prepared:"

- Be Polite
- Be Professional
- Be Positive
- Be Patient
- Be Proactive

A short meeting to go over forms and "get to know you" keeps the initial discussion time reasonable but still allows bonds to form. In reality, what you will be discussing may need to take longer but be mindful of the time so no-one is overwhelmed. During the meeting, here are some of the things you will learn:

- Find out what accommodations the Scout may need if applicable.
- Find out what sensory, emotional, social, dietary restrictions, or allergy challenges may be checked, making sure you verbally clarify each area.
- Find out if the Scout has sensory issues or emotional triggers as these may cause meltdowns or shut-downs.
- Listen non-judgmentally. Families do not want to be pitied or be made to feel that their child is going to be a burden.
- Ask what level of privacy the family prefers.

The leader meets with the Scout following the discussion with his parents or caregiver.

Privacy

The family should indicate what information about the Scout's condition should be disclosed to others in the troop. This should be discussed without the youth. If a family is very open about disclosure this is an opportunity to offer them the chance to make a presentation to other leaders and/or Scouts about what autism may look like for their Scout son. When in doubt, it is better to follow the family's lead. For more information, see the Autism and Scouting Leadership Training Kit from Autism Empowerment, available for free download at :

www.AutismandScouting.org.

Essential Resources for Autism and Scouting

There are many helpful resources leaders can access online when working with a Scout on the autism spectrum.

BSA's disabilities awareness Web site: www.scouting.org/disabilitiesawareness.aspx. Resources include:

- *Guide To Advancement*
- *Guide to Working with Scouts with Special Needs*
- *Essentials in Serving Scouts With Disabilities* PowerPoint educational presentation
- College of Commissioner Science curriculum
- Link to all past *Abilities Digest* newsletters

Autism Empowerment, www.AutismEmpowerment.org, is a nonprofit organization devoted to enriching the lives of youth, adults, and families within the Autism & Asperger community. It is the only national organization that offers an Autism and Scouting program designed to help leaders support youth and adults with autism. The organization's autism and Scouting Web site is: www.AutismandScouting.org.

In addition, other helpful resources are available to share with Scouting families in units. These include:

- Autism and Scouting Leadership Training Kit - Free 93 page kit being used worldwide
- Autism and Scouting Podcast
- Autism and Scouting Webinars & Training Materials
- Growing national database of Autism Friendly Scouting Units

Facebook Pages

Both the Autism and Scouting program and *Abilities Digest* provide social media for connecting to other members of the community. In particular, both provide Facebook Pages:

Autism and Scouting - www.facebook.com/autismandscouting

Abilities Digest - <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165>



Don't miss your opportunity to attend our Philmont training conference: "Disabilities Awareness: Building Unit, District, and Council Resources" being held July 12-18, 2015 at the scenic Philmont training center. Participants will learn effective ways to support unit leaders who work with Scouts with disabilities. A limited number of scholarships are available. Contact Andrea Watson at: 575-376-2629 for more information.



Preparing for Summer Camp



Summertime means summer camp for most Scouts. They want to take part in the activities and, most importantly, have fun. This takes preparation, especially for new Scouts and those with disabilities. The unit leader should take time to think about each Scout as an individual and how they will react to camp routine., especially for those who have not attended camp before. Start by identifying roadblocks— camping features that prevent Scouts from participating or feeling comfortable. Make sure a leader watches for those roadblocks and is ready to bring the challenge within reach of the Scout's abilities.

Involve the Scout's parents in the planning process. Invite them to attend camp with the unit if appropriate. All campers should have buddies, but those with special needs should have a buddy who understands their disabilities and can help with roadblocks.

If Scouts have anxieties about unfamiliar places, make the camp familiar ahead of time. One Venturing crew produced a videotape of the campsite which helped smooth the transition from home to camp. In another case, Scouts actually visited the camp ahead of time and saw their assigned campsite, trails, and activities centers.

Mobility poses a challenge, especially on camp trails. Use a camp map and pay attention to travel needs when planning a camper's activities. Scouts with Down syndrome, for example, have low muscle tone. They tire easily from walking back and forth to the campsite. After lunch, instead of having them walk to the campsite to rest for an hour, they should just hang out in the dining hall with their buddies to wait for afternoon activities. Campers with wheelchairs should be familiar with camp trail conditions. The unit should plan to bring a set of tools to maintain wheelchairs or other mobility equipment. Bolts often shake loose after maneuvering on bumpy trails.

Camp staff are another resource. Contact them ahead of time about each camper's special needs or restrictions. The staff may have suggestions for appropriate activities or alternatives to ones the camper should avoid. A bit of forewarning also lets staff and counselors make adjustments whenever possible. Not all camp directors can adapt their programs, but all strive to give campers a fun and rewarding experience.

When arriving at camp, leaders should identify "cool zones" in each activity area. This is a quiet place campers can retrieve to when feeling overwhelmed, over-stimulated, fed-up, etc. This is good for any Scout, not just Scouts with disabilities. Caring leaders realize everyone needs a break to gather themselves. "Cool zones" should be within the responsible leader's view. Planning and preparation can make summer camp fun for everyone.

Enhancing Awareness

Handouts Supporting the New “Essentials” Presentation

Several handouts to use as supplemental resources while teaching the new *Essentials for Working with Scouts with Disabilities* educational presentation are now available to leaders, and can be accessed at:

www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/Handouts_for_Essentials_Working_with_Scouts_Disabilities.pdf. Depending on the audience, presenters may use all or part of the handouts to enhance their presentation.

Adaptive options/ideas for assisting Scouts w/Disabilities provides resources for finding accessible trails in state parks. Time and place should also be considered for use when teaching Scouts with disabilities. Various adaptations also are suggested for materials, architectural, leisure, cooperation, and environmental areas.

Appropriate Peer/Adult Supports focuses on parents and peers supporting Scouts with disabilities and gives examples of the types of support parents can provide as partners, and those a peer could provide. Leaders learn how to help parents by promoting independence for these Scouts. *Peers as supports* focuses on peers acting as a “peer buddy.” Please keep in mind that a “peer buddy” is not the same as the buddy system. The peer buddy focuses on performing a leadership role and being successful in that role through training, and support from his unit leader.

How to have a Joining Conference focuses on holding an initial, informative meeting with the Scout, parents or caregivers, and leaders. Meeting can take place after the Scout has joined and information that may enhance the Scout’s experience has been shared. A sample script is provided.

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Managing Subscriptions to *Abilities Digest*

***Abilities Digest* is designed for council and district disabilities awareness committees, related staff advisors, and any leader who would offer a Scouting program to youth who have special needs. Any Scouting volunteer or professional may subscribe.**

Subscribing. Send a message to disabilities.awareness@scouting.org, with “SUBSCRIBE” in the subject line. Indicate your name, email address, and council in the message text.

Unsubscribing. To decline future issues please reply and enter “REMOVE” in the subject line. We will remove the subscription within the next two weeks.

Receiving Multiple Copies. If you receive *Abilities Digest* at more than one email address, choose the one to be removed and reply with “REMOVE” in the subject line. Include a message requesting that we remove only that email address.

Duplicate Copies. If you receive more than one copy of *Abilities Digest* at the same email address, please reply to all but one of them with “DUPLICATE” in the subject line.

Address Change. If you want *Abilities Digest* sent to a different address, reply and enter “ADDRESS CHANGE” in the subject line. In your message, enter your council name and the email address you prefer.

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Planning successful outings helps leaders plan ahead to insure Scouts with disabilities are having good outdoor experiences. Leaders learn to expect the unexpected and apply supports for trail routes and transportation .

Conversation Starters Leaders often ask, “What do I say to this Scout or his family?” This handout provides leaders with suggestions for open communication with the Scout and his family.

Self-removals and slowing down activities helps leaders understand how Scouts voluntarily removing themselves can help control their emotions and eventually resume a positive Scouting activity. Adults also receive tips on how to slow down activities by providing breaks, implementing time frames, cues, and minimizing startling responses.

Teaching Autism Acceptance

As his Eagle Scout service project, a Scout with autism recently organized and lead a “Great Quest for Autism Acceptance Event,” a community activity offering accurate information to youth and adults to help them understand and gain an appreciation of what individuals living with Autism, Asperger’s, and other sensory processing challenges go through. Nine stations were set up to simulate sensory and communication challenges including: Sound, Sight, Taste, Smell, Touch, Fine Motor Skills, Communication, Invisible Disabilities and The Sense is Right..

Such events reinforce approaches for speaking about autism and autistic individuals that are different from other disabilities. For example, “person first” language is highlighted in the Disabilities Awareness merit badge and in many of BSA’s adult training materials. Some members of the autistic community prefer instead using adjectives like “autistic” or “Aspie” for Asperger's syndrome. Autism Acceptance is about respecting each Scout’s abilities and challenges, and helping all Scouts reach their potential. The National Disabilities Awareness Committee is grateful the Eagle Scout candidate produced a blueprint Scouting units and districts can use to organize a similar event as part of a camporee or community service project. Contact scouting@autismempowerment.org for a free copy of the event blueprint.

About *Abilities Digest*

Abilities Digest is the official e-letter of the Boy Scouts of America National Disabilities Awareness Committee. Its intent is to help expand membership through helping parents and Scouting volunteers to improve their understanding, knowledge, and skills related to including and serving the special needs population. Therefore, districts and councils may reprint articles from this publication. Our plan is to distribute four issues of *Abilities Digest* annually, but special editions may go out whenever there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at disabilities.awareness@scouting.org.

Council Abilities

Commissioner Training for Disabilities Awareness

Commissioners have had disabilities awareness training resources since 2012! The Commissioner Service team updated five classes that now include disabilities awareness in the curriculum for Colleges of Commissioner Science: one at the Bachelor's level, one at the Master's level, and three in the Continuing Education offerings—all accessible in the Commissioner Training landing page. These classes are useful for University of Scouting, and specific leader educational opportunities. Each class is packaged in a folder containing all the information instructors need for their presentation within the appropriate level including current resources available for handouts.



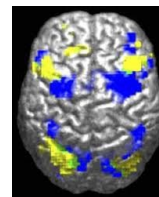
- The Bachelor's course, *Serving Scouts with Disabilities* (BCS 118), is a basic information class that identifies the resources available for leaders and provides a “primer” for advancement.
- The Master's course, *Advanced Scouting with Disabilities* (MCS 322), gives specific characteristics of the ten disability categories and strategies for working with Scouts who have special needs.
- The three Continuing Education classes address three of the most discussed topics in disabilities awareness: Advancement, ADHD, and Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Scouting with Disabilities – Advancement (CED 713) provides a summary of section 10 of the *Guide To Advancement*, No. 33088, and addresses when and how requirements can be modified in each Scouting program. *Scouting with Disabilities – ADHD* (CED 714) provides insight into the characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and gives parents and leaders tips on how to work with a Scout who has ADHD. (Note that a narrative summary of this class was published as an article entitled “ATTENTION” in the October 2014 issue of CHADD magazine .) *Scouting with Disabilities – Autism Spectrum* (CED 715) summarizes the various manifestations of autism spectrum disorder and provides strategies for working with Scouts who are autistic.

The Essentials in Serving Scouts with Disabilities that the NDAC developed is expected to be added to the Commissioner College curriculum as a Bachelor's level class, since it provides basics regarding how a leader should work with a Scout who has a disability. Advancement is minimally addressed in this educational presentation. Even though these classes are identified as Commissioner College classes, the material can be used to educate leaders who are not commissioners. All of these classes are accessible at: www.scouting.org/disabilitiesawareness.aspx.

Council Produces Video on Scouts with Neurobiological Diagnoses

Diagnoses such as ADHD, autism, bipolar disorder, depression, and learning disorders, are sometimes called “neurobiological diagnoses” (NBD). The Northern Star Council, serving central Minnesota and western Wisconsin, recently released a four-part training video focusing on Scouts with NBD.



- Part 1 gives information and characteristics about these diagnoses.
- Part 2 gives strategies and tactics for preventing problems before they happen.
- Part 3 gives strategies and tactics for handling many common problems that can arise in a unit.
- Part 4 talks about working with parents, medications, and advancement.

The council has made the videos available at: <http://training.northernstarbsa.org/info/UnitTrainingResources.aspx>

Professional Corner

Organizing New Scouts with Disabilities Units—Initial Visit

The basic premise of Scouting for youth with disabilities is that they want most to participate like other youth. Scouting gives them that opportunity starting with Cub Scouting all the way through Venturing. When we make the initial visit with a special needs group home or ARC agency director, we should talk about our whole Scouting for youth with disabilities program. Ask the director the following: What does the potential charter partner do to help individuals with disabilities? Where is their agency’s focus or service? What is their mission? Is it a cognitively disabled, autistic, or multiple disability agency? How can Scouting help their agency, school, or group home? Depending on the agency you may want to group Scouting programs by some of the following areas:

- Emotional Behavior (EBD)
- Learning Disability (LD)
- Autistic
- Developmentally Disabled (DD)
- Multiple Disabilities
- Blind
- Deaf or in some areas called a person with a hearing disability (caution –some deaf families do not see being deaf as a disability)

Your council may already have a number of units or groups in each of these program areas. By going in to an Autistic center for example and talking about a unit that you already serve with Autistic youth may sell Scouting better than selling children with disabilities as one block of special needs young people. *(Continued on page 9)*

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You will want to come to the initial meeting with district and council programs already in a calendar for the potential charter partner. You also will want to bring a list of the services the council already has for example, camps and camp programs. While you should always do research on the potential charter partner, don't assume that Boy Scout aged boys will be doing Boy Scouting.. Leave this decision to the potential charter partner. You may have Scouts with a potential charter partner at different levels requiring more than one level of Scouting.

Make sure you asked the potential charter partner to involve the parents of the youth. Most parents are willing to help but in many cases we fail to ask for their help. The last unit I started had two parents in the group that were Eagle Scouts themselves.

During the second meeting, be ready to discuss a specially prepared two to three month program plan. Make sure the district or council can provide a commissioner to the unit along with the following support:

- Disabilities awareness training for your potential charter partner and new leaders.
- District or council special needs programs including advancement service projects and camping opportunities.
- Leader contact information of another unit in the district willing to partner with this new charter partner on program and volunteer development from the start.
- Council support for uniforms, supplies, camperships, etc.

This can be very helpful. The key to starting a new special needs unit is to be flexible and listen to the potential charter partner 's needs and concerns.

Warren Wenner is a retired Professional Scouter. Warren served 34 years as a professional including the Southern Region staff as an Area Director and in six local councils including twice as a Scout Executive. His son is a special needs Eagle Scout. While Scout Executive, the council was recognized with the Outstanding Service to Youth with Disabilities by the National Organization on Disabilities, New York, NY. The National award is presented to a youth group serving youth disabilities. He serves as an Advisory Panel member with the National Disabilities Awareness Committee. Warren also serves on the National Camping Task force, the Southern Region NCAP committee and as Chair of Camp Assessment for Area 3, Southern Region.



A Peek Ahead

Topics Planned for Next Issue:

Abilities Training Opportunities: Philmont training conference on Disabilities Awareness

Enhancing Awareness: American Sign Language Interpreter Strip

Adapting Advancement: New Cub Scout Program's Disabilities Requirements

Recognizing Abilities: The 2015 Woods Service Award recipient and recent youth achievements

Professional Corner: Organizing a Scouts with Special Needs Unit

And the Survey Says: Results from the March random survey

Helpful Links

Here are links to current materials to aid volunteers and Scouts with disabilities:

Official Materials Posted on Scouting.org

Scouting with Disabilities new landing page:

www.scouting.org/disabilitiesawareness.aspx

Including Scouts with Disabilities educational presentation:

www.scouting.org/Home/BoyScouts/Resources/advancement_presentations.aspx

Request for Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility form, No. 512-935:

www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-935_WB.pdf

Individual Scout Advancement Plan, No. 512-936:

www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-936_WB.pdf

Advancement for Members with Disabilities and/or Special Needs:

www.scouting.org/scoutsource/guidetoadvancement/specialneeds.aspx

Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges, No. 512-730:

www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-730.pdf

Guide to Working With Scouts with Special Needs and Disabilities, No. 510-071:

www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/510-071.pdf

Working With Scouts With disabilities:

www.wswd.org/

Social Media

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165>