

**SCOUTS**

**WITH**

**DISABILITIES**

**A Guide  
for  
Adult Scout Leaders**

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# SCOUTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

## Proposed Adult Training Syllabus

### **1. Introduction:**

#### **A. Who are Scouts with special needs?**

Any young man or woman with a particular disability who has a desire to participate in Scouting.

#### **B. How do kids with special needs fit in Scouting?**

Many Scouts with special needs 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 unit leaders and other Scouts. A clear and open understanding should exist between the unit leadership and the parents or guardians of the special needs Scout. Both are required to give extra effort, but in both cases, the effort will be well worth it.

#### **C. Do we Mainstream the Scout or not?**

How do you decide whether to mainstream a child in a traditional Scout unit?

While there are, by necessity, Troops, Packs and Crews composed exclusively of Scouts with similar disabilities, experience has shown that Scouting usually succeeds best when every boy is a member of a Den or Patrol in a regular Pack or Troop or a member of a Crew.

To the fullest extent possible, Scouts with special needs should be given opportunities to camp, hike and take part in all Scouting activities within their abilities. Most Scout activities work well when the unit leadership has sufficient time to adapt the program to the facility and the ability of the Scout.

#### **D. Will there be extra work involved with Mainstreamed Scouts?**

Most Scout units do not have leaders who have expertise in working with Scouts with special needs, so a parent of the special needs Scout may be required to attend Scout activities, especially those that might require strenuous physical effort or those that occur over an extended period of time such as a campout or summer camp.

## **2. Parent's Pre-joining Conference**

Prior to joining a Scout unit, parents and Scout should meet with the Scout Leader to explain the prospective Scout's 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 unit. Allow him to speak for himself as much as possible. The following are some of the issues that should be discussed.

### **A. General Characteristics**

The Scout Leader should make every effort to obtain a general picture of the Scout's strengths and weaknesses. The leader should be aware of specific problems that might arise at meetings, campouts, field trips, etc.

*Note: Since most Scout Units do not have assistant leaders who have expertise in working with Scouts with special needs, a parent may be required to attend unit activities, especially those activities that might require strenuous physical effort or that occur over an extended period of time.*

### **B. Physical Disabilities**

Physical problems should be discussed with the parents and Scout. A complete medical history and medical form (See Appendix A) should be filled out completely and kept on file with the Scout unit. If you anticipate that this Scout may need exceptions made in the advancement process, now is the time to obtain either a medical statement concerning the Scout's disabilities from a licensed health care provider, or an evaluation statement certified by an educational administrator.

### **C. Mental Capabilities**

The Scout leader should be advised by the parents of their child's capabilities. The Scout leader should know the Scout's present grade level, his reading, listening, and mathematical abilities. The Scout leader can then determine how best to help the Scout get the fullest program possible.

### **D. Medication**

It is the responsibility of the youth and/or his parent or guardian to ensure that he takes his prescription medication correctly. It is also important for the Scout leader to be aware of what medication the Scout takes regularly.

A Scout leader, after obtaining written permission and instructions for administering any medications, can agree to accept responsibility for making sure a Scout takes the necessary medication at the appropriate time.

**BSA Policy does not mandate or encourage the Scout leader to administer any medication and if local or state laws are more limiting, they must be followed.**

## **E. Discipline**

Parents should be asked about any behavioral disorder. The Scout unit rules should be discussed with the parents and the Scout. The Scout leader should determine the discipline used to maintain appropriate behavior. The Scout leader should explain disciplinary procedures (sitting out games, suspension from a unit meeting, or activity etc.) to the parents. Have rules in writing for the parents and the youth.

## **F. Diet and Eating Disorders**

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 or activities should be provided by the parents.

## **G. 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 the parents.

## **H. Transportation**

Transportation to and from Scout meetings is the parent's responsibility. Car-pooling is acceptable as long as a burden is not placed on other parents.

## **I. 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.

## **J. Emergency Procedures**

Parents must inform the Scout leader of the name and phone number of their son's doctor. They must also inform his doctor about the Scout's involvement in Scouts and who his Scout leader is. They should also provide a release form to the doctor's office so that necessary information may be released to the Scout leader if necessary.

The Scout's medical history should be discussed in full with the Scout leader. All necessary medical permission and release forms should be completed and on file.

## **3. Membership Requirements for Boys Over Age.**

*BSA Policy- The medical condition of all candidates for membership beyond the normal registration age must be certified by a licensed health-care provider. (Use the Personal Health and Medical Record form, No.34412A (Appendix B)).*

Any corrective measures, restrictions, or limitations must be noted. In the case of candidates with mental retardation or emotional disturbance, their condition must be certified by a statement signed by a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist. Current health, medical, or certification records of all youth members with disabilities who are beyond the normal registration age are to be retained in the unit file at the council service center.

#### **4. Advancement Guidelines.**

Many Scouts with disabilities may have difficulty completing the requirements to advance in Scouting. However, it is important that these Scouts feel as much like others as possible, therefore completing the requirements as stated in official Scouting literature should be a primary objective. It may take these Scouts a little longer than others, so using the intermediate recognition system with the leather thong and beads can be a real motivator.

If a Scout's disability hinders him in completing a particular requirement for advancement or merit badge, then he may wish to apply for alternate requirements for advancement, or for an alternate merit badge.

#### **5. Alternate Requirements.**

A Scout who has a permanent physical or mental disability and is unable to complete all of the requirements for advancement may submit a request to the council advancement committee to complete alternate 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 encouraging the use of special aids are other ways leaders can help Scouts with disabilities in their efforts to advance. The substitute requirement should provide a similar learning experience to the original requirement. Bear in mind that the outcome of the Scouting experience should be one of fun and learning, not completing the requirements for rank advancements, which might place unrealistic expectations on the special-needs Scout.

*Following are the procedures for applying for alternate requirements:*

##### **Step 1. - Do as Many Standard Requirements as Possible**

Before applying for alternate requirements, the Scout must complete as many of the standard requirements in each rank as his ability permits. He must do his very best to develop himself to the limits of his abilities and resources.

##### **Step 2. - Secure a Medical Statement**

A clear and concise medical statement concerning the Scout's disabilities must be submitted by a licensed health-care provider. It must state that the disability is permanent and outline what physical activities the Scout may not be capable of completing. In the case of a mental disability, an evaluation statement should be submitted by a certified educational administrator relating the ability level of the Scout.

##### **Step 3. - Prepare a Request for Alternate Requirements**

A written request must be submitted to the council

#### **6. Council Advancement Committee Review**

The Council Advancement Committee should review the request, utilizing the expertise of professional persons involved in Scouts with disabilities. The advancement committee may want to interview the Scout, the parents, and the 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 and the Scoutmaster.

## **7. Role of the Adult or Unit Leader.**

### *Guidelines for working with Boy Scouts with Disabilities*

#### **A. Leadership Techniques.**

1) 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. All boys have different needs. The wise leader will recognize this and be prepared to help each individual.

2) 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 Scout unit. 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.

3) Many youth 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 parents permission before contacting the Scout’s health care team.

4) 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.

5) Example is a wonderful tool. Demonstrate personal discipline with respect, punctuality, accuracy, conscientiousness, dignity, and dependability.

6) 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.

7) 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.

8) Do not let the Scout or parents use the disability as an excuse for not trying. Always expect the Scout to give his best effort.

#### **B. 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 rewards if they are not effective in 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.

### **C. Giving Instruction to Youth with Disabilities**

- 1) Maintain eye contact during verbal instruction (except when the Scout's culture finds this inappropriate).
- 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 the instructions in a calm, positive manner as often as needed.
- 6) Help the Scout feel comfortable with seeking assistance.

### **D. Providing Supervision and Discipline**

- 1) As a leader, you must be a number of things to each boy; a friend, authority figure, reviewer, disciplinarian, resource, and teacher.
- 2) 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 or trying to say; use phrases like, "You really feel that way?" or "If I understand you right....." Have the Scout reiterate what he said to insure you understand what he said is what he means.
- 3) Avoid ridicule and criticism. Remember, all children have difficulty staying in control.
- 4) Remain calm, state the infraction of the rule, and avoid debating or arguing with the Scout.
- 5) Have pre-established consequences for misbehavior for all Scouts.
- 6) When a Scout is behaving in an unacceptable manner, try the time-out strategy or redirect his behavior.
- 7) Administer consequences immediately, and monitor proper behavior.
- 8) Make sure the discipline fits the "crime" and is not unduly harsh.
- 9) Enforce the Scout unit rules consistently.
- 10) 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.**

11) 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.

12) Behavior is a form of communication. Look for what behavior is saying (i.e., does the Scout want attention?).

### **E. Mobility Issues**

1) Remember that people who use adaptive equipment (wheelchairs, crutches, etc. ) often consider their equipment an extension of their bodies.

2) Never move equipment out of the person's reach.

3) Before you take someone out who has a mobility impairment, make sure facilities at the destination are accessible. While at the facility be aware of surroundings and whether there are obstacles the Scout may need help with such as narrow corridors, elevators etc.

4) Never pat a person in a wheelchair on the head. This is a sign of disrespect for adults.

5) When helping, ask how equipment works if you are unfamiliar with it.

6) Prevent strained necks by standing a few feet away when talking to someone in a wheelchair.

7) Find a place to sit down for long talks.

### **F. Hearing Impairment.**

1) Make sure the person is looking at you before you begin to speak.

2) Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.

3) Use gesture to help make your point.

4) Ask for directions to be repeated, or watch to make sure directions were understood correctly.

5) Use visual demonstration to assist verbal directions.

6) In a large group, remember that it's important for only one person to speak at a time.

7) Speakers should never stand with their backs to the sun or light when addressing people with hearing impairments.

8) Shouting at a person with a hearing impairment very seldom helps. It distorts your speech and makes lip reading difficult.

## **G. Vision Impairments**

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

## **H. Speech/Language Disorders**

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

## **I. Mental Disabilities**

- 1) Be clear and concise.
- 2) Don't use complex sentences or difficult words.
- 3) Don't "talk down". "Baby talk" won't make you easier to understand.
- 4) Don't take advantage. Never ask a person with mental retardation to do anything you wouldn't do yourself.
- 5) Be understanding. People with mental retardation are often aware of their limitations, but they have the same needs and desires as those without the disability.

- 6) Be patient, Ask if instructions are understood and repeat them if necessary.

### **J. Social/Emotional Impairments**

People with social or emotional impairments have disorders of the mind that can make daily life difficult. If someone is obviously upset,

- 1) Stay calm. People with mental illness are rarely violent.
- 2) Offer to get help. Offer to contact a family member, friend or counselor.

### **K. Attention Deficit Disorder**

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

- 1) Structure Scout meeting time, activities, and rules so that the Scout with ADD knows what to expect. Post a calendar of events.
- 2) Be positive. Praise appropriate behavior and completion of tasks to help build the Scout's self-esteem.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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.
- 5) Test the Scout's knowledge and not just his ability to take tests. Testing orally might help. Accept the use of assistive technology if needed.
- 6) Begin a formal achievement program. Weekly reports to parents could increase their involvement if needed.
- 7) Work closely with parents and members of the education team. People working together can make a big difference.
- 8) Be sensitive to the Scout about taking his medication. Avoid statements such as, "Johnny, go take a pill."
- 9) Simplify complex directions. Give one or two steps at a time.

### **L. Learning Disabilities**

Learning disabilities (including minimal brain damage, perceptual disabilities, communications disorders, and others) are usually disorders of the central nervous system that interfere with basic learning functions.

- 1) Listen and observe carefully to find clues as to how this Scout approaches problems and what his difficulties are.

- 2) Remember that praise and encouragement can help build self-esteem.
- 3) Let other troop members use their friendship and support to show the Scout that he belongs.
- 4) Use short, direct instructions that help the Scout know what is expected of him.
- 5) As much as possible, stay with a regular troop schedule, allowing the Scout to help with assigned duties.
- 6) Give the Scout extra time when needed. Don't rush his answers. Rephrase his instructions or questions if necessary.

## **8. Professional Assistance.**

There are organizations and associations for almost every disability, disorder or disease that one can imagine. They are ready and reliable resources for information about a specific disorder and can be found through Internet searches or through the Special Needs District in the Denver Area Council or through your local district representative for Special Needs.

### A. Where and How

(See "Resource Organizations" on the back page of "Boy Scouts with Disabilities".)

B. See your Special Needs District Director or Executive Director.

## **9. Resources**

A. Look for local resources offering activities, games, places to go, things to do, etc. that are accessible to special needs Scouts.

## **10. APPENDIX**

- A. Informed Consent Form
- B. Health Form
- C. Release Form to Administer Medication
- D. Checklist of Abilities and Limitations
- E. Training Completion Certificate
- F. Games and Activities
- G. Outside Resources

### **Notes:**

1. This is a Draft document; send additions and corrections to Denver Area Council, Boy Scouts of America.
2. Most of the above information is available in the BSA Pamphlet "A Guide to Working with Boy Scouts With DisABILITIES"

# *Appendix A*

# PARENT or GUARDIAN INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The undersigned are parents or guardians ("*Parent/Guardian*") of a youth member of the Boy Scouts of America ("*Scout*"), and they hereby respectively acknowledge that the Scout wishes to participate in a Scouting activity sponsored by \_\_\_\_\_ Pack/Troop/Crew/District, Denver Area Council, Boy Scout of America ("*District*"), to be held at \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_ including travel to and returning from the location ("*Activity*"). The Scout will be accompanied on the activity by the following adult leaders: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ ("*Adult Leaders*").

The undersigned *Parent/Guardian* further acknowledges that the *Scout* has certain physical limitations or impairments that will require the physical assistance of one or more *Adult Leaders* while participating in the *Scouting Activity*. The undersigned *Parent/Guardian* expressly consents to such assistance by any *Adult leader*.

The *Scout* agrees to promptly report to any *Adult Leader* any physical symptoms or ailments encountered by the *Scout* while on the *Activity*. Should medical treatment be deemed advisable by any *Adult Leader*, in the *Adult Leader's* sole discretion, the undersigned expressly consent to said treatment by any licensed physician or medical caregiver.

The undersigned further agree to hold harmless the Boy Scouts of America, the \_\_\_\_\_ Pack/Troop/Crew/District/Council, their *Adult Leaders*, officers, board members, employees, volunteers, agents, and related parties or entities from any and all claims demands, injures, damages, actions, or causes of action arising out of the *Scout's* participation in the *Activity*.

**We certify that we have read and understand the above and hereby agree to it.**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Scout

SWORN TO AND SUBSCRIBED BEFORE ME, under my official hand and seal of office, this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Notary Public

My Commission expires on \_\_\_\_\_.

# **Appendix B**

# CHECKLIST OF ABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

Youth's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Nick Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

What is his disability (Disabilities): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Can he walk without assistance? \_\_\_\_\_

With assistance? \_\_\_\_\_ How? \_\_\_\_\_

Use crutches? \_\_\_\_\_

Wheelchair? \_\_\_\_\_

What other aids? \_\_\_\_\_

Any other physical limitations? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he wear braces? \_\_\_\_\_

What type? \_\_\_\_\_

Can he adjust them? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he wear prosthesis? \_\_\_\_\_

Can he adjust it? \_\_\_\_\_

If not can he direct others? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he wear a helmet for protection against falls? \_\_\_\_\_

When and for what purpose? \_\_\_\_\_

Can he feed himself? \_\_\_\_\_

What help is needed? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he need a special diet? \_\_\_\_\_

If so attach list: \_\_\_\_\_

Does he dress himself? \_\_\_\_\_

What help is needed? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he go to the bathroom alone? \_\_\_\_\_

What help is needed? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he wear a collective device? \_\_\_\_\_

If so describe it: \_\_\_\_\_

Does he have normal vision? \_\_\_\_\_

Wear glasses or other aids? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he have normal hearing? \_\_\_\_\_

Wear a hearing aid? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he have any allergies? \_\_\_\_\_

If so what are the allergies? \_\_\_\_\_

Is he taking medication of any kind? \_\_\_\_\_

What type of medication, dosage, and for what:

Medication	Dosage	For what
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_____	_____	_____
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_____	_____	_____
-------	-------	-------

_____	_____	_____
-------	-------	-------

_____	_____	_____
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Can he administer it himself? \_\_\_\_\_

If not who does it? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he have a written medication schedule? \_\_\_\_\_

Does he have sufficient medical supply for duration of Scout activity (troop meeting, campout,

etc.) \_\_\_\_\_