

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. The disability 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. Scouting works with youth, but 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.

In This Issue

- **Enabling Units:** A Scout with Autism – Where to Start; Essential Resources for Autism and Scouting; Preparing for Summer Camp
- **Enhancing Awareness:** Handouts Supporting the New "Essentials" Presentation; Teaching Autism Acceptance
- **Council Abilities:** Commissioner Training for Disabilities Awareness; Council Produces Video on Scouts with Neurobiological Diagnoses
- **Professional's Corner:** Twin Valley Council's Successful Approach for Organizing Scouts with Disabilities Unit
- **A Peek Ahead:** Topics Planned For Next Issue
- **Helpful Links:** Accessing Disabilities Awareness Materials

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 begin forming. In reality, what you will be discussing may need to take longer but keep this initial meeting to a reasonable timeframe 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.

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

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 resources that Scout leaders can access and use online to help when working with a Scout who is on the autism spectrum.

BSA's Disabilities Awareness Landing Page - <http://www.scouting.org/disabilitiesawareness.aspx>

This is BSA's official Web site for working with Scouts with disabilities. Accessible resources include:

Guide To Advancement

Guide to working with Scouts with Special Needs

Essentials in Serving Scouts With Disabilities - Powerpoint

College of Commissioner Science curriculum

Link to all past *Abilities Digest* newsletters

Autism and Scouting Program from Autism Empowerment

Autism Empowerment website: www.AutismEmpowerment.org

Autism and Scouting Website - www.AutismandScouting.org

Autism Empowerment is a nonprofit organization devoted to enriching the lives of youth, adults and families within the Autism & Asperger community. It is the only national autism organization that offers an Autism and Scouting program dedicated to helping Scout leaders more effectively support youth and adults with autism in Scouting. 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

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:



- 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 - <https://www.facebook.com/autismandscouting>

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



Preparing for Summer Camp

Summertime means summer camp for most Scouts. Every Scout wants to take part and, more importantly, have fun. This takes preparation, especially for Scouts with special needs.

The unit leader should take some time to think about each Scout as an individual and how each will react to summer camp routine. This is especially true of new Scouts who have not attended camp before. Identify roadblocks: features of camp life that prevent the Scout from participating or feeling comfortable. Make sure that one or more unit leaders watch for those roadblocks and are ready to help bring the challenge within reach of the Scout's abilities.

Involve the camper'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. For example, one venture crew produced a videotape of their campsite. This helped smooth the transition from home to camp. In another case, campers actually visited the camp ahead of time and saw their assigned campsite, the trails, and the activity 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. Some campers with Down syndrome, for example, have low muscle tone. They tire easily from walking repeatedly back-and-forth between the campsite and activity areas. After lunch, instead of walking all the way back to the unit campsite to "rest" for an hour, campers and buddies should just hang out in the dining hall 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 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 for ones the camper should avoid. A bit of forewarning also lets staff and counselors make adjustments where 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 a "cool zone" in each area the campers visit. This is a quiet place campers can go to when feeling overwhelmed, over-stimulated, fed-up, etc. This is good for any Scout, not just Scouts with special needs. Caring leaders realize sometimes everyone needs a break to gather themselves. "Cool zones" should be within view of the leaders responsible for the area. Planning and preparation can make summer camp fun for everyone.

Enhancing Awareness

Handouts Supporting the New "Essentials" Presentation

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

http://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 help enhance the presentation.

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.

Adaptive options/ideas for assisting Scouts w/Disabilities provides ideas for accessibility on trails in state parks along with resources for finding more information. Time and place are also considerations that are referenced for use when teaching Scouts with special needs. Suggestions of various adaptations also are provided for: materials, architectural, leisure, cooperation, and environmental areas.

Appropriate Peer/Adult Supports focuses on parents and peers as supporters for 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 the mechanics that go into holding an initial, informative meeting with the Scout, parents or caregivers, and unit leaders. This meeting takes place after the Scout has joined the unit and information is shared that should enhance the Scout’s experience in Scouting. A sample script is provided.

Planning successful outings helps leaders prepare and plan ahead for outings to insure Scouts with disabilities are having good outdoor experiences. Leaders learn about “expecting the unexpected,” ability levels, and different strategies for trail routes and transportation supports.

Conversation Starters Often times leaders will 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 self-removals can help Scouts independently control their emotions so they can return to the activity and resume a positive Scouting experience. Leaders also receive tips on how to slow down their activities by providing breaks, informing Scouts of time frames, cueing, and minimizing startling responses.

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.

Teaching Autism Acceptance

As his Eagle Scout service project, a Scout with autism recently organized and lead a “Great Quest for Autism Acceptance Event.” The event was a community activity to offer positive, respectful, and accurate information about autism and autistic individuals.



The event helped youth and adults understand and gain an appreciation of what an individual who lives with Autism, Asperger’s and sensory processing challenges goes through.

Nine stations were set up to simulate sensory and communication challenges. Stations included: 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 special needs and disability communities. 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 the other form, and use adjectives like “austistic” or “Aspie” (for Asberger’s syndrome.)

Autism Acceptance is about accepting and respecting each Scout’s abilities and challenges and helping all Scouts reach their highest potential. The National Disabilities Awareness Committee is grateful the Eagle Scout candidate produced a blueprint for running a similar event, which is available from Autism Empowerment. Scouting units and districts can use this blueprint to organize an event as part of a camporee or as community service event. Contact scouting@autismempowerment.org for a free copy of the event blueprint.

Council Abilities

Commissioner Training for Disabilities Awareness

Commissioners have had Disabilities Awareness Training Resources for three years! In 2012, the Commissioner Service team updated and standardized the curriculum for Colleges of Commissioner Science. Updates included FIVE classes that addressed disabilities awareness: one at the Bachelor’s level, one at the Master’s level, and three in the Continuing Education offerings. These classes are useful for University of Scouting classes, as well as for specific leader education opportunities. Each class is packaged in a folder that contains all the information instructors need to present the class, including the currently available resources for handouts. Each class is in a folder within the appropriate college degree level, i.e., Bachelor’s, Master’s or Continuing Education, accessible in the Commissioner Training landing page.

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 detailed summary of the provisions of Section 10 of the Guide To Advancement (No. 33088) and addresses when and how requirements can potentially be modified in each program within Scouting. Scouting with Disabilities – ADHD (CED 714) provides insight to the characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and gives tips for parents and Scout's leader on how to work with a Scout who has ADHD. (Note that a narrative sum-



mary of this class was published as an article in the CHADD magazine, ATTENTION, in October 2014.) Scouting with Disabilities – Autism Spectrum (CED 715) gives a detailed summary of the various manifestations of the autism spectrum disorder and provides strategies for working with Scouts who are "on the spectrum".

The Essentials in Serving Scouts with Disabilities class that the NDAC recently created is expected to be added to the Commissioner College curriculum soon 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 from the Disabilities Awareness landing page at: <http://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.

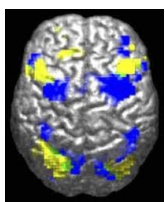
- Part 1 gives information and characteristics about these diagnoses.
- Part 2 gives strategies and tactics for preventing problems before they happen.
- Part 3 gives strategies and tactics for handling many common problems that can arise in a unit.
- Part 4 talks about working with parents, medications,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

The council has made the videos available online. Here is the URL:

<http://training.northernstarbsa.org/info/UnitTrainingResources.aspx>

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

Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility form,

No. 512-935: www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-935.pdf

Individual Scout Advancement Plan,

No. 512-936: www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-936.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.wwswd.org/

Social Media

Twitter: @AbilitiesDigest

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