

Special-Needs Scouting Presentation for All Scout Leaders

Adapted from *Scouting for Youth with Disabilities*, No. 34059, pp. 145-148

Training Time: 90 minutes

Suggested Handouts:

- *A Guide to Working With Boy Scouts With DisABILITIES*, No. 33056C.
- *Alternate Requirements for Tenderfoot, First Class, and Second Class Ranks*
- *Alternative Advancement Policies*
- *Ten Tips for Leaders*
- List of Available Resources

Objective: By the end of this session the participants will know the how to work with the special-needs boys in the patrol/den and troop/pack to guarantee success, and to locate resources.

Welcome & Introductions (5 minutes)

- “**Welcome** to VHC’s Leader Training for Working with Scouts with Disabilities and Special Needs.”
- Staff **Introductions**
- Overview of the presentation
 - We’ll talk about the **difference** between **disabilities** and **problems**.
 - We’ll discuss specific **strategies** for dealing with problems.
 - **Talking** with the Scout and his parents
 - **Planning** meetings and outings so every Scout will be successful.
 - Using the Boy Scout **Advancement Policies and Procedures**
 - We’ll identify some **resources** for you as a Scout leader.
 - You can **take notes**, of course.
 - But **everything** we present to you tonight is in the resources.
- Briefly, some **Logistics** – exits, restrooms, cell phones & pagers
- We have scheduled time for **Questions and Answers** at the end, but please **feel free to ask** if you don’t understand something we say.

Discovery (5 minutes)

“First of all, let’s find out a little about why are you here.

What do you expect from this session?

What problems are you dealing with?”

(This will help you know what Scouting position some of the participants have, and an idea of their level of understanding of special needs. Watch out that you don’t get pulled into specific-situation stories that hijack your agenda (“I have a boy who...”). Reframe the offered comments to general issues (like disrupted meetings and concern that boys will be accepted in troops), general disabilities like “ADHD,” and resource questions (“where do we find the correct info about Scouting rules?”))

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Video (15 minutes)

Next let's look at a video that I think you'll find appropriate for this evening's topic.

Show the video.

DISABILITIES AND PROBLEMS (5 minutes)

So let's discuss the question: "What is a disability?"

What is the difference between a **boy with a problem** and a **boy with a disability**?

A **disability** is a real and permanent medical condition and cannot be eliminated. (This does not necessarily mean it can't be controlled or dealt with.)

A **problem** is made by individuals and can and should be eliminated.

A **disability** can sometimes cause a **problem**

- in behavior,
- in learning, and/or
- in socialization.

Boys (and adults) will sometimes try to eliminate a **problem** without understanding the cause (**disability**).

- It is our job as leaders
 - to **work with** the problems, or better yet,
 - to **prevent** them in the first place by understanding the disability.
 - to keep in mind that each patrol, den, troop, and pack is **one group**, but that the group is always made up of **individuals**.

A boy with a disability has the **same need** as any boy to be **successful**, and to be **accepted** socially.

- We must work with any **problems** to increase the chances of his success.
- We must reach out to these Scouts and their parents
- We must work with the group to help him be included.

Ask the Participants:

What kinds of **DISABILITIES** are you dealing with in your patrols/dens and troops/packs that can cause **PROBLEMS**?

(Let them list a few general ones, for example, behavior, slow learner, ADD, ADHD, dyslexic— not specific situations with one or two boys.)

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So **how do we deal** with the **PROBLEMS**? Here are **3 suggestions**:

- 1. Work with the parents and the Scout with special needs.**
- 2. Plan meetings and outings so every Scout will be successful.**
- 3. Learn about Boy Scout Advancement Policies and Procedures**

Let's start with the first suggestion:

1. Work with the parents and the Scout with special needs. (10 min)

- **Communicate, communicate, and communicate some more** with parents and the Scout.
 - Try not to talk about the Scout **behind his back**, even to his parents, but **include him**. It is HIS disability and HIS life you are dealing with.
 - **Assume he is competent** to understand and handle his disability. Leaders will be surprised how much more cooperation and effort you will get by respecting the Scout's abilities to understand his own situation.
 - Let the Scout **speak for himself**, rather than letting the parents speak for him. At times, parents tend to say what they think their son would say! You will also eliminate any future "he said, she said" problems.
 - Find out **what the PROBLEM really is** and its characteristics
- Find out what, if any, **medication** he is taking, how often and what is the expected effect? (This will help you know if he forgot to take his medication, or if it is time for the next dose.)
- Find out **what triggers** the characteristics, and **methods to avoid** these triggers.
- Find out **how they handle** the problem **at home**.
- What does the **teacher (school) do** with written permission from the parents? (Possibly talk to the Scout's teacher.)
- What do the parents and Scout **suggest you do**?
- Communicate on a **regular basis** to get feedback as to how you are doing, as well as any changes that may have occurred with the Scout (medication changes, etc.).

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- See if the Scout wants to **talk about his disability** with the other Scouts.
 - IF the problem is truly a disability, and IF the Scout wants to talk about his disability with the Scouts in the patrol/troop or den/pack,
 - **give him time** to teach, and
 - let the group **learn** along with you.
 - Leave **up to the Scout** and his parents how much is said.
 - **Some boys do not want to** admit a disability and feel they will be treated differently if others know.

QUESTION: What if the parents say: “He’s just a boy, and boys will be boys. He doesn’t have a disability. He’s just active”?

- DO NOT DIAGNOSE; accept parents’ answer.
- Turn the problem around and **make the problem yours**, not the Scout’s or the parents’. This way you will not antagonize the parents or the Scout.
- For example, say: **“I am having trouble dealing with the behavior.** Your son isn’t getting the benefits of the program because I am spending time dealing with his behavior rather than delivering the program.”
- Give **specific examples** of the boy’s disruptive behavior.
- **Ask the same type questions** as above, and enlist the aid of the parents (“What do you do at home?” etc.) You are asking for their help with your problem, so they won’t be defensive about their son’s behavior.

2. Plan meetings and outings so every Scout will be successful. (15 min)

- **Set the example** by your attitude.
 - **Good attitudes** toward others are **contagious**.
 - If you treat the Scout **as you treat the others**, the Scouts will catch on and will see him in a positive light.
 - As much as possible, **treat the Scout the same** as all the others.
- **Communicate with the Scout** about his problem and treat him with respect.
 - Don’t talk *about* him—talk *with* him!
 - Never be **condescending**. Assume he is **competent**.
 - Do not let anyone (including his parents) tell the Scout he is not capable of trying to do something he wants to do.
 - Always encourage him to try.
- Have written **rules of behavior** and have them posted.
 - Make the rules **reasonable**.
 - State the rules **simply** and in terms the Scouts understand

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- Have **no more than five**. (With more than five, a Scout with a disability may not be able to remember them.)
- **Do not bend** the rules.
- Let all the Scouts participate (take **ownership**), deciding what the rules are. (You can guide them into deciding rules that the leadership feels are appropriate. Maybe some leading questions, or a menu to select from.)
- Explain that there are **consequences** for all behavior.
- For acceptable or positive behavior, there are **positive consequences**, like success or rewards.
- For unacceptable or negative behavior there are **negative consequences**, like hurt or punishment.
- Let the boys know that **the rules** they are writing **are to help them** keep their behavior positive.
- If rules are broken, **discipline immediately**.
- Do not have a **specific consequence** for each broken rule (“If you do __, then __ will be your consequence.”).
- Make the **consequence fit the action** and the child. Consequences for the same behavior may not be the same for two different Scouts.
- **Consequences** usually should be the **removal** of something from the boy that he likes, or the removal of the boy from an activity he likes.

Ask the participants for an example of a consequence that would not work for two different situations of the same rule being broken.

- Have **different levels of difficulty** for an activity or break the activity into parts.
 - We want everyone to be able to **successfully complete the task** at hand.
 - Be creative. **Find ways** to make every Scout successful.
 - Maybe **different parts of the job** are appropriate for different Scouts.
 - Know what “**success**” is for each Scout.
- Give **extra time and attention** to those who need it.
 - **Get extra help**, if necessary.
 - **DO NOT “baby”** the Scout or do anything for him that he can do for himself!
 - Remember, **FAIR IS NOT THE SAME AS EQUAL**.
 - If necessary, explain to the Scouts that **they too will need** some extra help on something sometime.
 - You are **giving help** so that one particular Scout can be successful, too.

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- **Fair** is giving every individual Scout what he needs to be successful.
- **Fair is not necessarily equal.** We as leaders must be fair.
- Praise and accept the **best effort** of each Scout.
 - Keep expectations high, but give the **freedom to fail**.
If you don't, a boy may quit trying.
 - **Challenge** each Scout to **his own limits**.
 - Don't let him use his disability as a **cop-out**, but
 - Don't allow him to get **overly frustrated**.
 - It is a challenge for us as leaders to figure out where that **fine line** is, but we must.
 - Remember, "**do your best**" is part of the program.
 - **Don't do for him** what he can do for himself.
 - We'll talk in a few minutes about the **BSA advancement regulations**.
- Give **positive alternatives** to negative situations.
 - **Eliminate** as much as possible the word "**don't**".
 - If a Scout is doing something **unacceptable**, give him a **positive alternative**.
 - **Redirect** him.
 - For example: If a Scout is getting aggressive, don't tell him to stop, tell him to (be specific!). Give examples.
 - Know your Scout and what would be a good alternative.
 - **IF** behavior is simply to get attention, **ignore the behavior but not the Scout**.
 - Give him the **attention** he is looking for in a **positive** way, by being involved.
 - **Don't** even **acknowledge** the **inappropriate** behavior, if possible.
 - If the leader responds negatively toward the behavior, the boy will escalate the behavior and a vicious circle will begin, making the situation continuously worse.
 - This circle can permanently end a good relationship between the leader and Scout.
 - The **leader's response** to the behavior can make all the difference.
 - Look at the behavior as **the Scout's way of communicating**.
 - Figure out what his **behavior is saying**.

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- **Don't try to control** the behavior, but help with the transition to acceptable behavior by redirecting.
- **Do not** give a choice if **choice is not an option**.
 - If there is a choice to be made, let the **Scout** (or group) make the **choice**.
 - You, as the leader, must **honor the choice** he (or the group) has made.
 - If you don't, you will not only lose their respect, you will lose control of the group.
 - **Choose your words carefully**.
 - Remember, if you do give a choice, you must **abide by the decision**.
 - For instance, if he is misbehaving, **don't say**, "If you don't stop, I will send you home right now" **if it is not an option** to send him home immediately.
 - Even though you are not saying, "Do you want to stop or do you want to go home?" **you are really giving him a choice** between stopping his behavior and going home. His behavior will show his choice.
 - Guess what would happen if he **knows** you can't send him home.
 - You will **lose his respect**.
 - Next time you give a choice, he will know **you don't mean it**.
 - **You**, the leader, will be the **loser** in this situation.
 - **Give choices whenever possible**, whether it is choice of activities, behavior, or anything else.
 - If the Scout (or group) is **part of the decision-making process**, they will take **ownership** and **live up** to the choice.
 - After all, it was **their choice!**

3. Learn about Boy Scout Advancement Policies and Procedures (10 min.)

- Many Scouts with disabilities will have **no trouble advancing** within the Scout program.
- Although we **cannot change the requirements** as they are written, we can make **accommodations** to help.
 - To complete a rank or a merit badge, each requirement must be **completed as stated**.

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- “Leaders should use **reasonable accommodation** and **common sense**,” but requirements cannot be waived, and credit cannot be given for a “good try.”
- Do not expect the **same quality of work** from every boy, but they should **complete all the requirements**.
- A **review** for rank advancement or for a merit badge can be done one **piece at a time**, if necessary.
 - Once a Scout has been passed and signed off on a requirement, he **does not have to repeat** the part of a review, even if he has several review sessions.
- If a disabled Scout **cannot possibly complete** the requirements of rank advancement or Eagle-required merit badge, he can **request permission to substitute**.
 - The **procedures** for approval of alternate requirements for ranks and Eagle-required merit badges are **purposely not simple**.
 - Scouts should **use them only when absolutely necessary**, not as any easy solution to a difficult challenge.
 - For any alternate requirement, either for ranks or merit badges, a **statement** from a medical doctor or certified educator must be submitted, stating that the Scout’s **disability** is of a **permanent** rather than a temporary nature.

Hand out the sheet Alternate Requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class Ranks.

Briefly explain when and how to request alternates for these ranks.

- For Eagle-required merit badges, there is the alternative merit badge option for the disabled Scout.

Show and explain BSA form 58-730.

- “This [advancement] plan is designed to provide advancement opportunities for Scouts with disabilities.”
- “The alternate merit badges chosen must be of such a nature that they are **as demanding** of effort as the required merit badges.”
- “It is important that unit leaders use **reasonable accommodation** and **common sense** in the application of the alternate merit badge program.”
- Each **request** for substitution must be **filed on form 58-730**, submitted to, and approved by, the council advancement committee.
- The candidate must **earn as many of the required merit badges** as his ability permits **before** applying for an alternate merit badge.

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- Some Scouts may need **more time**.
 - If there is a chance that he will need an **extension past his 18th birthday** in order to achieve the Eagle rank, there are **procedures** to follow.
 - Learn about them as soon as it appears they will be necessary.

4. Resources Available for Scout Leaders (4 min)

- *Scouting for Youth with Disabilities Manual*, No. 34059
- *A Guide to Working With Boy Scouts With DisABILITIES*, No. 33056C.
- *Ten Tips for Leaders*

5. Summary (1 min)

- Remember, special-needs Scouts and “typical” Scouts are **more alike** than they are different.
- **Focus on the sameness**, and figure out how to make the differences less.
- Making the program work depends on a **leader’s attitude and willingness** to make it work.
- **Use ALL the resources** available to you.
- As we ask of the boys, **DO YOUR BEST**.

6. Question and Answer Session (20 min)