

Recommendations to Help Scouts with Disabilities and Special Needs

Verdugo Hills Council, Boy Scouts of America

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

1. **Have fun.** While Scouts with Disabilities may pose some challenges, BSA has always welcomed *all* boys. James E. West, the first Chief Scout Executive, was a person with a disability. Other Scouts benefit by having Scouts with disabilities in their troop, providing them opportunities to help others.
2. **Have a pre-joining conference.** Before a Scout with a disability joins a troop, the Scoutmaster should meet with a Scout and his or her parents in a preconference to discuss the Scout's special needs and successful past accommodations and practices. Physical or mental limitations; current medications; and a strategy for meeting the Scout's needs should be discussed.
3. **Learn about alternate advancement.** A Scout with a permanent physical or mental disability may request changes in the requirements for any rank. The Scout may also request an alternate merit badge in lieu of a merit badge required for Eagle if the disabling condition prohibits the Scout from completing the necessary requirements. Any accommodations should provide a "similar learning experience." Full guidelines and explanations are available through the *Guide To Advancement*.
4. **Involve the parents.** Encourage the parents of Scouts with disabilities to actively participate in troop activities, including campouts or long-term activities. A volunteer Scout buddy may also help a Scout with disabilities to effectively participate in the troop program.

SPECIFIC TIPS

5. **Change Strategies.** Disabilities often vary in their intensity and affect. What works for one Scout with a specific disability may not necessarily work for a Scout with the same disability. If a specific accommodation or strategy is not successful, try something else.
6. **Plan for extra time.** Scouts with disabilities often need extra time to complete specific tasks. Be patient and flexible. Breaks are often helpful.
7. **Simplify instructions.** Simplify complex instructions; give one or two instructions at a time; repeat instructions if necessary, make sure the Scout understands the instructions before beginning the activity.
8. **Provide encouragement.** Praise and reward is nearly always more effective than criticism. Praise both good behavior and performance immediately. Do not praise falsely or so often that it becomes ineffective.
9. **Develop your own troop program.** Consider ways you can encourage all members of your troop to support Scouts with disabilities. Some suggestions are: Scoutmaster minutes, earning the Disabilities Awareness merit badge as a troop activity, and helping to assure that Scouts with disabilities have appropriate leadership positions.
10. **Learn more.** We encourage you to visit the BSA's [Disability Awareness webpage](#) often, and use the many helpful resources you will find there.