

# Scout Youth with Disabilities

Scouting recognizes that no two Scouts are exactly alike; each Scout is unique. Scouts are not machines who can be steered in exactly the same way, to have fun doing the same activities, or who learn in the same way from exactly the same instructions. Some Scouts need extra help from trained leaders.

- Since its founding, the BSA has fully supported members with physical, mental, and emotional special needs.
- Which one of the founders of the Boy Scouts of America was physically disabled?
  - a. Daniel Carter Beard
  - b. William D. Boyce
  - c. Ernest Thompson Seton
  - d. James E. West
  - e. None were physically disabled

The answer is “d.” James E. West contracted a disease as a child; one of his legs was shorter than the other, causing him to limp the rest of his life. But he is considered the architect of the BSA.

- Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, and Venturers with disabilities and special needs participate in the same program as do their peers.
- The *Guide to Advancement 2015*, Section 10 identifies the procedures required. Many councils have established an advisory committee for youth with special needs.
- These policies exist to facilitate advancement (Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, Venturers, and Sea Scouts) and need to be addressed with local advancement experts to ensure they are followed correctly.
- Scouts with “severe and permanent mental or physical disabilities may work on ranks past the chronological age.”
  - Cub Scouts: Did the boy “do his best”?
  - Boy Scouts and Varsity Scouts: Send a letter to council advancement committee requesting alternative requirements.
  - Eagle Scout required merit badges: Merit badge requirements may not be modified or substituted. Use alternate badges once approved to do so, and submit the *Application for Alternate Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges* to the council advancement committee.
- Scouts over age 18, if approved by the council executive board to register beyond the age of eligibility with a special needs code, may apply for the rank of Eagle Scout.
  - *Guide to Advancement 2015*, section 10.1.0.0, and *Request for Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility, No. 512-935*
- Working with Scouts with special needs, Scouters must be:
  - Comfortable (Not everyone in the unit may feel comfortable, and that is OK.)
  - Enthusiastic
  - Patient
  - Understanding
  - Flexible
- Working with Scouts with special needs is REWARDING and a learning opportunity.

## Disability Awareness Activities

"Disable" the scouts & have them try simple tasks to gain an idea of what problems a disabled person might face:

- **Lower limb mobility:** Tie a dowel or ruler to the back of the leg so that the leg could not bend. Try putting on trousers, shorts, socks, shoes etc. Walk upstairs. Join in a game which involves sitting on the floor and then getting up and running.
- **Upper Limb mobility:** Put "dominant" arm into a sling or tie a dowel to arm so it can't bend or strap fingers together or .... Drink a glass of juice, make a sandwich. Tie a shoe lace
- **Sight problems:** Blindfold scouts, or wear somebody else's glasses (for a short while only - to avoid eye strain) Put together a jigsaw puzzle. draw a picture. Write your name.
- **Hearing problems:** Wear a iPod or personal radio playing "buzz" (radio tuned between stations) or loud music. Have them join in a game which relies on hearing.
- **Learn the manual alphabet.**  
Gag somebody (perhaps the leader!) using a scarf etc. (make sure they can still breathe easily!) so they have to go through the meeting mute!

When we have tried something like this - we usually have scouts go outside with their "disability" & put up a tent (working in groups) also prepare a fruit salad - even "blind" scouts can do this with help! Trying to find a game that everyone can play is fun too!

We also have a troop set of "disability" equipment - items like a Braille watch, a button hooker, adapted cutlery etc. We hand the items to the scouts at the start of the session & ask them to guess what the items are for - with some hilarious results!!!

## 10 Simple Communication Rules –

### The "do's" and "don'ts" for Communicating with People with Disabilities

1. **Speak directly** rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present.
2. **Offer to shake hands.** People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands, and offering the left is an acceptable greeting.
3. **Always identify yourself** and others who may be with you when meeting someone with a visual disability. When talking in groups remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking. Ask if you can describe something to a person with a visual disability.
4. **If you offer to help, wait until the offer is accepted.** Then listen or ask for instructions.
5. **Address people with disabilities by their first names,** only when extending that same familiarity to all others. Never patronize people in wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulders.
6. **Do not lean against or hang on someone's wheelchair.** Remember that people with disabilities treat their chairs as extensions of their bodies. And so do people with guide dogs and help dogs. Never distract a work animal from their job without the owner's permission.
7. **Listen carefully when talking with people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish.** If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, or a nod of the head. Never pretend to understand; instead repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.
8. **Place yourself at eye level** when speaking with someone in a wheelchair or on crutches.
9. **Tap a person who has a hearing disability on the shoulder or wave your hands to get his/her attention.** Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if the person can read lips. If so, try to face the light source and keep hand and food away from your mouth when speaking. If a person is wearing a hearing aid, don't assume that they have the ability to discriminate your speaking voice. Never shout at a person. Just speak in a normal tone of voice.
10. **Relax!** Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions such as "*See you later*" or "*Did you hear about?*" that seems to relate to a person's disability.

Adapted from the United Cerebral Palsy "The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities". A humorous look at the "do's" and "don'ts" of communicating with people with disabilities. This 30-minute tape is available to borrow from the Commission on Disabilities (an excellent training tool for staff).