



# Camp Ready for Special Needs Scouts Leader Resource Sheet

## Introduction

Camp should be fun for everyone. If you have a Scout with Special needs, advance planning can be the difference between a good camp experience and one that is tense for scouts and leaders. Here is a list of things to consider before you head to camp.

### Adult Support:

What does the Scout need for adult support? Some Scouts need 1-on-1 adult support, and others may just need more support but not all the time. If you need to bring more adults than allowed in the leader/youth ratio, talk directly to the camp and explain your situation.

### Merit Badge Success:

Many disabilities require that a Scout may need more time to complete work. Merit badge requirements cannot be changed for a Scout with a disability, but accommodation can be made as to how they complete the work. For example, if a helper needs to scribe (write) for a Scout, they can do so, but they must write the Scout's words.

Whether you have a scout with an intellectual, emotional, attention, or other disability, consider these strategies for a successful merit badge experience.

- Work in Advance* – Print out the merit badge worksheet and as much work as possible before camp.
- Accommodation Planning* – If the Scout needs accommodation to complete the merit badge requirements, work with the camp in advance to ensure what you propose will meet the requirements.
  - For example: In the Bird merit badge, you are supposed to sketch 20 birds. A youth with low hand strength doesn't draw. An alternative is proposed to trace bird outlines from a book once birds are found, and then add color. Bring supplies to do this to camp. The merit badge counselor approves this strategy.
- Workload Planning* – Consider the energy and attention of each Scout and remember that camp is supposed to be fun. Signing up for 4 difficult merit badges, especially if a scout needs extra time and accommodations to complete them, is poor planning. Hopefully, the SPL, Scoutmaster, and Scouts going to camp include in their discussion what kind of camp experience they want and how everyone's needs can be met. For special needs scouts, consider these actions:
  - Pick one or two challenging merit badge(s), and do those successfully. If a Scout needs extra "lab" time, or time with the merit badge staff, talk to the camp in advance to see what options are available.

- Scouts can take merit badges more than once! Take fun merit badges that they can do independently, or with little assistance, to counterbalance the difficult ones.
- If a scout needs extra rest or psychological down-time, plan for that. You may not realize how much harder getting around camp and functioning in the camp environment may be for a special needs scout, and extreme fatigue will not help the camp experience.

### Special Needs and Unit Training:

Learning to work in a group is integral to Scouting. Successfully working with people who are very different from you requires team building and communication. The best-practices recommendation is for a leader and parent to have a pre-joining conference to understand the specifics of any disability and how to structure the scout experience. Sometimes, however, a youth may not start in the troop with a clear disability designation, whether the parents are still discovering their son/daughter is different, or because it is a recent circumstance due to injury or illness. Regardless, before camp is a good time to engage in training that addresses special needs (and schedule that parent conference too).

You can contact your District for training support or ask in your Unit if there is someone with expertise to help conduct training. Here are some training ideas:

- Every scout is unique in some way, has strengths, and weaknesses. Normalize differences by having Scouts talk about similarities and differences. If this is a new conversation, then prepare your leaders and SPL / ASPL in advance to be ready to share in a way that opens communication because they go first.
  - Foods – what can't you eat and why? Allergies, or preference?
  - In Camp, what jobs are you best at (fire building, stove, cooking, clean-up, hanging bear bags), and what are you not good at? (or really don't like to do)
  - At the upcoming camp, what will be hard for you? Are you worried about anything? (First time away? Don't do well in the heat? Etc.) What will be easy for you at camp?
- Conduct training at the Unit specifically on special needs. Ideally the training involves everyone (parents, leaders, and scouts) in a way that engages everyone to identify how the Unit can embody the Oath and Law in how they treat everyone. What can the unit do to work with a wide variety of people? Training can be customized to the Unit and should provide some general information about Scouting's philosophy and process for special needs scouts. Training can provide practical applications to Unit situations and teach specific communication skills.
  - How do you ask questions about what someone needs?
  - How do you aid someone with special needs?
  - If you have a special need, how do you explain to other Scouts about your difference and what you may need to be successful?
  - What special needs does your Unit have, and what can you do to make your Unit accepting and supportive?



## Resources

BSA Guide to Working with Scouts With Special Needs and DisABILITIES is very helpful and outlines the parent conference.

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The BSA Disabilities Awareness webpage that with a multitude of helpful resources including the Inclusion Toolbox for Special Needs and Disabilities which is a comprehensive source of disability information for the BSA Scouting Community.

<https://www.scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/>