

# CUB SCOUTS WITH DISABILITIES

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## INTRODUCTION

Scouting is based on principles that include duty to God and country, human dignity, the rights of individuals, and recognizing the obligation of all members to develop and use their potential. Cub Scouting is dedicated to bringing out the best in people, with the emphasis not on winning as an end result but on the far more demanding task of “doing one’s best.” A boy should not be compared with other boys in the pack but should be expected to do his best.

When looking at a Cub Scout, look at the whole boy:

- What are his *characteristics* (physical, emotional, developmental, spiritual, learning methods, interest areas, and strengths)?
- What are his *areas of opportunity*? Opportunities provide a chance for a boy to add new skills or build strengths. How can a boy’s areas of opportunity be turned into strengths?
- What are his *abilities*? How can his abilities be strengthened? We know that boys in this age group are in a continuous process of growing physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

By looking at each boy as an individual, we find that each boy has his own set of abilities. Boys with specifically identified special needs or specifically identified special considerations are no more nor less than boys with their own set of abilities. These boys, like all boys, have their own set of strengths, too.

Cub Scouts come with many different combinations of personalities and abilities, and each boy is a unique individual.

By combining this realization with the aims of Scouting—to encourage character development, citizenship training, and personal fitness in boys—we can provide a program for any boy. Through the Scouting program we can challenge each boy to develop and use his potential with support and guidance from other members and leaders.

Every boy in the den, and every den in the pack, is part of a cooperative group working together with shared responsibilities. This cooperative group, emphasizing individual leadership, makes Scouting work well for boys with different abilities. Children with and without identified disabilities benefit from working and cooperating together. Cooperative learning helps boys develop group skills, while shared responsibilities and a shared decision-making process promote leadership skills in all boys.

The motto of Cub Scouting is “Do Your Best,” which makes the program easily adaptable to every boy, regardless of identified disabilities. Your assignment as a leader is to help all Cub Scouts find success in *doing their best*.

## FOUR CATEGORIES OF DISABILITIES

Disabilities may be defined in four broad categories:

1. **Learning disabilities** can affect understanding, listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing mathematical functions. An example of a learning disability would be attention deficit disorder (ADD). Remember, not all disabilities are visible.

2. **Physical disabilities** hamper physical activities. For example, difficulties with the hearing process, need for hearing aids, and any degree of loss of hearing are all included in a hearing disability. A visual disability includes any interruption in the sight process. Any communication disorder that adversely affects a child's speech or language is a part of a speech/language disability.
3. **Developmental disabilities** directly affect or limit a boy's ability to learn. Developmental disabilities also may limit levels of social maturity. Examples include Fragile X syndrome or Down syndrome.
4. **Emotional disabilities** can affect a person's ability to adjust to general problems, stresses, and situations of daily life as well as an individual's ability to be with others and to cope with new situations.

## UNDERSTANDING ABILITIES

1. **Communicate with the boy's parents/guardians.** Parents or legal guardians are a primary resource as well as advocates for the Cub Scout. Seek guidance from them on how best to work with the boy.

A *parent-leader conference* (in person, on the telephone, or written in the form of a questionnaire) may help you get the knowledge and awareness that you need to work as a team with the parents to help the Cub Scout be successful.

2. **Observe the Cub Scout.** Although the boy is young, he needs people around him to encourage independence and self-advocacy. Self-advocacy—the process of knowing and being able to communicate personal needs and abilities—is important for any youth to learn. He needs to learn what his strengths are and how he needs help. He also needs to learn how to communicate these strengths

and needs. Through this process a Cub Scout will start to develop skills for leadership and for self-reliance.

Observing Cub Scouts participating in den or pack activities and interacting with other Cub Scouts will give you some insights into each boy's abilities. A den leader with a new group of boys might want to play some "get-acquainted" games that can give information about the boys and reveal some of the group dynamics.

3. **Accept each boy.** Boys who have disabilities are often integrated into a regular den and pack. The Cub Scout motto, "Do Your Best," needs to be in effect whenever the boys are participating in Cub Scouting activities. When working with any boy, particularly when working with a boy who has some special needs, you need patience and understanding. Boys have a right to receive patience, understanding, and respect. Accept each boy for who he is and what he can contribute. Offer him the friendship and encouragement he needs. Try not to overprotect or under-assist boys who have disabilities.

Keep in mind that each of us has *different abilities*. Each of us cannot do what everybody else can do—perhaps because we fear unsafe territory, or we have an attitude that prevents us from a particular accomplishment, or we have never learned or developed a particular skill. We are, however, each important individuals, and we do our best.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

Every boy develops skills at his own rate. By viewing each boy as unique and striving to meet his individual needs, the den and pack will become a more enriching environment for every boy in the den. These general guidelines are particularly important when you are working with and guiding boys with special needs; however, you will find them important and useful also for your interactions with every boy.

### Possible Questions for a Parent-Leader Conference

- **Does the boy have any special considerations?** Include items such as food or environmental allergies, restrictions on indoor/outdoor activities, special behavioral needs, special learning methods, special dietary needs.
- **What are his general characteristics?** Is he shy or outgoing? Is his temperament easygoing or is he easily frustrated? What are his strengths and abilities?
- **How does he learn best?** Does he like to experiment with items, to take items apart or put items together to find out how they work? Does he like to learn through watching and observing, or by listening to people or recordings? Does he like discovering items in nature? Is he aware of other people's needs and thoughts?
- **What are his personal needs?** Does he need any special accommodations? Does he use any assisting or adaptive equipment?
- **What are his areas of opportunity?** Is he learning any new skills or are there new skills he wants to learn?
- **What are emergency procedures and emergency names and phone numbers that might be needed?** Include any other pertinent emergency information.

1. **Follow the Cub Scout motto, "Do Your Best,"** and you will help create success for boys who have special needs.
2. **Use your resources,** which include people, materials, the pack committee, other organizations, the boy's parents, and the other boys in the den.
3. **Preplan all activities,** especially outdoor activities and field trips. Is the site accessible for every person in your group? Are the activities accessible for every person in your group? What special accommodations are needed? Are any special health or safety issues involved for any person in your group?
4. **Plan activities to include all ability levels** because each boy develops at his own rate.
5. **Emphasize individual abilities** while making necessary allowances for areas of need.
6. **Simplify instructions and activities.**
7. **Use a variety of instructions** for each activity. Verbal instructions with a demonstration may help teach the boys. Sometimes, it is good for boys to figure out how to do something on their own.
8. **Keep a good supply of "filler" activities on hand** for times when an activity ends early or you need a short activity to fill time.
9. **Keep quiet activities quiet,** but not inactive. A discussion will hold boys' attention for only a short time.
10. **Start with simple, easier activities** with a new group of boys until you find out the abilities of each boy.
11. **Include ethical, decision-making activities** to help build a cooperative and understanding group in your den.
12. **Promote an awareness of diversity in the group.**
13. **Practice new skills in smaller den groups** before using the skills, such as ceremonies, skits, and songs, at a pack meeting. Boys need the opportunity to build their self-confidence in a small cooperative group before using the skill in a large group.

## DEN AND PACK MEETINGS

As with the "General Guidelines" above, these ideas for helping you have successful den and pack meetings are important for *all* boys, but maybe particularly so for boys with special needs.

### Successful Meeting Elements

- Organization
- Routine and consistency
- Minimal rules
- Support
- Planning and balance

1. **Organization.** Try to be as organized as possible. When organization feels minimal, stop and look closely to discover some kind of underlying structure or find a way that you can impose one. Follow the suggested structure for den and pack meetings in *Cub Scout Program Helps*. If there appear to be too many separate activities for the Cub Scouts, reduce the number. If boys are distracted or their attention is drifting elsewhere, usually there are too many activities.

In between each part of the meeting is a transition time as you change from one part to the next. Ensure that every Cub Scout knows what he should be doing between parts to avoid distractions. In pack meetings, these transition times are great for run-on skits. In den meetings, you could assign each boy a specific task, such as a short project, song, or cheer. Try to have only one activity occurring at a-time because otherwise, it can be difficult for a boy to concentrate.

2. **Routine and consistency.** Having a routine makes pack leadership jobs easier and planning easier. Use the same routine for each meeting. Boys will know what to expect as well as what is expected of them. If the meeting's routine is going to change, make the changes known to boys ahead of time.
3. **Minimal rules.** Keep meetings simple, and limit the number of rules. Rather than having a large list of Do's and Don'ts, try limiting rules to three basic positive rules that will cover any other rule you may need. Remember **KISMIF**—Keep It Simple, Make It Fun.

Your three basic rules could be:

1. Keep yourself safe.
2. Keep other people safe.
3. Keep your place and materials safe.

Any boy at any ability level will find it easier to remember these three basic rules rather than a long list. You can expand on these rules by discussing with Cub Scouts what each means. Provide examples; for instance, name-calling would not feel safe to other boys. Running when it is time to walk would not be keeping yourself safe. Using tools incorrectly or not leaving an area clean would not be keeping materials or the meeting place safe.

These rules are positively worded, can create a sense of responsibility and leadership, and can help build a cooperative group. Help the Cub Scouts become responsible for these rules. Some boys have not had many chances to make decisions. Through making group decisions, boys can learn decision-making processes that will help them make decisions and become more independent.

*Remember:* Boys should help determine the rules whenever possible.

**4. Support.** A good support structure is a must. You may have a Cub Scout in the den who has a disability that requires special assistance or accommodations. Parents or special assistants may be needed to accompany the Cub Scout. Den chiefs can be a wonderful support within any den or pack meeting. Good planning can help you develop the support you need. Den chiefs, Cub Scouts, and parents/guardians can contribute to planning meetings.

**5. Planning and balance.** Plan your meetings in advance. Keep your meetings well-paced and not longer than 1½ hours. A meeting that has routine, organization, and consistency is a well-paced meeting. “Down time” leads to distracted boys. Balance your meetings by alternating between quiet and active (but not rowdy) activities. Balance will help the meeting flow and maximize boys’ attention spans.

## ADAPTATIONS

Adapt your activities as needed to meet the needs and ability range of all of your Cub Scouts. Use the least amount of change necessary to make the activity successful for all boys. Allow adaptations in advancement requirements for boys who have special needs. Parents can help you determine the need for adaptations and what kinds of adaptations would be the most useful. Making changes in your Cub Scout activities requires skill along with knowledge of the boys. Some general adaptations and examples follow.

### *Materials Adaptation*

**Example:**

A Cub Scout has little hand strength and is trying to carve.

**Solution:** Substitute a bar of soap for balsa wood.

### *Rules Adaptation*

**Example:** A Cub Scout is unable to throw horseshoes the standard distance.

**Solution:** Let the boy move closer to the horseshoe pit.

### *Architectural Adaptation*

**Example:** A Cub Scout in a wheelchair is unable to go bowling because the bowling alley is not wheelchair accessible.

**Solution:** In advance, find an alley that can accommodate wheelchairs.

### *Leisure Companion Adaptation*

**Example:** A Cub Scout cannot stay on task and runs around.

**Solution:** An adult or older youth can become a buddy for the Cub Scout.

### *Cooperative Group Adaptation*

**Example:** A Cub Scout has difficulty remembering the sequence of steps in a project.

**Solution:** Cub Scouts can work in cooperative groups to ensure success and completion of activities for everyone.

### *Behavioral Adaptation*

**Example:** A Cub Scout is unable to participate during a meeting because of low concentration levels.

**Solution:** Talk with parents/guardians about a behavioral plan.

## OPEN-ENDED ACTIVITIES

Open-ended activities do not have a particular outcome. They are wonderful for stimulating imagination, working together with a group, and animating boys’ thinking processes. These activities include questions that have no expected answer, and they encourage boys to think about subjects that have no right or wrong answer.

For example, an activity that has no expected outcome is making a “genius kit.” A genius kit is a creativity kit that contains a variety of materials with a variety of tools so that boys can create something—whatever they decide. Open-ended activities are good for developing leadership within a group as well as cooperation among group members.

## OUTDOOR PROGRAM

Outdoor experiences are a key part of the Scouting program. Make the outdoor activities accessible for all boys in your group, following the three basic safety rules mentioned above:

- Keep yourself safe.
- Keep other people safe.
- Keep your place and materials safe.

Cub Scout camping should be made available to boys with disabilities. Cub Scout day camp, Cub Scout resident camp, and family camping can provide many memorable and positive activities for the boys. Cub Scout camping also provides opportunities for dens and packs to be strengthened, and boys with disabilities can become more involved with the group.

See Chapters 32, “Outdoor Activities,” and 33, “Cub Scout Camping.”

## ADVANCEMENT

The advancement program is so flexible that with guidance, most boys can do the skills. It might take longer for a boy who is disabled to earn his awards, but he will appreciate them more when he knows that he has made the effort. The standard for every boy is, "Has he done his best?"

Include parents to help determine what "best" means for each boy. Develop the potential of each Cub Scout to the fullest of his ability through the advancement program. Adaptations are permitted in teaching the skills or activities for the advancement requirements.

You must be enthusiastic about helping youngsters with disabilities, but you must also fully recognize the special demands that will be made on your patience, understanding, and skill in teaching advancement requirements.

The Cubmaster and pack committee may give permission to a Cub Scout who has special needs to substitute electives for achievements that are beyond his abilities. It is best to include parents in this process of determining substitutions because they are most familiar with their son's abilities.

Remember to use frequent recognition for each boy. Cub Scouts love to be recognized for anything they do, and immediate recognition of advancement is even more important for boys with disabilities. The Immediate Recognition Kit, the den doodle, and the Den Advancement Chart all help provide immediate recognition in den meetings as boys complete achievements and electives. Remember that a month seems like a long time to a boy and that completing requirements for a badge might seem like forever to him. Be sure to give him periodic recognition at pack meetings when he earns a badge.

## OTHER ISSUES

### Boys Older Than Cub Scout Age

Boys older than age 10 who are either developmentally or physically disabled, including boys with visual, hearing, and emotional disabilities, are permitted to register in Cub Scouting. The chartered organization determines, and is allowed to make an informed decision about, whether a youth member with a disability is qualified to register beyond the normal registration age. The Cubmaster's signature on the boy's application or on the unit's charter renewal application certifies the approval of the chartered organization.

The chartered organizations using Scouting will determine, with approval of appropriate medical authorities, whether a

youth member is qualified to register (based on the above definitions) beyond the normal registration age. The local council must approve the registration on an individual basis.

## Medical Condition

The medical condition of all candidates for membership beyond the normal registration age must be certified by a physician licensed to practice medicine, or an evaluation statement must be certified by an educational administrator. Use the Personal Health and Medical Record form (No. 34414, page 34-51). Any corrective measures, restrictions, limitations, or abnormalities must be noted.

In the case of mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed candidates for membership, their conditions must be certified by a statement signed by a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist. Current health, medical, or certification records of all youth members beyond the normal registration age who have disabilities are to be retained in the unit file at the council service center.

### Resources and Support

For additional information on membership and advancement of Cub Scouts with disabilities, check with your local council service center. You can also turn to the following:

- Parents or guardians
- Local or area support groups specific to certain disabilities
- General groups that work with a variety of disabilities (National Easter Seal Society, United Way, National Education Association)
- BSA publications
- School personnel
- Professional personnel
- Training
- Cub Scout pack members
- Disability advocacy organizations
- Merit badge counselors for the *Disabilities Awareness* merit badge

