



Walk in the Shoes of Those With Disabilities

You probably know somebody with special needs. But do you know what it's like to walk in that person's shoes and look at the world through that person's eyes? Or maybe you have special needs yourself—a learning disability, perhaps, or a mobility challenge. Do your fellow Scouts understand the accommodations that help make life easier for you? Do you understand how different disabilities affect other people?

This month's meetings and main event will introduce your unit to disabilities of all sorts. Through videos, guest speakers, and simulations, you will learn more about the disabilities that affect at least 12 percent of the U.S. population. You will also learn what you can do to make it a little easier for these people to navigate our world.

Objectives

This month's activities should:

- Help Scouts understand more about disabilities.
- Coach Scouts on how to interact respectfully with people who have disabilities.
- Demonstrate the importance of person-first language.
- Explain how people who have disabilities compensate through enabling abilities.
- Introduce Scouts to adaptive sports.
- Introduce Scouts to agencies and professions that serve people with specific disabilities.
- Help Scouts understand accessibility and how it can be achieved.

RELATED ADVANCEMENT AND AWARDS

- Disabilities Awareness and Signs, Signals, and Codes merit badges
- Torch of Gold Award



Leadership Planning

As a leadership team, you may want to discuss the following items during your planning meetings when choosing special needs awareness as your program feature.

1. Who in our unit has taken disabilities awareness training?
2. Where is disabilities awareness training available in our community?
3. Does anyone in the unit (youth, leader, parent) have a disability?
4. Who in the unit has had experience with disabilities?
5. What resources are available through local organizations to teach this topic?
6. To meet our needs, what should we change in the sample meeting plans?

PARENTS CAN HELP WITH THE SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS PROGRAM FEATURE BY:

1. Sharing their personal experiences of living with a disability or supporting a friend or loved one who has a disability
2. Identifying experts in the community who can serve as resources
3. Providing transportation for field trips and the main event
4. Serving as presenters or merit badge counselors
5. Maintaining current Youth Protection certification, which is required of all adults providing transportation for or participating in outings.

WHAT ARE DISABILITIES?

A disability is a physical or mental condition that calls for a person to make adaptations to perform tasks that may come naturally to others. Disabilities don't always answer a yes-or-no question. They come in all sizes, shapes, and forms, just like the people who have them.

Consider visual impairment. A person could be totally blind, legally blind (testing 20/200 or worse in their better eye, even with glasses), blind in one eye but not the other, or have tunnel vision. They could also have a condition that makes it difficult to see at night or impossible to distinguish between colors like red and green. Then there are those people who have good vision with glasses but can barely see without them. Would you consider them disabled?

Experts use the term *spectrum* to talk about some conditions, like autism. At one end of the spectrum are people whose ability to function is clearly affected by their condition. At the other end of the spectrum are people who don't appear to have any obvious challenges. For example, an individual who is deaf in one ear may appear to not have a disability. One way to think about disabilities is that we all fall somewhere on that spectrum for one disability or another.





SPECIFIC DISABILITIES

If you already know something about a specific disability, or you would like to learn more about it, you may want to focus on researching and sharing information about that disability and the people who have it. You may choose to give a talk or volunteer with an advocacy program that focuses on the disability of interest. Here are some possibilities.

Amputation	Brain injury	Hearing loss	Paralysis
Arthritis	Cerebral palsy	Heart conditions	Polio/post-polio
Asthma	Cleft palate	Hemophilia	Sickle-cell anemia
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD)	Cystic fibrosis	Learning disabilities	Speech impairments
Autism spectrum disorder	Diabetes	Leukemia	Spina bifida
Blindness/low vision	Down syndrome	Mental disabilities	Spinal cord injury
	Dwarfism	Multiple sclerosis	Stroke
	Epilepsy	Muscular dystrophy	

USING PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

You have probably heard the old saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” But the fact is that words *can* hurt.

When you describe a person who is disabled, it is important to put the person first. Instead of saying “the blind kid,” say “the kid who is blind.” That shows that the person is more than their disabilities.

Most people prefer the term *disabled* to *handicapped*. Just because someone has a disability doesn’t mean they can’t accomplish things, which the word *handicapped* implies. In fact, many people with disabilities view themselves as “differently able” rather than as having a disability.

Avoid negative phrases like *wheelchair-bound*. Unless someone is literally strapped in—not very likely—that term isn’t accurate. It certainly doesn’t apply when a person who uses a wheelchair hoists themselves from their chair to their car so they can drive to work or to basketball practice!





ADAPTIVE SPORTS

Just because a person has a disability doesn't mean he or she can't compete in various sports. Just about every sport you can think of has been adapted for people with disabilities.

People with disabilities are as likely to play sports for fun as anyone else. They may be fierce competitors, too. Special Olympics serves children and adults with intellectual disabilities, the Paralympic Games involve athletes with a range of physical and intellectual disabilities, and the Warrior Games feature competition among wounded, ill, and injured members of the armed forces. There is even a Deaflympics for people with hearing loss.



ACCESSIBILITY

Curbs or steps without ramps, narrow doorways and aisles, revolving doors and turnstiles, high counters, tight parking spaces with no room to maneuver a wheelchair—any of these can make it impossible for people with disabilities to take part in everyday activities such as shopping in a store, watching a movie in a theater, eating at a restaurant, or even going to school or work. Next time you are in a public place, look at how accessible (usable) the location is for people with disabilities. Are there:

- Ramps and curbs made for wheelchair users?
- Steps that are low and wide enough to be easily climbed by people using crutches or canes?
- Wide doorways and aisles?
- Elevators?
- Signs and directions printed in Braille?
- Visual warning alarm systems and lighted call numbers for lines for people who are deaf?
- Accessible parking spaces wide enough for wheelchairs?
- Accessible restrooms, public telephones, and drinking fountains?
- Tables high enough for a wheelchair user to sit at without banging his or her knees?

Many accommodations help everyone, not just people with disabilities. For example, ramps are helpful for people pushing strollers or pulling wheeled luggage.





SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS GAMES

One-Armed Volleyball

Equipment: A volleyball net and volleyball

How to play: Form two teams of players. Have each player immobilize their dominant arm by either holding the back of their belt or placing their arm inside their T-shirt. Play a regulation volleyball game.

Scoring: The first team with 15 points (or the team with the highest score when time is called) wins.

Note: Having limited use of limbs and being off balance will be a new challenge for the participants.

Have a discussion afterward about the experience.

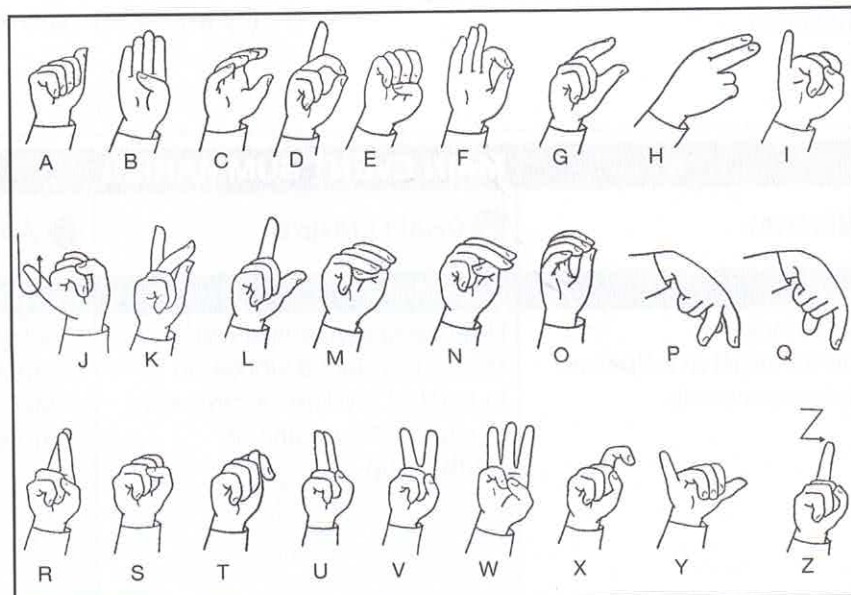
Say What?

Equipment: American Sign Language dictionaries or computers/tablets/smartphones with internet access

How to play: Form two teams. Give each team a few minutes to learn five simple ASL phrases (like "What is your name?" or "How old are you?"). Teams take turns making those signs for the other team, which tries to guess their meaning.

Scoring: Teams score 1 point each time they correctly guess a sign. The team with the most points wins.

Variation: If you have access to someone proficient in ASL, have that person make the signs for both teams. The first team to correctly guess a sign earns a point. Be sure to have the signer sign more slowly than usual.



Cane Maze

Equipment: Tapping cane or equivalent (such as a fiberglass wand), maze constructed of PVC tubing (or something similar), blindfolds

How to play: Blindfold participants. Have them walk one at a time through the maze using the cane to stay on the path. If desired, have other Scouts stand in the maze as obstacles.

Scoring: The Scout with the fastest time wins. Add penalties for running into obstacles.

Variation: Instead of setting up a maze, you could designate a course through your meeting place, such as from your meeting room to the restroom or front door.

Disabled Tent Pitching

Equipment: Tents and stakes, crutches, wheelchairs, arm slings, blindfolds, heavy gloves, and other materials that let Scouts simulate disabilities

How to play: Form teams and assign team members a variety of disabilities. On a signal, each team tries to set up its tent. All members must be involved in some way.

Scoring: The team that sets up its tent correctly and most quickly wins.

Note: Thicker gloves help Scouts understand what it's like to have dexterity impairments.



E.D.G.E. Ideas

Explain how it is done—Tell them.

Demonstrate the steps—Show them.

Guide learners as they practice—Watch them do it.

Enable them to succeed on their own—Have them practice/teach it.

EXPLAIN

- Explain what disabilities are.
- Introduce adaptive sports.
- Discuss accessibility and accommodations.
- Explain person-first language.
- Have a speaker from an agency that supports people with disabilities.
- Discuss opportunities to assist those with disabilities by asking if they need assistance first.

DEMONSTRATE

- Demonstrate the use of crutches and wheelchairs.
- Take an accessibility tour of your meeting place.
- Show how beep baseball works.
- Set up a display of adaptive sports equipment.
- Show internet videos of adaptive sports competitions.
- Demonstrate how closed captioning works on a TV or digital device.

GUIDE

- Have Scouts practice using assistive devices.
- Design a disabilities awareness challenge activity.
- Guide Scouts as they work with a Special Olympics team or other adaptive sports program.
- Facilitate discussions with athletes and coaches who are involved in adaptive sports.
- Tour museums and public places to see what is captioned.

ENABLE

- Have Scouts complete an accessibility survey of your meeting place.
- Create a disabilities awareness challenge for a Cub Scout pack or other group.
- Connect Scouts with agencies that serve people with disabilities where they could volunteer.
- Help Scouts select a disability issue to advocate (by writing letters, creating petitions, etc.).

MAIN EVENT SUMMARIES

● ESSENTIAL

Day Activity

Special Olympics—
Volunteer to assist at a Special Olympics tournament.

■ CHALLENGING

Day Activity

Disabilities awareness workshop—Conduct a workshop to teach disabilities awareness to another Scout unit or youth group.

◆ ADVANCED

Overnight Activity

Disabilities awareness camporee—Lead a disabilities awareness camporee for your district.



SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS

Meeting Plan: Getting Started



Week 1 Date _____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Have Scouts play a pickup game of volleyball as they arrive.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 15 minutes	A guest speaker, ideally someone well versed in disabilities issues, leads a discussion about disabilities.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 35 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Brainstorm a list of common disabilities.Discuss what limitations each poses.		7:25 p.m.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Brainstorm a list of common disabilities.Discuss how people with these disabilities could participate in sports and Scouting.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Brainstorm a list of common disabilities.Discuss ways to help others experience what it would be like to have these disabilities.If possible, research disability simulations on the internet.		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Discuss plans for participation in the main event.Review requirements of the Disabilities Awareness merit badge.		8 p.m.
Game 10 minutes	Play One-Armed Volleyball (described earlier).		8:15 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.



SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS

Meeting Plan: Communicating



Week 2 Date _____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Have Scouts practice sending messages using sign language. Groups take turns sending a message by whatever nonverbal means they choose, while another group tries to translate the message.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection To simulate the effect of being mute, have the leader conduct the opening ceremony by speaking with no voice (moving the lips but not making any sound).		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm ways we rely on the sense of hearing. Discuss ways we can compensate for hearing loss. Introduce American Sign Language (ASL). 		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 35 minutes	Learn to count to 20 in ASL. Use a printed or online ASL dictionary as a resource.		7:45 p.m.
	Try to translate the Oath and Law into ASL. Use a printed or online ASL dictionary as a resource.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm a list of 25 words commonly used in Scouting. Guess how they might be signed in ASL, then look up the correct signs in a printed or online ASL dictionary. Discuss ways to help others experience what it would be like to be deaf or hard of hearing. 		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on requirements for the Disabilities Awareness merit badge. Continue planning group participation in the main event. 		8 p.m.
Game 10 minutes	Play Say What? (described earlier).		8:15 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.



SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS

Meeting Plan: Accessibility and Accommodations



Week 3 Date _____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Blindfold participants as they arrive. Challenge them to navigate from the entrance to a designated location. Assign each person a guide to keep them safe.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite a guest to discuss accessibility and accommodations. Discuss how homes and other buildings can be modified to be more accessible for people with a variety of disabilities. 		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 35 minutes	Complete an accessibility survey of your meeting place using a resource such as the Checklist for Existing Facilities from www.ada.gov . If you meet in a large facility, assign groups to different areas of the building.		7:25 p.m.
	Complete an accessibility survey of your meeting place using a resource such as the Checklist for Existing Facilities from www.ada.gov . If you meet in a large facility, assign groups to different areas of the building. Make a list of priority improvements that should be made.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete an accessibility survey of your meeting place using a resource such as the checklist from www.raleighnc.gov. If you meet in a large facility, assign groups to different areas of the building. Make a list of priority improvements that should be made. Discuss how you could develop and present a plan for improving access. 		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on requirements for the Disabilities Awareness merit badge. Continue planning group participation in the main event. 		8 p.m.
Game 10 minutes	Play Cane Maze (described earlier).		8:15 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.






SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS

Meeting Plan: Adaptive Sports



Week 4 Date _____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	As youths arrive, show internet videos of adaptive sports competitions.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	Invite someone who is involved in an adaptive sport as a participant or coach to discuss that sport.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 35 minutes   	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watch an internet video of wheelchair basketball.• Review the rules and compare with regular basketball. Is the court the same size? Do players dribble the ball? How do players travel? What happens if a player falls out of their chair? What is a physical advantage foul?		7:20 p.m.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the above information.• Discuss how strategy in wheelchair basketball is similar to or different from strategy in regular basketball.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the above information.• Learn how some teams integrate players who use wheelchairs and nondisabled players. How do they keep the competition fair?		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work on requirements for the Disabilities Awareness merit badge.• Finish planning group participation in the main event.		7:55 p.m.
Game 15 minutes	Play Disabled Tent Pitching (described earlier).		8:10 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.



SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS

Main Event: Special Olympics



Date _____

Logistics

Location: _____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: 4 hours

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster _____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self _____

Essential (Tier I)

Volunteer at a Special Olympics event.

Equipment List

- Hat
- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Whistle
- Water and food

Activity

- Research opportunities to volunteer with the Special Olympics.
- Pick a competition to support, and learn how you can get involved.
- At the event, provide encouragement and positive reinforcement to all athletes and more specific assistance as requested by the athlete or coach.
- Assist coaches in getting athletes to their events and the awards ceremony on time.

Safety

- Attend pre-event briefing for special instructions and safety considerations.
- Keep in contact with coaches and assistants for guidance in case an athlete requires assistance.
- Two-deep adult leadership is required for all activities.

Notes

Be sure to spend some time talking with and getting to know the athletes.



SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS



Main Event: Disabilities Awareness Workshop

Date _____

Logistics

Location: _____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: 4 hours

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster _____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self _____

Challenging (Tier II)

Run a workshop to teach disabilities awareness to another Scout unit or youth group.

Equipment List

- Equipment for games and simulations
- Adaptive equipment
- Videos or other teaching aids

Activity

- Contact a Cub Scout pack or other group and schedule the disabilities awareness workshop.
- Develop a list of games and simulations you will include; these could be activities done during this month's meetings or activities you find in other resources.
- Assign the games and simulations to patrols or small groups to develop and run.
- Create a schedule for the workshop. Be sure to include time after each activity for reflection.
- Run the workshop.

Safety

- Have a first-aid kit available.
- Cellphones are a good idea.
- Identify any hazards participants could encounter, such as tripping or falling. Have spotters and cushions as needed.
- Two-deep adult leadership is required for all activities.

Notes



SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS

Main Event: Disabilities
Awareness Camporee



Date _____

Logistics

Location: _____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: Overnight

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster _____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self _____



Advanced (Tier III)

Lead a disabilities awareness camporee
for your district.

Equipment List

- Equipment for games and simulations
- Videos or other teaching aids
- Food
- Water
- Adaptive equipment
- Camping equipment
- Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.)

Activity

- Contact your district camping and activities committee and volunteer to lead a camporee with a disabilities awareness theme.
- Clarify the tasks assigned to your unit (e.g., Saturday activities) and what will be assigned to the district and other units (e.g., promotion, registration, campfires, campsite judging).
- Develop a list of games and simulations you will include; these could be activities done during this month's meetings or activities you find in other resources.
- Assign the games and simulations to patrols or small groups to develop and run.
- Create a schedule for the camporee. Be sure to include time after each activity for reflection.
- Conduct the camporee.

Safety

- Use the buddy system.
- Have a first-aid kit available.
- Cellphones are a good idea.
- Identify any hazards participants could encounter, such as tripping or falling. Have spotters and cushions as needed.
- Two-deep adult leadership is required for all activities.

Notes



RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Books

Disabilities Awareness merit badge pamphlet

Organizations and Websites

Americans With Disabilities Act

Website: www.ada.gov

Autism Empowerment

Website: <http://autismempowerment.org>

Autism Speaks

Website: <http://autismspeaks.org>

Children and Adults With Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Website: <http://chadd.org>

Easter Seals

Website: www.easterseals.org

National Down Syndrome Society

Website: www.ndss.org

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

Website: www.loc.gov/nls/

Serving Scouts With Disabilities

Website: www.scouting.org/programs/boy-scouts/the-building-blocks-of-scouting/disabilities/

Special Olympics

Website: www.specialolympics.org

United Cerebral Palsy

Website: www.ucp.org

Related Program Features

Citizenship, Communication, Mentoring, Project Planning

Photo and Illustration Credits

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