girl scouts of western washington

Inclusion Handbook: Focus on Ability

Tools and Guidelines for Including Girls with Different Abilities in Your Troop or Activity

Girl Scouts Of Western Washington
5601 6th Ave South, Suite 150
Seattle, WA 98108
1-800-541-9852

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Insights and the Girl Scout Philosophy

<CLICK HERE> *for a video which introduces the video series, describes the Girl Scout philosophy on inclusion, and lists everyone who contributed to this resource (including the professionals who reviewed the materials).*

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience: It's for EVERY girl!

Girl Scouts of Western Washington welcomes those whose learning, physical, or behavioral disabilities may limit some of their activities but not their hopes and achievements. The Girl Scout Leadership Experience is flexible enough that girls of any ability can participate, with the help of caring volunteers.

What does inclusion mean?

Simply put, it means involving everyone regardless of their abilities, working to get past the fear of the unknown by embracing and celebrating difference and choosing to have conversations, even if they are uncomfortable.

Inclusion is not only being *invited to the party* but also being *asked to participate*!!

Exactly What *Is* a Disability?

An individual with a **disability** is defined by the **ADA**, (Americans with Disabilities Act) as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment. A disability is something that substantially limits one or more major life activity: walking, talking, reading, writing, eating, dressing, or bathing yourself or any of the everyday things people do for themselves and others. A disability may affect only a small part of your life, or it may affect **every** part of your life.

Some disabilities are obvious: a person uses a wheelchair or walker, has a guide dog or white cane, or communicates using Sign Language; or perhaps they have a *prosthesis* – an artificial limb – or their movements are stiff and jerky and their speech is hard to understand. Other disabilities are "invisible;" you can't tell just by looking that a person has autism, a seizure disorder, a learning disability, bi-polar disorder, chronic heart disease, or Cystic Fibrosis.

Juliette Gordon Low, the Founder of Girl Scouting in the USA, was deaf for most of her adult life. She sometimes used "ear trumpets," the forerunner of today's hearing aids. She also tried to hide her deafness by being charming, talking a lot and moving quickly from one person to the next. Her deafness was a great inconvenience for her – but it didn't stop her from starting the Girl Scout Movement in America. *Juliette Low's disability didn't stop her from following her dream – and a disability should not stop a girl from becoming a Girl Scout.*

Who Can Be a Girl Scout?

Sometimes parents and even Girl Scout volunteers assume that if a girl has a disability – or a certain kind of disability - she cannot be a Girl Scout. Not true!

"**Membership as a Girl Scout** is granted to any girl who:

- "has made the Girl Scout Promise and accepted the Girl Scout Law;
- "has paid annual membership dues;
- "meets applicable membership standards [in grades K - 12]"

Girls with developmental delays are registered as closely as possible to their chronological age, and they wear the uniform of that age level. They may keep their girl membership until age 21, then move into the adult category.

That's it! No requirements on how far you can walk or run, how well you can see or hear, how well you relate to others, or how quickly you can think. Troop Placement Specialists place girls with special needs as they would any girl. So "Be Prepared" to welcome a Girl Scout with a disability to your group, troop or unit. How likely is this to happen? About 11.5 percent of all school-age children in the USA in 2010 had hearing, vision, cognitive, mobility or developmental disabilities. At nine percent, cognitive disabilities, which includes ADD/ADHD, were the most common. It's also ok to remind parents that, as a troop leader, you are a volunteer and don't have the same resources that their classroom teachers might have, and that you may need their help, since they are the experts on their girls. When a girl joins a troop, her guardian should fill out the *Meet My Girl* form however, you can ask the girl or her parents to fill out a *Getting to Know* ... (inclusion form).pub form as well, as a way to start (possibly more difficult) conversations.

But what will I DO with a girl who has a disability?

The same thing you do with a girl who *doesn't* have a disability: help her grow in courage, confidence and character so she can make the world a better place. You'll model the Girl Scout Promise and Law, but you'll also help her

choose the activities she wants to do at Girl Scouts…show her how to stay safe and healthy…help her make friends…teach her how to live outdoors… share fun Girl Scout traditions… and share your expectations for good behavior!

*Y*ou might not be sure what to DO and that's ok because…

Neither did her parents, when their daughter was born with a disability, or when her disability was incurred. It takes time to get comfortable with new and unfamiliar situations. And we're not asking you to become an expert or nurse or therapist – just a Girl Scout troop leader. Your responsibility for a girl with a disability is the same as it is for the other girls in your troop.

What if I don't think I can work with a girl with disabilities?

Try putting the ***girl*** first: she's a girl who has a disability, but she's also a girl who has feelings and wants to have friends, learn new things, go places and have fun. Will she sometimes need extra help, or will you have to adapt activities for her? Possibly – but doesn't *every* girl need a little extra help or understanding from time to time? So why not give it a try; it's OK to be nervous or uncomfortable; that's absolutely normal when you try something new. Give yourself time to get to know the girl and understand her disability before you say "No – I can't do it."

*Do you mean I **have** to take a girl with a disability, whether I want to or not?*

N**o** troop leader is required to add any girls beyond the minimum for their troop's grade level requirements, however, when you accept the position as a troop leader you are encouraged to welcome all girls who meet these grade requirements, pay their national membership dues, make the Girl Scout Promise and accept the Girl Scout Law. Knowing that, ask yourself, "What help do I need to feel comfortable welcoming a girl with ____into the troop?"

First, you'll want to learn at least a little bit about this girl's disability. You can ask the girl or her parents to fill out a Getting to know ... (inclusion form).pub form, as a way to start the conversation. This is a good way to get to know all the girls joining your troop, regardless of their abilities. Plus, by having all girls use it, you won't be singling anyone out!

Her parents are usually the best place to start. Say something like, "I want Girl Scouting to be a great experience for your daughter, but I've never met anyone with [disability] before. It would be a big help if you could tell me about your

daughter and about [disability.]" Most parents will not be offended if you ask, "Can she do this? Does she need help with that? How do you handle_____?" So first, ask the parent or guardian, **and ask the girl**! Usually girls can tell you when they need (or don't need!) help and what kind of help is needed. *YOU CAN DO IT.*

Some leaders are understandably hesitant about taking a girl with a disability or medical condition into the troop; they worry about saying or doing the wrong thing, coping with adapting program activities, and about how other girls in the troop may feel. When you **focus on *ability*** - on what a girl *can* do rather than what she can't - you begin to ease some of the unfamiliar thoughts in your head. "It's true Meg can't do X, but she can do Y – so we should be able to take part in Z with no problems."

Sometimes it helps to have the new girl's parent come to a meeting prior to their daughter joining the troop, to explain her/his daughter's disability and answer girls' questions, but only if the girl won't feel singled out. The leader may also feel more secure if the parent comes with the new Girl Scout for her first meeting. These are all things to talk over with the parents or guardian of the girl with a disability (see "Quick Tips for Leaders," below).

The "Girl First" Approach

<CLICK HERE> for a video entitled "We See," which describes how to find common ground with people with special needs. This video was produced as a part of a Girl Scouts of Western Washington Ambassador's Gold Award Project.

Advice from a Girl with a Disability

- Please don't worry about me. I'm a lot tougher than you think.
- Most of my needs are just like those of other girls even though my physical or mental development is different.
- Give me what you naturally give to all the other girls: your love, your praise, your acceptance, and especially, your faith in me.
- Help me to have a successful experience in your troop *(or group or camp unit.)* When there are a variety of activities, I will always find at least one thing I can do well!
- Encourage me to do things for myself, even if it takes me a long time.

- If the troop has a regular meeting-time routine, I will know what to expect.
- Like other kids, I remember instructions best if they are short and clear.
- Give me opportunities to help others.

Written by: Carole Carlson, Adapted by: Ginny Thornburgh

Every-Day Etiquette

- Talk directly to the girl (or adult) with the disability, not to the near-by family member, aide or interpreter.

- Offer assistance, but do not impose – allow a girl to do things for herself, even if it takes longer. Do not impatiently take over doing things for the girl which she can do on her own. (True for non-disabled girls as well!)

- Ask the girl with the disability about the best way to be of assistance. Personal experience makes her the expert!

- Do not pretend to understand if the girl's speech or ideas are not clear. Ask her – politely of course – to repeat herself or clarify. Continue speaking to the girl rather than asking a companion to answer for her.

- If a girl uses a wheelchair, sit when talking to her so that you are at eye-level. Do not move a wheelchair, crutches or walker out of reach. Ask if assistance is needed – and wait for the answer! Do not lean on the wheelchair or otherwise invade the girl's personal space.

- Work to control reactions of personal discomfort when someone behaves in an unexpected way or looks different. *Try to see the wholeness of spirit underneath and overcome the tendency to turn away or ignore the person with the disability*.

Labels Go on Jars and Cans, Not People: People First Language

A girl with a disability (or who's differently abled) is A GIRL, FIRST!

We know you know this, but it bears repeating:

Labels Not to Use...(they are deemed offensive by many)	People First Language...
the handicapped or the disabled	people **with** disabilities
the mentally retarded or, she's retarded	people **with** intellectual disabilities, or, she has a cognitive impairment
my friend is autistic	my friend **has** autism
she's a Down's; she's mongoloid	she **has** Down Syndrome
birth defect	a congenital or developmental disability
epileptic	a person **with** epilepsy or seizure disorder
wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair	**uses** a wheelchair or a mobility chair or is a wheelchair user
she is developmentally delayed	she **has** a developmental delay
he's crippled; lame	he **has** an orthopedic disability
she's a dwarf (or midget)	she **has** dwarfism; or is a little person.
mute	**is** nonverbal; **has** selective mutism
is learning disabled or LD	**has** a learning disability
afflicted with, suffers from, victim of	person who **has** ...
she's emotionally disturbed; she's crazy	she **has** an emotional disability
normal and/or healthy	a person without a disability
quadriplegic, paraplegic, etc.	he **has** quadriplegia, paraplegia, etc.
she's in Special Ed	she **receives** Special Ed/Resource Room services
handicapped parking	**accessible** parking

- Always make sure the girl is comfortable with the “people first” language that is used. Ultimately, it is a personal choice for each girl or family.

Benefits to Everyone!

<*CLICK HERE*> for a video in which women with special needs who "grew up" in the Girl Scout program describe their successes, and the benefits of Girl Scouting.

<*CLICK HERE*> for a video in which a Girl Scout troop leader describes successes and personal growth that girls with special needs have experienced in her troop from selling Girl Scout cookies.

Including Girl Scouts with disabilities into troops or groups of Girl Scouts *without* disabilities has advantages for both groups of girls. Everyone will learn she is much more alike than she is different, and the girls with disabilities learn to function in a group of non-disabled people that is more like the world they will live in as adults. They learn to use their assets and learn that they can contribute to society.

Girls without disabilities learn to focus on what a person can do rather than on what a person cannot do. They learn that each person is an individual, not to stereotype people with disabilities, and to identify the barriers in the physical, social, and emotional environment that limit the ability of people with disabilities to become part of society. A leader who had girls with disabilities in her troop wrote:

> *"You really get a lot out of having such a girl in your troop, in your life. I've had all different types of girls in my troops. However, right now I have a girl with Cerebral Palsy in my troop. She either uses a walker or her wheel chair and she is just amazing. It has actually been fun (although her dad doesn't think so) to see her break out of her shell and start to have some normal early teen attitudes. She is the 2nd of 7 kids and until she joined my troop about 15 months ago she always watched them going, doing, playing, etc., and only had her one week away at CP camp. What a joy!"*

> *"Another thing was watching as the girls in the troop changed what they naturally did to make sure that they were accommodating her. They stopped playing Monkey in the Middle when snack was over and waiting for the meeting to start and went to other things that would include this young lady without ever having to be told. It can work!"*

Bridging the Gap:
When Ability Levels Vary Widely Within Your Troop

<CLICK HERE> for a video which describes an overview of the philosophy and principles to use when accommodating everyone in your troop of varied needs.

<CLICK HERE> for a video which takes you step-by-step through the types of accommodations you will likely need in place to keep your meetings inclusive to all as you navigate all the program levels from Daisies to Ambassadors.

Girl Scouts has a longstanding tradition and policy of allowing every girl to participate in the Girl Scouting program at the program level that fits their chronological age, regardless of their developmental level. The reasons for this are many, and include…

For the girl:

- A clear message is sent that she is a maturing young adult, and all the dignity that goes along with that.
- Even though her mind and her interests may be similar to those of a younger child, her body is still aging. She still has to deal with adolescent issues such as puberty, and the social climate of middle and high school… even the decision whether or not to start dating, or preparing for a career, to name a few.
- "Kicking a Girl Scout out of a troop" is not a decision to be taken lightly. Girls with special needs in particular experience rejection and exclusion in

many areas of their lives. Girl Scouts should not be “one more place” where this happens.

For the troop:

- Being in a culture where everyone has a place, no matter who they are, can send a powerful message to the others in the troop. Conversely, a girl leaving the troop because of who they are, does not convey a positive Girl Scout message.
- A girl with special needs has so much she can offer to her “typically developing” peers. See the list *there are advantages, too* under the philosophy section.

That being said, a hallmark of the Girl Scout experience is the *adult-girl partnership*. There are several people involved on both sides of this equation. The adult perspectives and needs to consider include not only that of the troop leader, but also the perspectives and needs of the parents of the girl with special needs. The girls to consider include not only the girl with special needs, but also the other girls in the troop.

One place to start is to look at the school situation for the girl with special needs. Is she currently in an integrated school setting, or more of a self-contained setting with *reverse integration*? (*Reverse integration* refers to a self-contained classroom where “typically developing” students from that school spend time with the students in that classroom – usually as a *teacher’s aide* type of scenario, or other *peer tutor* type of situation.) Having conversations with the parents of the girl (and the girl) with special needs about her school set-up can help you to gain information about how others are accommodating needs, and what the family’s philosophy is about integration. Family cultures vary widely on this topic. Some seek integration across all environments, while others evaluate the ideal environment on a case-by-case basis, while others are somewhere in between.

From there, it is best to survey all of the members of the *adult-girl partnership*, to gain insights as well as to brainstorm ideas. Below are some possible scenarios that could play out to meet the needs of a girl with developmental delays who is experiencing a large gap between her developmental level and those of the rest of her troop. This is a good time to *think outside the box*, if at all possible. It is important to note that in all instances, the girl retains the identity of the program level that fits her chronological age.

Possible scenarios…

- The girl with special needs remains a full member of the troop, with 1:1 help to adapt the troop's program for her (see *Adapting Badge Activities*). This could be…
  - her parent (least desirable, especially when the girl is an adolescent)
  - a peer tutor/coach (from another troop, earning service credit or leadership hours)
  - a relative of the family (such as an older sister or cousin)
  - some other volunteer (check local faith organizations or high school counselors who might be aware of people seeking volunteer positions)
- The girl with special needs attends a sub-set of the troop meetings of her troop, such as parties and other social events, but does not attend the more *high level* meetings requiring skills beyond her. Instead, on these alternate meetings, she engages in other Girl Scout activities, such as…
  - individual badge or journey work with a 1:1 mentor who tailors the program to meet her needs
  - council-run events that are best suited for her skills and developmental level (with or without a 1:1 mentor, depending upon needs)
  - volunteer work with a 1:1 mentor for service-unit events or even GSWW events or fundraisers. This could include behind the scenes projects to prepare materials for the event, and then helping to set up the event using the materials developed.
- The girl with special needs joins a younger troop while still retaining her chronological-aged program level identity. Whenever the girls in that troop earn a patch or badge, the girl with special needs could also receive it, if desired, as a participation patch. For her to be able to display achievements on the front of her vest, she should be given opportunities to earn her own program-level awards whenever possible. This can be accomplished in ways such as…
  - Additions to the troop meeting that meet her badge requirements, as seen in any other multi-program level troop (see *Adapting Badge Activities* section).
  - Council-run or service-unit run badge workshops for her program level.
- The girl could join (or help form) a troop where most, or all, of the members of the troop are her program level and have special needs (and they do *reverse integration*).

This list of possible scenarios is not meant to be exhaustive, but only a starting point for discussion. Working through a solution that is amicable to all involved demonstrates life skills that all the girls in the troop will benefit from as they grow into adulthood.

Creating a Welcoming Environment

<CLICK HERE> for a video which provides tips and strategies for welcoming a girl with special needs into your troop, as well as useful ways of thinking about and approaching the topic.

Helping Girl Welcome Girl Scouts with Differences and Disabilities

You're ready to welcome and involve a new troop member who has a disability, but what about the other members of the troop or group? Have you prepared them for a new member who may look or act differently than they do? Here are three activities that may help set the welcoming atmosphere you want:

Play the "If I…Could I…?" Game

The purpose of this game is get people thinking beyond stereotypes and misconceptions about what girls (or anyone) with a disability **can't** do and focus on what they **can** do. Put the phrases below on individual cards or cut them into strips. Put the **"If I…"** cards and the **"Could I …?"** cards into 2 separate piles or two paper bags. Go around the circle and ask each girl to pick one card from each pile and answer the question as best she can. If she answers "no," try to think of what could be done to change it to a "yes." *[NOTE: Not always possible!]* At the end of the game ask, "If a girl has a disability, can she still be a Girl Scout?" *(Yes!)*

IF I…

couldn't hear

couldn't see

had only one leg

used a wheelchair

used crutches

stuttered

had only one arm

had a seizure disorder

had a developmental delay

had trouble making friends

couldn't talk

could not use my hands

couldn't see or hear

could not use my legs

COULD I…

watch TV?

talk to my friends?

play games with my friends?

go to school?

day dream?

go to parties?

ride a bike?

play with my pet?

celebrate my birthday?

be in a school play?

email a friend?

cry when feelings are hurt?

fly in an airplane?

play a musical instrument?

have a sleepover?

eat my favorite ice cream?

It's Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer!

An Activity that Highlights our Unique Gifts

You'll Need: red paper circles, (about 2" diameter for older girls, 3" or 4" for younger ones) and dark markers with a fine tip.

- Invite everyone to join you in singing *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*
- **Ask the girls**, "How do you think poor Rudolph got his shiny red nose?"
- Reveal the secret: he's allergic to snow!
- **Ask**, "Have you ever been picked on, teased, or called names because of something that wasn't your fault? Then you probably know how Rudolph felt. Did he – or you - feel sad? Angry? Embarrassed? Scared? Vengeful?"
- **Ask**, "Did you ever wonder how Rudolph felt when the other reindeer suddenly loved him and cheered for him? Was he happy? Excited? Proud? Angry because they hadn't liked him before? Confused, because he hadn't changed – they had?"
- **Ask, "**If you hurt someone's feelings, what can you do to make things better? Apologize? Do something nice for that person?"
- **Ask**, "Did you know? We ALL have red noses! We all have things that make us special, unique, and individual."
- Hand out noses (circles of red paper) and markers or pens.
- **Say,** "On one side of your red nose, write down at least one thing, or more, that makes you, YOU! What makes you a special, one-of-a kind, no one else exactly like you person? Your friends would know it's you because of…."
- **Say**, "On the other side of your nose, I want you to write down at least one skill or talent or ability you have. What are you really good at? What do other people ask you to do because you do it so well? Or maybe it's a secret talent that no one else knows you have!"
- **Say**, "Everybody hold up your noses! We're a group of Rudolph's – how lucky is that? I like being me, so I'd like to share my red nose."
- Share and invite anyone else who would like to, to read either or both sides of their nose.
- **Say**, "Isn't it great? We are all alike enough to get along and have fun together, but different enough to have all kinds of skills and abilities to share. Put your noses with your other swaps and keepsakes so you can remember how great it is to be uniquely YOU!"

Let's close with a Friendship Circle…In Girl Scouts, we to do our best to be friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, and to respect ourselves and others. We don't laugh or call people names because they are different from us. We invite them to join in our games.

As I start the Friendship Squeeze, think about ways you can help girls who are different from you be part of your circle of friendship.

Some Girl Scouts are short and others quite tall,
Some Girl Scouts run fast, some can't walk at all.
Some are dark brownish and others light tan;
I'm rather beige on the backs of my hands.
You love your roller blades, I love my bike.
There are ways we are different and ways we're alike.
We are friendly and helpful, courageous and strong,
We are sisters in Girl Scouts and we get along!

Troop Structures that Promote Success for All

<CLICK HERE> for a video which provides tips and strategies to promote success in your troop that you implement prior to the troop meeting. These strategies work for all girls!

<CLICK HERE> for a video which provides tips and strategies to promote success in your troop that you implement during the troop meeting. These strategies work for all girls!

"A.S.K. -- Always Seek Knowledge!

- Before your first troop meeting, talk to the girl's parent(s) or caregiver about her special needs and any adaptive equipment she will bring to meetings. See *Parent as a Resource* section for more details.
- In the troop, ask the girl about her needs – what she can do for herself and when she needs help.
- Ask for help when you need it – from your service unit team, troop committee, or outside resources.

When Teaching or Leading Activities…

- Make sure activities start on time, are organized, have structure, and adult volunteers are prepared (with a plan and materials), and are ready to have fun.
- Be patient. Give instructions slowly, in short sentences, one step at a time. People have fears for reasons that are real to them. It is important to respect this fact and not rush someone into a situation that they are not ready for. However, don't assume, just because someone has a disability, that they can't understand.
- Allow girls to try tasks on their own. Let them make mistakes, take more time if they need it, and encourage them to persevere. Be patient and resist taking over doing things for her which she can do alone. Lack of coordination or poor motor ability may increase the need for repetition and patience on the part of the troop volunteer.
- Be direct and specific in conversation and when teaching. Give instructions simply. Be sure to maintain eye contact so that you know she is listening and that she understands you. However, understand if it is difficult for her to maintain eye contact with you. This is common with girls who are on the autism spectrum and does not mean that they are not listening.

- Use teaching techniques that appeal to different senses and different learning styles (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic or *learning by doing.*)
- The comprehension level of the girl(s) will determine the best teaching approach to use. Not everyone will learn at the same rate. This is not a reflection on the leader's ability to teach and motivate.
- Have realistic expectations. For example, leaders should keep in mind that if girls do not regularly engage in physical activity, they are likely to fatigue easily.
- What appears to be stubbornness may actually be a fear of a new situation. Nobody wants to fail.
- Be flexible. End an activity at the high point of enthusiasm; don't wait for participants to get bored. (Good advice for all game leaders.)
- Show enthusiasm in what you are doing in order to maintain a high level of interest from the participants.
- Make sure that everyone has an equal chance to participate.
- Encourage girls to try, while respecting their right to refuse.
- Arrange activities so everyone can develop appropriate social behaviors. For example, learning to be a courteous spectator when one is not a participant.
- Be positive - try to prevent girls from encountering repeated failures. Make your meeting place a “NPD (No Put Downs) Zone.”
- New or complex activities should be planned for the early part of a session, while participants are fresh and alert. Another factor to consider is that there is a greater chance for injury after fatigue has set in.

Take Small Steps

- Break a project or activity down into lots of little steps.
- Explain or demonstrate one step, then let girls do it before going on to the next step.
- Some girls will always finish or complete what they’re doing sooner than others. Have printed instructions so they can go on to the next step, or ask them to help someone who’s having trouble. You might also have another project for them to do when they finish this one – something they can keep coming back to, if possible.

Demonstrate

- Show the girls what to do, demonstrating step-by-step and explaining exactly what you’re doing. For girls with visual disabilities, show them by feel and description. For girls with hearing impairments, have written instructions and pictures or samples. This helps girls with cognitive disabilities, too.
- Let girls show you what they’ve learned and accomplished.
- Have girls sit in a circle whenever possible, and be sure they can see and hear you.

Use Visual Aids

- Some girls will learn better or stay focused longer if they have something to look at: an illustration, a sample, a list of directions, a diagram, or all the above.
- Girls with hearing disabilities are often helped by written instructions and pictures.
- Girls who are blind or have vision impairment may need large print or Braille instructions. Examples are also helpful.
- Girls with developmental delays often understand better if there are pictures, examples, models, or picture schedules. It is often helpful to have a timer that the girls can see, as opposed to a timer on a phone or a clock on the wall.

Transition Tricks

- Never move abruptly from one activity to the next – give 10 and 5-minute warnings or hold up green, amber, and red signs. Avoid whistles, yelling or screaming.
- At the 10-minute warning, tell girls what should happen next. If you have "get-ready" instructions (cleaning, packing), give them one step at a time. Use a friendly voice.

Girl Involvement

- Make sure activities and projects are chosen by girls with the help of an adult mentor, adviser, or leader. Activities are fun, interesting, exciting, or adventurous.
- Make sure adults communicate clear expectations about what is and is not acceptable behavior during activities. Implement consequences fairly and calmly.

- Use a Kaper (job) Chart to divide the work of managing your troop fairly among the girls (opening and closing ceremonies, clean-up, games, snack, etc.)
- Help girls develop, write, and post their own guidelines/rules - concrete examples of how to live by the Girl Scout Law (e.g., *Don't Gossip* for *Considerate and Caring*).

FROM: www.aadd.org (All About Developmental Disabilities), and *What to Do Instead of Screaming,* by Myra Nagel plus other sources.

Adaptations for Specific Special Needs

<CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations in general… their philosophy, history, and relevance to your troop meetings.

Adapting Badge Activities

Prior to a troop meeting involving badge work from the Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting handbook, volunteers naturally look over the badge requirements as part of their meeting preparation. You may feel that some parts of the badge may pose a challenge for one or more of the girls. As a treasured volunteer, you have the authority to adapt the badge requirements so that every girl can be successful. All you need to do is adhere to the underlying learning objectives of the badge requirements. How you help girls achieve the learning objectives is very flexible! Please click on this link (below) to see some specific ideas for adapting some badges at the Junior program level. Use these ideas as a starting point for working with girls at all program levels, and for all earned awards.

Adapting Badge and Journey Activities for Girls with Special Needs.docx

Adapting Your Troop Meetings

Typical troop meetings involve badge or Journey work, perhaps a craft, song, game, or flag ceremony. Volunteers may need to make specific accommodations for girls to make the troop meeting experience enjoyable. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) groups special needs into some useful categories: **Communication, Social Relationships, Learning, Movement, Vision, and Mental Health**. You don't need to know what a girl's specific diagnosis is; if you see her struggling in one or more of the areas below, you can use the suggestions that follow to help her enjoy participating in troop meetings alongside her sister Girl Scouts.

- **Communication Differences**

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with challenges in communication differences.

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with challenges in deafness and hearing impairment.

  Communication differences can be categorized into *receptive* (auditory comprehension and the ability to understand what is said) and *expressive* (ability and willingness to speak, or express oneself to others). There are two main causes for difficulty expressing oneself to others: how well a girl can come up with the words they want to use in their mind, and how well they can use the muscles of their mouth and throat to make those words come out. These are all separate issues; it's important to realize that just because a person has trouble in one area, does not mean that they have trouble in the other area. There are a variety of ways that the

person can express themselves: spoken language, Sign Language, body language, adaptive technology (e.g. keyboards), charade-type communication, drawing what they want, or even pointing. Even a girl who can speak but chooses not to (e.g. shy, or socially challenged) may try communicating in a different way to increase her comfort level.

If the girl has a limited vocabulary, asking questions to clarify can often help. Frame your questions in short, concrete (tangible) "yes/no" sentences. Don't try to ask more than one question at a time, and refrain from "double negative" questions. If they have a more expansive vocabulary, ask them to describe the situation in which the topic of concern happens. By "talking around" the issue, they often will eventually come up with the words they need to say, or you can guess what they are trying to communicate.

If the girl in your troop has difficulty using the muscles of their mouth and throat to form words, for example, a girl who is mute or a girl who stutters, get advice from her parents. Sometimes the girl might use sign language or a communication device that they type into. Sometimes they can answer "yes/no" questions or two-option questions by looking or pointing either to the left or right (or your left or right hand) to indicate their choice.

You have a "girl-led" opportunity. When the girl's preferred language of communication is sign language or other foreign language, the troop leader would do well to learn a few common words. Words like "yes," "no," "hi," "good-bye," "come," "stop," "go," "eat," "drink," "more," "all done," "bathroom," "good job," "please," and "thank-you," are a good set of words to start with. Start a conversation with a girl who's deaf or hard of hearing by walking in front of her, not by tapping her on the shoulder (which could startle her).

The challenge of non-verbal communication. Sometimes a girl in your troop may have trouble reading body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, or "non-concrete" communication. This can reveal itself in a variety of ways. She might have trouble knowing what other people are feeling if they don't specifically communicate feelings in words. She may have trouble with detecting sarcasm, since this skill depends upon the communicator's tone of voice. Or she may not "get it" when someone tells a joke or uses a metaphor. Some girls engage only in "concrete" thinking patterns; they take everything literally and have difficulty with abstractions. In all these cases, working with both the girl with special needs and the others in the troop is the best way to bridge the gap. Suggest to the girl with special needs to "check in" with others when she's unsure what communication is happening. Encourage other girls in the troop to learn to incorporate explanations into their communication, especially when misunderstandings arise. Awareness is key for all

involved. Some troops have come up with a code word like “Cheerios” when the meeting needs to pause for some communication clarification.

- **Pro-Social Behavioral and Relational Differences**

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with challenges in prosocial behavioral and relational differences.

  Some girls in your troop will not have the same level of social skills such as: the ability to show empathy, put herself “in other people’s shoes,” take turns, and other forms of reciprocity. Sometimes a girl will react in an unexpected way to a crowded or stimulating environment or to a hug from a sister Girl Scout. Girls with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, Sensory Integration Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, or ADD/ADHD are examples of girls facing special challenges in group settings. Scientists have found differences in the frontal lobes of the brain in children suffering from difficulty in forming positive relationships. The frontal lobes of the brain, which continue to develop until age 25, guide a girl’s judgement, impulse control, and ability to interpret others’ body language, among many other things. The girl with social/behavioral/relational challenges often experiences rejection and isolation from her peers. She may appear to be “in her own world”, may exhibit repetitive motions, or too much energy. She may try to be the center of attention, or she may be the one who runs out of the meeting room. She may challenge the rules and refuse to cooperate. Trust us: these girls want to be like the others, and they want to be a Girl Scout. With extra patience, you can help her experience the Girl Scout program with minimal disruptions to the troop meeting; the other girls will build empathy at the same time. Try a few tips from experienced troop volunteers; also ask her parents/guardians for advice. It helps to remember her frontal lobes are probably different than yours; she is not “out to get you.” She is desperate for friendship like every other girl, but some situations we consider “normal” are causing her intense fear or pain.

  Best Practices: You will quickly be able to discern whether a girl is an attention-seeker, or needs to avoid certain kinds of attention or stimulation (aversion behaviors). For girls who need a high level of attention, it helps to remember that if they don’t get enough positive reinforcement, they will go for negative attention (acting out) over no attention at all. Over-stimulated girls may withdraw or act out. Some girls are particularly sensitive to touching sticky, messy, or rough textures. They may avoid certain projects because of this. This challenge should be treated with respect, as the girl’s experience of these sensations is often described as painful or revolting.

  You have an opportunity to be girl-led. We have found that a non-stigmatizing, non-punitive “time out” with another adult or girl buddy is helpful. If possible, let her

choose a “personal space bubble” to do her badge work or craft, and give her 1:1 supervision. The girl will know when she is ready to re-join the group. Make sure she feels welcome when she rejoins the group. As she gets a little older, she can take cues from volunteers or her troop mates for when her feelings are escalating a bit, and take a “self-time out” early on. For the girl with sensory challenges, give her a choice of wearing non-latex gloves or perhaps using tweezers to manipulate the objects, or just observing a troop mate doing the “icky” part of the task.
Also in your toolbox of accommodations for social/behavioral/relational disabilities are extra layers of communication to “grease the wheels” of social interactions. Slow the instructions down and feed them piece-by-piece. Modify or shorten the badge work or simplify the craft to something manageable. Always reward attempts at positive behavior, social interaction, and group participation even if the girl is not successful. What’s important is that they tried. Their troop mates will soon find ways to help them be successful. Children are surprisingly good at encouraging each other, especially when we thank them for “being a sister to every Girl Scout.”

- **Learning Differences**

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with various learning differences. Includes a discussion about learning styles.

  We all have preferred ways of learning, and they generally fall into three groups: Visual Learners, Auditory Learners, and Kinetic/Hands-On/Learn-By-Doing Learners. Girls with a learning difference (LD) are part of a broad category that includes girls with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as girls with dyslexia, or a learning disability in a specific subject, such as Math. Learning differences are quite common, and the girl’s parent/guardian may have set up an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan with her school. These documents tell teachers how to best adapt curriculum so the learner can get maximum benefit. If the parent/guardian is willing to share excerpts from the girl’s plan, you can see how that information would greatly benefit a troop volunteer! Some girls with LD wear special glasses, some read under a colored filament, some use cards that show a portion of a sentence at a time. Special Ed and General Ed teachers are very clever with “work-arounds.” We recommend you be girl-led. Work with her to discover how she learns best (visually, by listening, or by doing). Let her opt in or opt out of troop activities if you can’t adapt the activity. For example, ask your girl if she is comfortable reading aloud, or would like to pass. Use small teams of girls to work together to problem solve in badge work, so your girl with LD can participate without being singled out. Praise courage and confidence when she takes a risk and reads aloud, presents the group’s solution, or participates in the skit even though she needed prompts to remember her lines.

- **Movement Differences**

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with challenges in “gross motor” movement differences.

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with challenges in “fine motor” movement differences.

  We all come in different shapes and sizes, and we all vary in the degree that we can use our limbs. Girls in your troop may have large body size, rheumatoid arthritis, cerebral palsy, gross or fine motor skill challenges. She may have movement tics or Tourette’s Syndrome. She may use a wheelchair, crutches, or a walker to ambulate.
  Let’s start with the choice of meeting place. If you are welcoming a girl in your troop who uses a wheelchair or has difficulty navigating steps, and your troop’s meeting location is not wheelchair accessible, creative problem-solving is called for. Depending upon the region you live in, finding an alternate meeting location may be a challenge, as private buildings may not be legally required to be accessible. Look to public buildings as a resource, or try “mission-based” groups (such as churches or synagogues) who might waive the rental fee due to your special circumstances. The girl’s parent, or other troops in your service unit might also have “leads” on places you can utilize. Also, be aware that there are resources out there where local carpenters donate their time and materials to build ramps for individual homes and other “worthy causes.” For more information, visit http://www.ramps.org/projects-washington.htm.
  Mobility accommodations during the troop meeting: Inquire of the girl or her parent/guardian what kinds of terrains present challenges: pathways outside, door thresholds, 90 degree turns in narrow hallways, etc. Can table legs or chairs trip her? If a girl in your troop uses a walker, crutches, a gait belt, or cane make sure it is always near to her. Find out from the girl or her parent what kinds of assistance (if any) is needed for getting up from the floor, in/out of chairs, or whether she needs assistance in the bathroom. In a troop meeting, consider movement differences when planning flag ceremony, where girls sit/stand during the meeting, and ways to make games and crafts inclusive. Your troop can brainstorm ways to modify the rules of a game so all can play, because a Girl Scout is honest and fair. Let’s say the troop plays a game on the floor, or your scout has fallen onto the floor. Many girls with mobility challenges find it easier to use a chair or other stable object to push up off of, to get themselves to a standing position. Encouraging her to get into a crawl position, and then into a kneeling position, often helps. For everyone’s safety, avoid “picking her up” off the ground.
  Best practices for accommodating fine motor skill challenges: The most common ways in which fine motor difficulties affect a typical Girl Scout project are with writing and using scissors. In most instances, giving the girl an opportunity to

speak their answers instead of writing them (perhaps with a scribe) is a good substitute. If the writing IS the activity (such as drawing on a poster, or writing thank-you cards), you can try a couple of accommodations. First, see if she can copy the words she wants to write from a separate page where you have written out what she wants to say. Alternately, try writing the words in, say, yellow ink (or light pencil) for the girl to trace over what needs to be written. Other options include the use of stencils, either for letters, or creating a stencil of the shape that needs to be drawn and colored in. As for cutting with scissors, try modifying the shape to be more square-ish, which is easier to cut. The easiest form of a scissor project is "fringe" (snipping along a long strip of paper), so perhaps the girl can make either fringe or grass for the project. Sometimes laying the paper on the table makes it easier to cut rather than holding in the air… or try making the cut lines thicker. Sometimes pre-cutting the shapes may be necessary, while still having the girl responsible for applying the glue, or sticking together the pieces. If there are activities that involve many steps and the girl is getting overwhelmed, try breaking up the steps into smaller pieces. If it is necessary for someone to help the girl with a few of the steps, make sure the helper gives back "control" of the project, as soon as the difficult steps are completed. Organizing the task such that (at the very least) the final step is accomplished by the girl with special needs, is particularly helpful to promote her feeling successful.

- **Blind and Low Vision Accommodations:**

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with challenges in blindness and low vision.

  To promote safety, try to keep the layout of the troop meeting room consistent (i.e., furniture position and where to get snack and craft supplies from) and uncluttered. If the girl reads Braille, perhaps she'd like to instruct the class in how to read the alphabet HER way. She can still participate in crafts, games, and badge work with modifications. If she uses a service animal, she may still be able to play a relay race, for example, at a slower pace. Adapt creatively and ask her troop mates to come up with ideas so they gain empathy. If a craft is on the agenda, your blind scout may still be able to complete some or all of it by feel. Involve the parents for advice in advance of the meeting.

- **Mental Health Disorders Accommodations**

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with challenges in mental health disorders.

  According to the National Institute for Mental Health, about 13% of children aged 8 to 15 had a diagnosable mental disorder in 2016. About 8-9% have ADD/ADHD;

most of the rest of the children in this category are experiencing mood disorders. Examples of mood disorders include: bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, panic disorder, PTSD, and eating disorders, to name a few. In our experience, very few parents disclose this information initially on the girl's medical form. You will likely notice some uncommon behaviors at your troop meeting and not know the cause. Calmly report your observations to the parent/guardian. Do not attempt to make a diagnosis. Build trust with the parents and try to partner with them in helping their daughter feel comfortable at troop meetings. Since many mental disorders worsen at night, we will discuss this more in the camping section. Often that's when the tears flow or the girl's behaviors are exacerbated. If you EVER encounter an irrational, obstructive, or verbally abusive parent, OR if the girl is afraid to go home after a meeting, call your Troop Program Manager immediately for advice.

- **General Health Accommodations**

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with challenges in other health disorders.

  The most common situation is where a troop leader is asked to give a girl prescription medication while at an event. Volunteers should always reference the "Permissions to Administer Medications to Minors" forms (available on the Safety and Permissions Page, under "Medications"). As a volunteer, you are never obligated to give medication (including Epi-Pens) if you are not comfortable doing so. Your other options include having a willing adult or an Event First Aider administer the medication, or having the child's parent/guardian stop by to administer the medication. If you opt to take responsibility to administer medication, make sure to receive adequate training from the parent, particularly in the case of injections or other specialty interventions. Other common health issues that arise in an inclusive troop might include a girl who has epilepsy, is medically fragile, or particularly sensitive to extreme temperatures or environmental factors such as smoke or allergens that could provoke an asthma attack. Good communication with the parent on how they manage these challenges helps gain insight into useful techniques. A troop leader should speak to their Troop Program Manager if they are uncomfortable with what is being asked of them.

- **Food Accommodations**

  <CLICK HERE> for a video about accommodations for girls with challenges in dietary needs.

  It's increasingly common to have a girl with a nut allergy, gluten sensitivity, special diet, or food restrictions for religious reasons. If a girl has complicated dietary needs, the simplest solution is to have her bring food from home for any food-related troop

event. Food restrictions can become a "learning opportunity" for the troop if you to ask those supplying the troop snacks to adhere to the dietary needs of that girl (for example, no pork/ham/bacon). Be sure the parent/guardian has written down food allergies and restrictions on the "Permission For Troop Meetings and Day Trips" form, and on the girl's Medical and Health History form. Exercise care whenever the girl's food allergies are potentially life-threatening, especially if you want to give her food not sent from home. Close communication with the parents is essential to assure safety in these situations. Also, if the girl cannot be in the presence of others eating that food item (as is sometimes the case with a peanut allergy), then completely "banning" that food item is the only safe alternative.

Final thought: We have never met a parent/guardian that wasn't delighted to receive your call on how to make your daughter feel valued, respected, and included at troop meetings. If at any time you feel overwhelmed accommodating a girl's special needs, reach out to the parent/guardian honestly and openly with your questions, compliments and concerns. Get advice from your Troop Program Manager. Girl Scouts not only has a philosophical obligation, but in some instances a legal obligation to make reasonable accommodations "that don't fundamentally alter the program being offered." As an unpaid volunteer, you have the right to request that a parent come help their daughter participate in the troop meeting. Be firm with your boundaries, while simultaneously celebrating your personal growth and watching your girls become more inclusive, sensitive, caring, and compassionate human beings. The Girl Scout Leadership Experience truly works for EVERY girl.

Promoting Calm Attentiveness

<CLICK HERE> for a video about ways to promote a state of calm attentiveness in all the girls. Works for the troop leaders as well!

According to the *Alert* program by *Therapy Works* http://alertprogram.com/ our level of attentiveness can be likened to a car's engine. We are either *revved too high*, or *idling too low*, or *idling just right*. It is when we are *idling just right* that we can achieve a state of calm alertness which is necessary to follow directions and stay on task. They believe that there are five ways that help us get into this *just right* level of alertness, whether you are *revved too high*, or *idling too low*. They are…

- Large body movements
- Fiddle with something in your hands
- Put something in your mouth and manipulate it
- Change the visual (sight) parts of the environment
- Change the auditory (hearing) parts of the environment

We all have experienced this. How many of us need to get up and take a movement break when we have been working long hours at the computer, or when we are particularly anxious? Or we twiddle our pen or doodle to keep focused on a lecturer, or squeeze a stress ball to calm down? Or we chew on gum, or munch crunchy snacks to either wake up or relieve anxiety? Or we turn up the lights to wake up, or dim them to help us relax? Or we dial up our favorite music to get us in the mood we need to achieve… to activate us when we are down, or calm us when we are stressed? We all have our favorite way of improving our attention. Often you can tell what a person's preferred way of doing this is by the habits they've developed.

With the first three items on the above list, it is particularly helpful if the movement is done with great force, such as bouncing vigorously, or squeezing things hard in the hand, or chewing on things that are especially crunchy.

Some girls with special needs experience a real challenge in maintaining a calm, alert state of being. There are a variety of reasons for this, but the bottom line is that their need for these techniques is even greater than it is for most of us. As mentioned, one can often quickly tell which technique is their preferred method by the habits they have developed. Some of these habits are socially acceptable, and some of them are not; some coping habits are even unsafe. In the case of less desirable habits, the trick is to help the person substitute a different form of sensation that is within the same category, but more appropriate. For example, a girl who can't seem to stay in her seat, or who gives hugs or high fives with too much pressure, might be assigned to carry around heavy troop supplies or run errands for the leader. A girl who picks at the upholstery of the couches at the meeting site or peels off the paper of the troop crayon supply might be given some other form of fiddle toy for her hands. A girl who chews on her pencil or on the strings of her coat hood, might be encouraged to chew gum, or to carry around a drinking straw that she chews on.

Below are some modifications that would work well for each of the various forms of attention regulation.

Large Body Movements:

- Use wiggle seats (something that a girl can move on without disrupting others)

- Tie surgical tubing or a latex exercise band around the bottom of a chair so a girl can push her feet against it
- Place a weighted blanket over her shoulders or on her lap

Fiddle with Something in Your Hands:

- Give girls fidget toys like stress balls to hold while listening
- Allow doodling at troop meetings

Place Something in Your Mouth:

- Chewing on a drinking straw, or surgical tubing (in a necklace around neck)
- Being allowed to chew gum, or suck on a sugar free sucker

Visual Elements of the Environment:

- Provide a calm space if a girl needs to remove herself to avoid or recover from a meltdown, such as a bean bag in the corner or a tent (blanket draped over a table)
- Be aware of fluorescent lights; the flicker of these can be particularly agitating

Auditory Elements of the Environment

- Use ear muffs to cancel out excess noise
- Be aware of, and try to eliminate excessive environmental noise. This could mean asking a neighbor to mow during a different time of day, or turning off music when girls need to focus.

You will likely find that incorporating these techniques will work with EVERY girl in your troop… and you are welcome to try them for yourself as well! ☺

Moving from Negative to Positive Behaviors

<CLICK HERE> for a video about the general principles to consider when developing strategies to help any girl move from behaviors that are negative, to ones more positive in nature.

<CLICK HERE> for a video about the specific steps to apply when developing strategies to help any girl move from behaviors that are negative, to ones more positive in nature.

Understanding behaviors can make your leadership easier. A simple way to summarize the behaviors we all experience is to categorize them as either behaviors we engage in to *gain* something, or behaviors to *avoid* something. As we mature, we find socially acceptable ways to navigate our desires and needs.

There are a variety of reasons why a person experiencing special needs might have trouble gaining positive experiences or avoiding negative experiences. Below is a list of needs and desires that we all share, along with possible reasons why a person with special needs may have trouble obtaining what they need or desire.

We all seek to gain…

- *approval and acceptance.* Girls with special needs often don't experience this, because they are unable to keep up with what everyone else is doing. Also, some girls with special needs can't read facial expressions or body language, or have concrete thinking and can't understand jokes, so they are awkward in social situations.
- *orderliness, calm, and predictability.* Girls with special needs often don't experience this, because they don't have the attention to keep up with the leader's verbal instructions. Or they don't have the ability to filter out sensory input (visual, auditory, sometimes even tactile, taste, and smell) so they can tune into what they need to focus on. Their inner worlds are often very chaotic because of this.
- *achievement and rewards for accomplishment.* Girls with special needs often don't experience this, because they are delayed in the skills that they need to accomplish tasks at the same level as their peers. This includes not only large body movements, dexterity, and coordination, but also spatial, sequencing, and/or organizational skills, attentiveness, strength, and endurance. Or sometimes it takes them longer to show their skills, but no one gives them the time to do so.

We all seek to avoid…

- *embarrassment.* Girls with special needs often feel embarrassed, for the same reasons they have trouble gaining approval or acceptance, or because they have been unable to become proficient in an area in their lives.
- *chaotic feelings.* Girls with special needs often feel like the world is a chaotic place, for the same reasons they have trouble gaining orderliness, calm, and predictability.

- *failure, rejection, and punishment.* Girls with special needs often have negative experiences in these areas, for the reasons listed above.

Of course, there are many more needs and desires we all have, and many other ways in which someone with special needs might not reach them… this is only a partial list.

In some instances, a girl with special needs might start to develop a negative set of behaviors in their desire to gain positive experiences, or to avoid negative ones. This is where Girl Scouting can be very useful to them. You see, a big part of the Girl Scout program involves teaching the girls the skills that they can use to be successful in life. This idea may be applied in situations where girls with special needs are showing negative behaviors as well. **The FIRST STEP is to figure out the root cause of the behavior… what the girl is trying to gain or avoid by the behavior she is showing.** Here are some helpful steps…

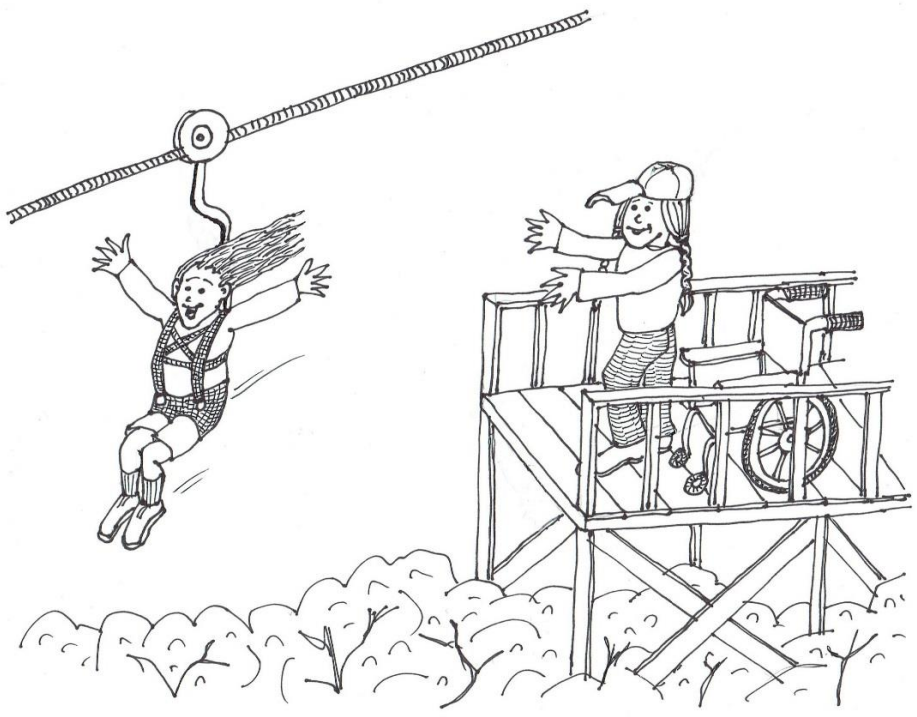
- If possible, it is helpful to have a team discussion with the key players in the girl's life. At the very least this should include her family, and also anyone else that can provide insight. (For tips on working with parents, refer to the section on *Utilizing Parents as a Resource*.)
- From there, it is often helpful to look at what are the hopes and dreams for this girl in her scouting experience. In other words, what would an ideal troop meeting look like? Answering this question needs to factor in her potential in various areas, but it should also factor in how her individual strengths can be elevated.
- After that, one can begin to ask questions to further sort out the root cause of the negative behavior. These questions can include…
    - What types of settings does this behavior occur in?
    - Is there a particular event that always seems to set off the behavior?
    - What does the behavior look like? Any noteworthy features about it?
    - What always happens as a result of the behavior? Are there ways in which the results or consequences bring about the gain of something positive, or the avoidance of something negative?

Once you have an idea of what you suspect might be the root of the negative behavior, it's time to figure out (and then teach) what a socially acceptable way would be for the girl to accomplish her goals: to gain something positive, or avoid something negative, without having to show the negative behavior. Keep in mind what limitations she may be experiencing that are contributing to her behavior. For example:

- *If the girl is feeling overwhelmed by sensory input or is overly active,* refer to the ***Maintaining Calm Attentiveness*** section of this manual.

- *If the girl is having trouble focusing, is feeling disorganized, or is out of tune with the expectations of the activities or schedule,* refer to the ***Troop Structures that Promote Success*** section of this manual.
- *If the girl is experiencing a lack of social connectedness,* refer to the ***Creating a Welcoming Environment*** section of this manual.
- *If the girl is experiencing a lack of mastery over the tasks being asked of her,* refer to the ***Adapting Badge Activities*** section of this manual

Most importantly, take care of yourself! See the ***Troop Leader Self Care*** section of this manual for more information.



Preventing and De-Escalating a Crisis

<CLICK HERE> for a video about the general principles to consider when developing strategies to help any girl prevent or de-escalate a crisis (meltdown).

<CLICK HERE> for a video about the specific steps to apply when developing strategies to help any girl prevent or de-escalate a crisis (meltdown).

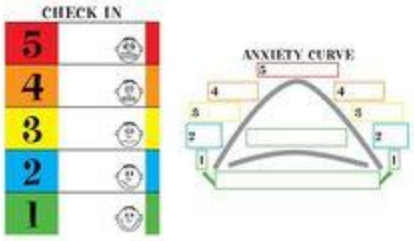
The first step of preventing a crisis starts with understanding the root of the negative behavior that the girl with special needs is experiencing. This topic is discussed at length in the *Moving from Negative to Positive Behaviors* section of this manual.

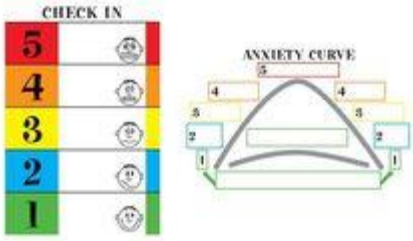
Even with the best prevention program, sometimes a girl in your troop might become unusually agitated – for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the source of her agitation may or may not be readily apparent, or able to be removed quickly enough to prevent her from escalating in her emotions. Still, a good place to start when you see a crisis building is with awareness. If you can get the girl to recognize that she is developing negative emotions, often you can help her use self-calming activities to de-escalate the impending crisis. (See the *Calm Attentiveness* and the *Troop Leader Self Care* sections of this manual for more details on self-calming behaviors.)

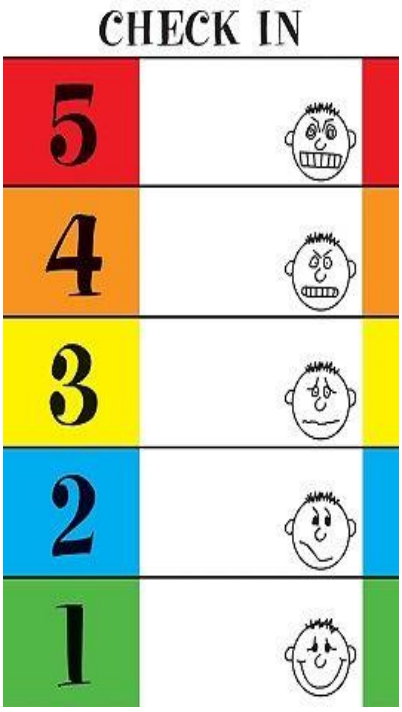
The Incredible 5 Point Scale and the Anxiety Curve

"The Incredible 5 Point Scale is used to assist students in becoming aware of their emotions, such as anger or pain, and the stage or level of the emotion. The scale can be used with a variety of students but can be particularly effective for students with Asperger's and Autism Spectrum Disorder."

http://www.autismempowerment.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Incredible-5-Point-Scale-Fact-Sheet-rev.pdf

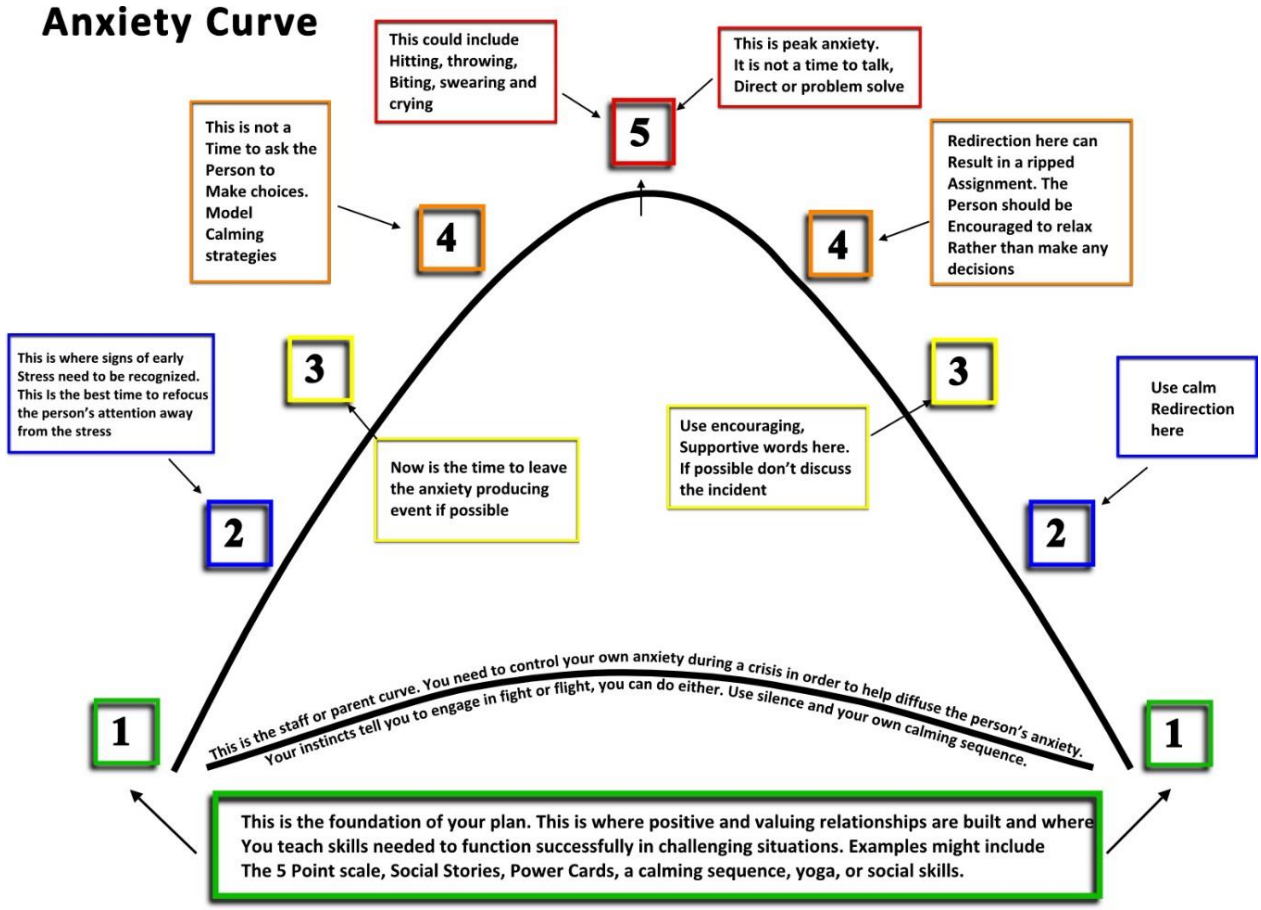






Rating	What makes me feel this way?	How can I tell?
5 I have lost control!		
4 This can really upset me		
3 This can make me nervous		
2 This bugs me		
1 This never bothers me		

The diagram below is one way to look at the build-up, crisis, and recovery of an emotional melt-down. It also shows the best interventions a troop leader can give at various stages along the way. If at all possible, refrain from touching the girl when she is in an agitated state, as this will likely cause further escalation.



As you can see, the best points of intervention are early on in the crisis. The good news is, most people who experience these sorts of anxiety curves have a fairly predictable set of behaviors that they show in the first few stages of their own *anxiety curve*. Identifying what these behaviors are can greatly help the girl with anxiety issues recognize the need to use self-calming activities. It's not enough for others to tell the girl she is escalating – the girl needs to be led in the process where she can see it herself. This is a huge life skill to gain for those who experience this challenge, which will have tremendous positive implications for the rest of their life. The trick is for the leader (and others in supportive roles) to maintain a sense of calm in the situation, and to not take the negative behaviors personally.

For more information about troop leader self-care, refer to the section in this manual by that name.

Successful Outings with Your Inclusive Troop

<CLICK HERE> for a video about the general principles to consider when taking your inclusive troop on an outing or day trip.

<CLICK HERE> for a video about the specific steps to review when taking your inclusive troop on an outing or day trip.

Taking your troop on a day trip can be rewarding and enjoyable for both volunteers and girls alike. Here are some "best practices" to assist you in planning and going on a day trip or outing where everyone feels included and valued.

Preparing for the day trip. Thinking back to your volunteer learning module for day trips, you will recall that you should have up to date permission and medical forms for everyone in your troop. If medication will need to be administered during the day trip, consider using the Permissions to Administer Medications forms, or have the girl's parent/guardian accompany you on the day trip to administer the medication. Keep all forms in a HIPPA-compliant folder to bring on your day trip, along with your basic first aid kit.

A girl-led troop values the voices and opinions of every girl in the troop on deciding where the troop will have their outing and what that outing will look like. It's recommended to start by asking girls some goals for the field trip: what would they like to learn and do on this trip? What is the one thing they would feel really bad about if they *didn't* get to do it on this trip? The answers may surprise you! If open-ended questions such as these are too vague for some of the girls, try giving them choices of goals and have them vote to identify the troop's favorites. Now you can help the girls build their day trip around their goals.

Day trip transportation can be part of the girls' planning. Have them consider various ways to get to their destination via bus or auto, or a combination. Troops that have girls with disabilities will quickly identify the pros and cons of riding the bus vs. taking several cars. Riding a bus can be very fun, very accessible, but also very stimulating. Riding a car may take less time, but can be more expensive (parking), also very stimulating (noisy), and might not accommodate a wheelchair, for example. Some troops find they need to write up a community agreement for the transportation part of the day, that might include things like: assigned seats, using the buddy system, not eating in the leader's car, which radio station will be used, and whether cell phones are allowed for

part of the day trip. Girls prone to overstimulation might wish to come up with a code word (e.g. Cheerios) to indicate they need more personal space or less noise.

In addition to considering a community agreement for coming and going to and from the day trip, troops may wish to have a small packing list for girls and have them bring day packs. Their day pack might include something to do during the ride, a water bottle and a snack, and a place to carry their jacket or raincoat. Some girls might need to bring items they use for self-calming, such as a blanket or fidget toy. Troop volunteers may wish to look up some fun car games ahead of time, or lead the girls in some songs during the trip.

Another aspect of girl-led planning and inclusion is to have girls try to identify any barriers to participation ahead of time. Will there be steps, gravel paths, or steep hills that are difficult for some troop members to navigate? If so, what's the best way to handle that? In addition to any physical challenges posed, might there be any emotional challenges to consider? Will the place be crowded or noisy? If so, what will the girls do to cope with that? Questions like these build empathy and good planning skills in your troop.

Finally, girls can assist in reviewing basic safety elements of the day trip prior to going. The Safety Checkpoints on the Volunteer Learning web site are a good place to start. Most troops use the buddy system, or for groups of three, the "truddy" system. Some troops find it useful to make colorful troop t-shirts, or wear unique, colorful bandannas, to quickly spot the girls in a crowd. Older girls might find it helpful to enter leader cell phones into their phone in case of separation. Quiz your girls on any other safety elements that should be considered, such as staying hydrated on a hot day.

Inclusive troops need more adults than recommended for the usual adult-to-girl ratio. An extra adult or two will come in very handy.

Arriving at your day trip destination. Inclusive troops by nature have girls with a wide range of ability levels, so often it's hard to find a day trip where every element is enjoyed by all the girls. Many troops find they need to split up into smaller groups of girls with similar interests during the day, therefore it's very important to locate a meet up spot and identify a meet up time. Troops with girls with special needs also find it useful to identify a "quiet spot" where girls can go with their small group for a brief time out to deal with any environmental stressors. A "quiet spot" may be a nice place with a bench or a grassy lawn; any place that feels calming will do. In order to not stigmatize the girl that needs the quiet spot, the entire small group should take a brief respite there.

Each small group should have 2 adults. Place one adult at the head of the line and the other adult at the end. The leading adult will scout for obstacles on the path way, and lead the group to the activities they identified they want to do (or to avoid) on their trip.

The following adult will prevent anyone from accidentally lagging behind or separating from the group. In an inclusive troop, the following adult at the rear, is the one who sets the pace, not the leading adult! The group will move at the pace required by the slowest walker, or the one who takes the most photos with her phone, or the one who needs to rest more often.

Inclusive troops should plan more bathroom and snack breaks than you think you need. You will use those extra breaks. The pace may seem slower to the volunteer, but the stress level will be low and the enjoyment factor will be higher for the girls.

Check in frequently with each of the girls in your group or troop to see how they are feeling, what they are enjoying, and whether they are hungry or thirsty. A stream of feedback from the girls helps you modify your trip as you go to set the right pace.

When it's almost time to go home, start giving 30 minute, 15 minute, and 5 minute "heads up." Tell the girls what that means – that your group needs to be moving toward the exit, or perhaps needs to be cleaning up from that final snack. Tell them what getting ready to go home looks like.

On the ride home, most troops find it nice to have a more relaxed and restful atmosphere compared to the ride to the outing. Girls might be animated and excited, but their bodies might be exhausted. A calm radio station in the car, or quiet activities on the bus are recommended.

After your day trip. At the next troop meeting, take time to reflect on the day trip. Reflection is an important part of the event, because it teaches girls how to evaluate which part of their planning went well or not-so-well, and why. Many troops benefit from a "Roses, Thorns, and Buds" discussion at their meeting. During this topic, each girl (using a buddy to help her, if necessary) gives an example of a Rose, a Thorn, and a Bud. A "Rose" is something that well particularly well during the day trip, resulting in something she enjoyed. A "Thorn" is something that she didn't enjoy, or didn't go smoothly. A "Bud" is an idea for a whole new trip, or something she would like to do on the trip if it's repeated. Getting your girls accustomed to this kind of debriefing is a valuable life skill.

Take time to congratulate yourself for "rising to the challenge" and taking your diverse troop on a day trip! It is likely you won't accomplish everything you set out to do, or that the day went perfectly, but you will have given each of the girls a wonderful opportunity to plan, carry out, and reflect on a trip. The only place they can get this kind of leadership training is in Girl Scouts, and only because wonderful volunteers like you made it possible.

Successful Overnight Trips

<CLICK HERE> for a video about the general principles to consider when taking your inclusive troop on an overnight event.

<CLICK HERE> for a video about the specific steps to review when taking your inclusive troop on an overnight event.

Years down the road, many a girl's favorite Girl Scout memory is that special overnight trip to a campground, Great Wolf Lodge, or some other destination. Taking your diverse troop on an overnight or weekend trip may seem a bit overwhelming, but if you use the tips that follow, you'll soon find it less stressful than anticipated, and well worth everyone's time and energy. Nothing keeps a girl in Girl Scouts like the opportunity to travel, and planning trips is a great way to unleash the "Power of G.I.R.L. – Go-Getter, Innovator, Risk-taker, and Leader."©

Preparing for the Overnight Trip. Thinking back to your volunteer learning module for indoor or outdoor overnight trips, you will recall that you should have up to date permission and medical forms for everyone in your troop. If medication will need to be administered during the trip, consider using the Permissions to Administer Medications forms, or have the girl's parent/guardian accompany you on the trip to administer the medication. Keep all forms in a HIPPA-compliant folder to bring on the trip, along with your basic first aid kit.

Goal-Setting. A girl-led troop values the voices and opinions of every girl in the troop on deciding where the troop will go for their overnighter, and what that trip will look like in terms of meals and activities. It's recommended to start by asking girls some goals for the trip: what would they like to learn or accomplish on this trip? Is there an area of personal growth they would like to challenge? What is the one thing they would feel really bad about if they *didn't* get to do (or eat) on this trip? The answers may surprise you! If open-ended questions such as these are too vague for some of the girls, try giving them choices of goals and activities, and have them vote to identify the troop's favorites. Now you can help the girls build their overnighter around their goals. Once goals have been identified, activities can follow. For example, a troop that really wants to learn to cook outdoors will be developing a very different trip itinerary than the troop that wants to complete an entire Journey in a single weekend. The activity goals often dictate where the overnighter will take place and what equipment is needed. For example, troops that really enjoy outdoor cooking and campfires need to go to a

campground. The troop that wants to work on crafts or badge work may need a covered, warm place with lots of tables. The troop that wants to explore Portland or Port Townsend will need a motel or troop house. Goals are always a great place to start.

Where to Have the Overnighter. Many troops choose to have their very first overnighter indoors in a volunteer's home, so that girls can choose to have a "half-sleepover" and go home at 10 pm if they aren't comfortable staying the night. A couple overnighters such as this might be needed before venturing to an overnighter in a troop house at camp, and most certainly before trying open air camping in cabins or tents farther from home. Youth rooms at places of worship are also safe and inexpensive places to host an indoor overnighter close to home. Think of beginner overnighters as a "shake down" kind of event to surface any challenges that need to be addressed before attempting an overnighter farther away.

Getting There. Trip transportation can be part of the girls' planning. Have them consider various ways to get to their destination via bus, auto, or train. Troops that have girls with disabilities will quickly identify the pros and cons of riding the bus vs. taking several cars. Riding a bus can be very fun, very accessible, but also very stimulating. Riding a car may take less time, but can be more boring than a train, or too stimulating (noisy), and might not accommodate a wheelchair, for example. Most girls love to ride a train, but the overnight destination needs to be within a reasonable walking distance from the train station. Girls will also need to bring a small day pack or "quiet bag" for the trip. They should bring a snack, a water bottle, and several things to occupy their time. Some girls might need to bring items they use for self-calming, such as a blanket or fidget toy. Troop volunteers may wish to look up some fun car games ahead of time, or lead the girls in some songs during the trip.

Packing for the Trip. Two tips that are very useful for all troops new to overnight trips are: the Generic Packing List, and luggage drop off the night before. A Generic Packing List is a long list of items a girl might need for any sort of trip, with a check boxes next to each item. Ask your Troop Program Manager if you need a copy of a Generic Packing List. Girls use this list at a meeting to check off only what they need for *this particular trip*. For example, not every trip requires a bathing suit or a winter coat. This particular trip might need 2 underwear and 3 pair of socks. Using a Generic Packing List in a diverse troop is beneficial for the girl who can't think abstractly or has trouble staying on task. It goes much quicker than thinking up a packing list from scratch. The other tip is to pack the car or drop off the duffle bag the night before departure. This affords the troop leader time to gather medications and instructions without singling out those girls, and to check for any forgotten items of importance for all girls. Parents can then send their girl with that forgotten coat, for example, the next day when the troop departs. It's also much faster to load the cars with everything dropped off the night before, and a

couple parent volunteers to assist packing the cars. Leaving on time helps prevent behavior issues, so sometimes luggage drop off the night before is imperative.

Community Agreements and Kaper Charts. The success of an overnight trip depends heavily on prosocial behavior and sharing the work. Troops will find it valuable to write up a community agreement for the trip, that might include various things like: staying positive, using the buddy system, not eating in the leader's car, doing kapers with a smile, how to determine who gets the top bunks, what time is quiet time/bedtime, and whether cell phones are allowed for part of the trip, etc. Girls prone to overstimulation might wish to come up with a code word (e.g. Cheerios) to indicate they need more personal space or less noise, or a brief self-time out. Part of the community agreement is to respect the needs of everyone in the troop and not to belittle a girl for needing extra time, or for using her code word.

Overnight trips involve more activities and tasks than day trips, and kaper charts are a great way to give everyone the opportunity to help set up and clean up an activity or meal. Some troops break the troop into smaller groups of 3-4 girls, called patrols, to accomplish their kapers, and allow girls within the patrol to self-determine who will do which part of the kaper. The Junior Girl Scout program level is a great time to begin experimenting with patrols. Patrols level the playing field for girls with special needs, especially when girls are assigned to patrols randomly and the patrols are re-drawn every couple months.

Planning Activities and Menus. A girl-led troop will give all girls a voice in determining what kinds of activities will take place on the trip. Troop volunteers guide this process and help achieve consensus on a reasonable list of activities. Knowing ahead of time what sorts of things to expect is usually very calming for all girls. You'll soon find that girls have lots of opinions on what to eat during their trip. Menu planning will give girls a chance to lead with ideas, and volunteers will guide final choices to ensure that all girls can enjoy most, or all, parts of the meal. It's nearly impossible to please everyone, so don't try. Make sure there is always a "PB & J" option (if not peanut allergic) for the girl who doesn't like what was cooked. Advise the girls to consider meals with choices of ingredients, such as a build-your-own taco, baked potato, stew packet, etc. You'll be more successful in handling diverse dietary needs and preferences.

As for other activities on the overnighter, such as crafts, hiking, or working on a badge or outdoor skills, the role of the volunteer is to anticipate everything needed to make the activity barrier-free and accessible to every girl as much as possible. Please reference the other sections of this handbook for challenges posed by different ability levels and the suggestions for solutions that work around the challenge.

If your troop has chosen to camp at a campground, it is recommended to call the property manager with any questions on accessibility or terrain. Some volunteers feel more comfortable visiting the campground ahead of time.

Girls in the Junior level or older may be able to help identify any barriers to participation ahead of time. Will there be steps, gravel paths, or steep hills that are difficult for some troop members to navigate? If so, what's the best way to handle that? In addition to any physical challenges posed, might there be any emotional challenges to consider? Will the place be crowded or noisy? If so, what will the girls do to cope with that? Questions like these build empathy and good planning skills in your troop.

Safety Issues and Chaperones. Finally, girls can assist in reviewing basic safety elements of the overnight or weekend trip prior to going. The Safety Checkpoints on the Volunteer Learning web site are a good place to start. Most troops use the buddy system, or for groups of three, the "truddy" system. Some troops find it useful to make colorful troop t-shirts, or wear unique, colorful bandannas, to quickly spot the girls. Older girls might find it helpful to enter leader cell phones into their phone in case of separation. Quiz your girls on any other safety elements that should be considered, such as staying hydrated on a hot day.

Inclusive troops need more adults than recommended for the usual adult-to-girl ratio. An extra adult or two will come in very handy. Some troops are very successful using a 1:1 ratio adult to girl for the first several overnighters. This has an extra benefit for the troop leader of identifying which adults are particularly skilled on overnight trips for promoting calmness and attentiveness in the girls, and those adults who give girls the "just right" amount of help instead of doing all the work for them.

Tips During the Overnighter. Always plan your trip to arrive before dark. In an inclusive trip, this is very important. Many issues are exacerbated by darkness, and arriving while it is still light enough to unpack and settle is very important. It will get your trip off to a great start. It is recommended that troops new to overnight trips have girls bring a sack dinner and beverage. That first night is not a great time to be cooking a meal. Better to keep it simple and roast marshmallows instead, or share a nice dessert.

Troop volunteers should not overschedule the girls during the trip. Planning too many activities too close together sets the troop up for disappointment and stress. A better practice is to have slots of "free time" for the girls to choose what they want to do, and often it's just conversing with the other scouts. Another good practice is "B.O.B. time" after lunch: "Body On Bunk" time. That's time for girls and volunteers alike to recharge their energy levels. Girls with special needs, on average, require more rest time than those without, so BOB time is a great way to meet that need.

If you have girls in the troop that require assistance in moving from chair to bunk, or with toileting, you can discuss this ahead of time with their parent/guardian. At your overnighter, be sure to ask the girl what assistance she needs. She will be able to tell you what she needs and how to help her. Always make sure all girls are respectful of her needs, and that toileting and dressing are handled discreetly.

The need for flexibility cannot be underscored. You will come on the trip with a rough schedule of what is happening when, but be willing to move things around a bit as the trip progresses to meet the needs of the girls. Meal preparation often takes longer than expected, and sometimes the girls' curiosity is sparked by a frog they just caught and want to play with for an hour, and it wasn't on the schedule. It's helpful to check in with the girls frequently and ask if they are enjoying themselves, and check if they are hungry or thirsty. A running feedback loop is valuable so you can modify the activities as you go. Follow their lead and you'll have a great trip.

Nightfall and Bedtime. If you have girls in the troop using adaptive technology or hearing aids, be sure to store these things safely in a moisture-free environment at night to prevent damage or loss. Nightfall and bedtime are often an especially challenging time for girls with special needs. Many troops bring glow-sticks for nightlights and to mark doorways, or the leaders' sleeping area. Girls who are light sleepers would benefit from ear plugs and an eyeshade or towel over their eyes.

Many troops, whether they have girls with special needs or not, have successfully used a bedtime routine for their overnight trips. It's recommended to ban ghost stories out of sensitivity for some of the girls. Some troops have a book they read from for the girls; you're never too old for a bedtime story! Other troops play calming music for ten minutes. Remember that in the "Promoting Calm Attentiveness" learning module, we discussed how visual and auditory stimuli can work either for or against the desired outcomes, especially at bedtime and dawn. Community agreements and routines help all girls anticipate what comes next, and to settle their busy brains for sleep. Contact parents/guardians of girls with special needs in advance for bedtime advice.

After your overnight trip. At the next troop meeting, take time to reflect on the trip. Reflection is an important part of the event, because it teaches girls how to evaluate which part of their planning went well or not-so-well, and why. Many troops benefit from a "Roses, Thorns, and Buds" topic at their meeting. During this topic, each girl (using a buddy to speak for her, if necessary) gives an example of a Rose, a Thorn, and a Bud. A "Rose" is something that well particularly well during the day trip, resulting in something she enjoyed. A "Thorn" is something that she didn't enjoy, or didn't go smoothly. A "Bud" is an idea for a whole new trip, or something she would like to do on the trip if it's repeated. Getting your girls accustomed to this kind of debriefing is a valuable life skill.

Take time to congratulate yourself for “rising to the challenge” and taking your diverse troop on an overnight or weekend trip! It is likely you won’t accomplish everything you set out to do, or that the trip went perfectly, but you will have given each of the girls a wonderful opportunity to fundraise, budget, plan, carry out, and reflect on a trip. The only place they can get this kind of leadership training is in Girl Scouts, and only because wonderful volunteers like you make it possible.

Troop Leader Resources

<CLICK HERE> for a video about troop leader resources, and troop leader self care.

Troop Leader Self Care

It is important for the troop leader to be in a *good place* from which to lead. We can only share compassion with the girls in our troop if we are compassionate with ourselves. Below are some words of wisdom from other troop leaders that hopefully will help you to **take care of yourself**, **set boundaries**, and **resolve conflicts.**

- **Practice the calming techniques on yourself when you feel stressed!** Everyone can benefit from ways to reduce stress, and keep calm! Feel free to incorporate into your routine the tips and tricks presented in this manual whenever you feel stressed.

- **Ask for help!** We mentioned this already, but it bears repeating here. Leading a troop of diverse needs can be challenging, so you have a right to ask for help! **Looking to the parents of the girl with special needs, or your service unit or another sister troop are good places to start. Be creative, and *think outside the box.*** Contact your Service Unit Manager (SUM), or Troop Program Manager (TPM), or Girl Scouts of Western Washington staff as soon as you feel that you are in over your head! They are available to help you manage conflict.

- **Knowledge is power!** Taking a few moments to read up on the types of challenges the girl in your troop has, and/or meeting with her parents/guardians can be very empowering. Not only will you be equipped with options to try, but you can gain insights into the girl’s inner world, which can help with empathy and creative

problem-solving.

- **Let the girls you work with know what you expect**. If you expect someone to be polite and listen when you are giving instructions and then you get interrupted, let that individual know your expectations. Early in the program, set limits on behavior you will or will not accept. Even if certain behaviors are accepted at home, you can say, "*At Girl Scouts we do not yell at each other. We do our best to be friendly and helpful. That is part of the Girl Scout Law."*

- **We usually get what we expect.** If we go into a situation dreading it because it might be difficult, it usually will be. The more positive we are, the more positive the result will be. When a girl says "I can't" or "You do it" (as opposed for asking for specific help) it's time to say: "*In Girl Scouts we each put our own chairs away. Put your chair by the wall next to the other chairs."*

- **How we react can set the pattern for behavior.** If a situation arises that is unpleasant, try to remain calm and react positively. Keep in mind you are a role model for how you want that girl to react to HER OWN negative experiences.

- **Frame your instructions using the *mannequin rule*.** Tell the girls what you want them TO do, rather than what you want them NOT to do. If a mannequin can do it (be quiet, stop touching your neighbor), it's **not** a helpful instruction. Instead, look for actions to have them do that are inconsistent with them being able to do the negative behavior (cover your mouth, sit on your hands, etc).

- **Try to deal with one situation at a time.** If Dana steps on someone's toe and later drops her towel in the pool, try to keep each incident separate. Try to avoid letting a number of events build up and thereby influence your reactions.

- **Try to see the situation as the girl sees it.** If we try to put ourselves in the other person's position, we might be able to understand why she is reacting this way. A girl may be trying to *test the limits*. On the other hand, she may not realize that she is causing a problem: for example, Dana may already know how to swim, and she may want to practice her strokes by swimming up and down the entire length of the pool. She may not realize that this distance is too advanced for her.

- **In conflict situations, use "I" statements**, such as "I am feeling overwhelmed," or "I have limits on what I am able to do in this situation" to avoid blaming.

When and How to Set Limits on Behaviors in the Troop

When a girl's disability causes constant outbreaks of unacceptable and disruptive behavior, adult volunteers may have to make a hard decision: is the behavior so consistently disruptive that the group is unable to function? Is the girl's behavior dangerous to herself or others? If either of these is true, it's acceptable to remove the girl from the troop or group setting, however, contact Girl Scout staff to be sure you are following the correct procedures. This does not mean she is no longer a Girl Scout,* but it does mean she will now participate as a non-troop member (a Juliette), working with an adult partner to earn awards or to attend service unit or council events.

Before a girl is removed from a troop, it's important for these things to happen **first:**

- Group volunteers talk with the girl's parents/guardians/care-givers on a regular basis about her behavior, and have tried simple behavior modification tips recommended by them, a teacher, or other experienced person.
- Group volunteers let their Service Unit Manager or council support person know what is happening, and document the girl's actions and their own (talked with parents, tried different techniques to change behavior.)
- Group volunteers talk directly with the girl herself, being sure she understands the consequences of her actions. If appropriate, they use a Behavior Contract with the girl and her parents/guardians/caregivers.
- Group volunteers and their Service Unit Manager or council support person meet with the parents/guardians (and girl, if appropriate) to summarize the experience and explain why the girl may no longer attend troop/group meetings.

Be sure everyone understands that the girl is still a Girl Scout and may continue to work on badges or journeys or other awards, and participate in service unit and council events with an adult partner. If realistic (this will depend on the girl's situation), offer parents the opportunity to let her try again in a troop/group setting when there is a significant improvement in her behavior.

Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is a great tool for incorporating inclusion in a hands-on way that benefits both girls. “The Peer Coaching program is built on the philosophy of learn-teach-learn. With peer coaching, both individuals are actively coaching and learning at the same time” (Wastell, 2016). A local Girl Scout of Western Washington wrote a wonderful handbook as a resource for students who are interested in being a peer coach.

Peer Coaching Handbook.pdf

Utilizing Parents as a Resource

<CLICK HERE> for an overview video about utilizing parents as a resource.

<CLICK HERE> for an video about cultural factors you may need to be aware of, for first or second generation Americans (such as how various cultures around the world view people with special needs).

The parents of a girl with special needs can be a great resource! They often have good ideas of what works, as well as what to avoid. They can also help fill in background information about the girl, to help with insights and empathy. They can help you identify the girls’ strengths and interests, so that she can be celebrated as a unique individual. And they can often help point you in the direction of resources, information, places to ask for help, or equipment used at home that can be utilized at a troop meeting. Depending upon the circumstances or needs, they can provide 1:1 help at troop meetings with their daughter (or with others in the troop so that your assistant troop leader can assist more closely with the girl with special needs, depending upon what works best).

When connecting with the parent of the girl with special needs, you will be able to share a common bond: the love and commitment we all have as people who cheerlead our children and young adults. And yet, there is an additional layer of complexity that parents of children with special needs face that most others who relate to “typically developing” children and youth don’t experience.

Below is a partial list of issues that parents of children with special needs often experience that are either unique to their situation, or much more intense compared to those who parent “typically developing” children.

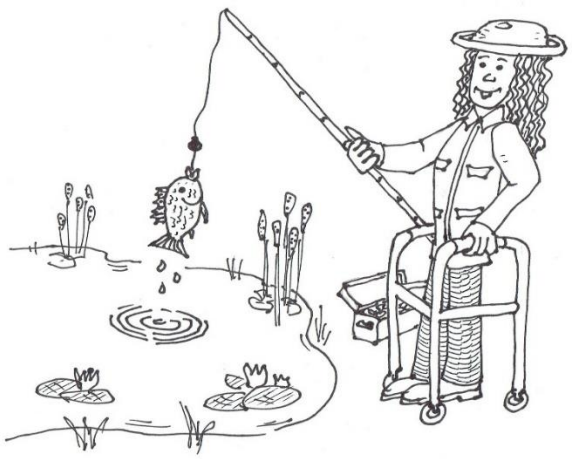
- Large amounts of time devoted to advocating to make sure their child’s needs are met, and rights are respected.
- Repeated experiences of seeing their child rejected and excluded from various social situations.
- Desiring to accept and celebrate their child’s accomplishments in a world that has a different definition of success, and extends only pity/judgement towards their child.
- Worry about the future… will my child be able to be independent when they grow up? What happens when I am no longer around to take care of them?
- Feeling scrutinized by people: extended family members, the child’s teachers, the stranger at the grocery store (to name a few)… who all have an opinion of what the parent is *doing wrong*.
- Large amounts of time devoted to therapies, medical appointments, therapeutic diets or other interventions, taking up all the family’s financial and emotional resources.
- Grief from the loss of their “dream child” – the one they envisioned when they first became a parent. Various life events that call into question whether the child will ever achieve what we all expect our children to accomplish, such as graduating from school and moving out and becoming self-sufficient, can cause the parent to grieve these losses even in advance. Feelings of denial, anger, bargaining, and depression may result, before acceptance is attained.

All of this can be exhausting, and sometimes results in families feeling socially isolated, and/or hyper-defensive about their child and how the parents are raising them.

The good news is, collaboration is possible! Below are some tips to consider:

- Start by acknowledging in your own mind that every girl in your troop comes with a unique set of strengths and needs. Normalize the conversations with such phrases as “I want to explore how we can best elevate the strengths of <name of girl>, and help her to be successful in the troop.” Help the parent to see that you engage in this same process with every member of the troop.
- Try as much as possible (when conversing with the parent) to weave into the conversation that you LIKE his/her daughter, and point out ways in which the girl contributes to the troop.
- Find creative ways for the girl with special needs to shine, and brag to the parent about these accomplishments!
- Keep your conversations focused around logistics and accommodations, not around (emotionally charged) labels. Labels don’t help to move a plan forward.

- When the need for assistance or accommodations is identified, include the parent in the team of people to provide (or arrange for) what is needed. Ask questions such as, “how do you propose WE accomplish that?” Identify the current resources in your troop available to meet the needs of the members of the troop. If necessary, remind the parent that Girl Scouts is a volunteer-led organization, and all parents of the girls in the troop are called upon to contribute what they are able. Use “I” statements when setting boundaries of how much you are able (willing) to offer help to meet the need at hand.
- If 1:1 help is needed for the girl, brainstorm with the parent on options to receive help from other sources, asking the parent to take the lead on securing the necessary assistance for their child. Remember, often both parent and daughter need a break from each other, so thinking creatively on ways to help the girl in the troop without involving the parent (if possible) is a win-win for everyone. With the parent in charge of arranging the 1:1 help, if they can’t find someone else to play that role, they will usually offer to play that role themselves without anyone having to make ultimatums.
- If the parent is in denial about (or refuses to acknowledge a problem with) the need for their daughter to receive 1:1 help, be very specific and concrete in the feedback you give. Stay away from generalizations that may appear as if you are vilifying their child. Again, try to keep the conversations focused on logistics and needs. Frame it in terms of how it is in the best interest of this girl to have more positive experiences than the one she is currently having. Reiterate that you like their daughter, and are trying to implement solutions to make it work so that it is a positive place for everyone. Ask how the girl’s needs are met successfully in other environments, to get a feel for what works, as well as giving the parent an opportunity to share success stories.
- Validate the feelings and needs of the parent (that are the undercurrent of the discussion), without coming across as patronizing.
- If necessary, you may need to reiterate to the parent that, as a troop leader, you are a volunteer and, as such, do not have all the resources that their child might have available when in school.
- As a last resort, bring in a Girl Scout representative to help mediate the conflict.



Resources for Further Learning

Adapting Badge and Journey Activities for Girls with Special Needs.docx

www.arcofkingcounty.org

Autism and Scouting Training Materials: http://www.autismempowerment.org/autism-scouting-program/leadership-training-kit/autism-scouting-training-kit-materials/

http://www.autismempowerment.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Incredible-5-Point-Scale-Fact-Sheet-rev.pdf

https://www.autismspeaks.org/

http://www.exceptionalfamilies.org/

http://www.inclusionproject.org/

https://kindering.org/

Peer Coaching Handbook.pdf

http://www.washington.edu/doit/washington-state-resources-parents-children-and-youth-disabilities

www.wapave.org

Forms

Getting to know ... (inclusion form).pub

If you would like information please contact *Girl Scouts of Western Washington* through our website at https://www.GirlScoutsWW.org/en/about-girl-scouts/contact-us.html, or call Customer Care's toll-free number 1-800-541-9852, or email CustomerCare@GirlScoutsWW.org.

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