Adapting Activities

Food Allergies as a Special Need

Food allergies are not disabilities by the usual meaning of the word, but at the same time, accommodating food allergies requires the same mindset as accommodating a special need. Just like an invisible disability, accommodating food allergies requires good communication with the Scout and the Scout’s parents. Food allergies can create a resentful social dynamic when many Scouts are denied a food or treat they really enjoy in order to protect one Scout with a food allergy.

Food allergies can trigger itching, swelling, rashes, or in the extreme anaphylactic shock. Other variations cause miserable gastric distress rather than outward itching. Unless you have personal experience with such an extreme reaction, it may be hard to understand why parents are afraid to place their child in a situation the parents don’t control. Fortunately, when parents entrust their Scouts to us, they are typically open with us about their Scout’s allergies.

The obvious step with allergies is to carefully check the ingredient lists of the foods you purchase. Usually, less processed foods are safer. The less obvious part is preventing cross contamination of cooking and eating utensils. Scouts are not all diligent dishwashers, so an extra degree of planning and supervision is needed to protect a...
Scout with a food allergy. You need to recognize that a surface can be germ-free (sanitary), but not entirely free of allergen residue. It may take a separate set of utensils and/or more elaborate washing procedures to be safe. In a resident camp setting, early and detailed coordination with dining hall staff is wise, but it may still be necessary to bring safe foods to camp with you.

As a final note, all of these tips for accommodating food allergies can be applied to accommodating religious dietary restrictions as well.

As always......Be Prepared!

**Jamboree Joe: The Power of the Can-Do Attitude**

This story has been shared with Scouters nationwide by Charles Dahlquist, National Commissioner, in a recent issue of *Scouting Magazine*.

Joe could be any Scout. This particular Scout attended the National Scout Jamboree last year. While we all face our daily challenges, Joe faces a lot more than most Jamboree attendees. He arrived with a motorized cart and a special aide to help him.

Some people might discourage a Scout with disabilities from visiting the Jamboree’s Action Point, or from attending the Jamboree at all. But Joe was met with a "Can Do!" attitude by the staffers at Action Point. He had the time of his life.

On his first morning at the Jamboree, Joe's aide asked, "What do you want to do today?" Joe replied, "I want to go mountain biking!" So off they went to Action Point.

When they arrived, a staffer asked Joe, "Have you ever ridden a bike?"
Joe replied, "No, but this sounds fun!"

As he looked at Joe, the young staffer could easily have said, "We're glad you're here, but this course is just too dangerous for you."

Instead he said, "Let's see if we can make this work!"

He called over another young staff member to assist him. They all put on bike helmets and the staffers got Joe on the bike, holding onto the handlebars for dear life! With one staffer on one side of Joe and one on the other, they guided Joe all the way through a most rigorous mountain bike course.

When they finished, Joe was ecstatic. While the two staffers were worn out and doubled over with fatigue, Joe said, "That was super!"
One of the staffers straightened up and asked Joe, "Have you ever been on a skateboard?"

Joe replied, "No, but it sounds fun!"

Off they went to the Summit skateboard park for another wonderful adventure. To literally top off his experience, he next took the canopy tour.

Following the Jamboree, Joe reached another Scouting summit: he completed the requirements for Eagle. His court of honor took place in March, 2018.

**Awareness Events**

**Philmont Training: DIVERSEability and DisABILITY**

**What:** DIVERSEability and DisABILITY - How to apply proper methods in Scouting with Special Needs.

**Where:** Philmont Training Center

**When:** PTC Course Week 8 (July 29-August 4)

This course is for Scouters, professionals, and parents that have a passion for helping Scouts with disAbilities become involved in all that Scouting has to offer. This course will help you to start or strengthen a Disabilities Awareness Committee within your council and show Scout leaders proper procedures, modifications, resources, and supports that can help our Scouts with special needs experience the outing in Scouting. See how you can help Scouts advance at all levels, experience programming, feel included and empowered to make a difference in the lives of others along with helping their communities.

**Adapting Advancement**

**Registering Qualified Members Beyond the Age of Eligibility**

*Reprinted from Advancement News, March 2018*

The 2017 Guide to Advancement is a great resource for answering many questions; especially those regarding Advancement for Members with Special Needs. Section 10.1.0.0 is a great place to start as it discusses registering
qualified members beyond the age of eligibility. We’ll try to address what the word “qualified” means for you here.

The Advancement Program offers some flexibility to assist members with special needs to advance in rank via alternate requirements and merit badge options. Often this flexibility enables Scouts to meet needed requirements to advance in rank within the age requirements.

The GTA says that qualifying for registration beyond the age of eligibility is a lot different and can only be granted when “the disability is permanent and so severe that it precludes advancement even at a rate significantly slower than considered normal.” It goes on to further say that “registration beyond the age of eligibility is intended as a permanent arrangement to allow ongoing participation as a youth member in the Scouting program.”

To learn more details about examples of conditions that could qualify please see Section 10.1.0.1. The next section, 10.1.0.2, will also help you understand how to register a member beyond the age of eligibility.

Waiting until nearly aging out, or having an advancement professional telling families to wait until the Scout is 16 or older to register beyond the age of eligibility (RBAE) is not helpful. The strongest and most charitable reason for registering as early as the qualifying nature of the disability is known is that the RBAE process documents the

Managing Subscriptions to Abilities Digest

Abilities Digest is designed for council and district disabilities awareness committees, related staff advisors, and any leader who would offer a Scouting program to youth who have special needs. Any Scouting volunteer or professional may subscribe.

Subscribing. Send a message to disabilities.awareness@scouting.org, with “SUBSCRIBE” in the subject line. Indicate your name, email address, and council in the message text.

Unsubscribing. To decline future issues please reply and enter “REMOVE” in the subject line. We will remove the subscription within the next two weeks.

Receiving Multiple Copies. If you receive Abilities Digest at more than one email address, choose the one to be removed and reply with “REMOVE” in the subject line. Include a message requesting that we remove only that email address.

Duplicate Copies. If you receive more than one copy of Abilities Digest at the same email address, please reply to all but one of them with “DUPLICATE” in the subject line.

Address Change. If you want Abilities Digest sent to a different address, reply and enter “ADDRESS CHANGE” in the subject line. In your message, enter your council name and the email address you prefer.
qualifying disability, which is the first step for requesting all accommodations/modifications/alternative requirements for advancement. Having this qualification in place early will benefit the Scout in the long term.

The foregoing covers the technical side of things, but here’s a few simple tips we hope will also help:

- **DON’T WAIT!** - The only types of disabilities that permit Scouts to be registered beyond the age of eligibility are permanent, so please don’t wait until the Scout is approaching the end of their eligibility to apply and submit the paperwork that is required.

- Read the GTA and ask questions if you are unsure. Many councils have committees that can address these for you.

- Communicate and work together. Parents and Scout leaders should work together to discuss advancement and options available to help a Scout advance if and when possible.

- Once a Scout is approved to continue to advance beyond the age of eligibility, please be sure their registration in the system has the proper disability code.

The Request for Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility, No. 512-935, found in the appendix (of the GTA) and at www.scouting.org/advancement, should be used in this process.

**Merit Badges and Scouts with Disabilities**

“Scout Jay has serious vision impairment, but he’s really excited about the Astronomy Merit Badge. Can he earn it?”

Substitute any merit badge for “Astronomy” and you have a common but tricky question. The answer lies in the exact written requirements. Scout Jay must meet the requirements exactly as written, no more and no less. If a disability prevents him from completing the requirements, then Jay must earn a different merit badge.

**About Abilities Digest**

*Abilities Digest* is the official e-letter of the Boy Scouts of America National Disabilities Awareness Committee. Its mission is to expand membership through helping parents and Scouting volunteers to improve their understanding, knowledge, and skills related to including and serving the special needs population. Therefore, districts and councils may reprint articles from this publication. Our plan is to distribute four issues of *Abilities Digest* annually, but special editions may go out whenever there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at disabilities.awareness@scouting.org.
Modern merit badge requirements are often flexible to benefit Scouts with disabilities. For example, most merit badges don’t explicitly require reading, writing, or speaking. Instead of saying “Write a list of the five most visible planets,” or “Recite a list of the five most visible planets,” the Astronomy requirement simply says “List the five most visible planets.” The form and structure of the list is not part of the requirement.

Requirement 4A poses a more interesting challenge: Identify at least 10 constellations in the sky. One merit badge counselor punched holes in paper plates and held them over the Scout’s head outside at night, in the right place for the night sky. The Scout used both hands to feel and identify the constellations.

Another counselor uses a slightly different approach with visually impaired Scouts: The counselor puts thumb tacks in the correct formations on cardboard for the constellations in the summer sky. The Scouts feel the thumb tacks, identify its orientation by clock time (“3 o’clock” for example), and then trace the constellation in the air. By the end of the training, the Scouts simply need to know the direction they stand to locate the constellations. It’s fun and it fulfills the merit badge requirement.

**Eagle required merit badges**

If disabilities prevent a Scout from meeting the requirements for an Eagle required merit badge, then the Scout can’t earn that badge. The Scout can still earn Eagle by requesting alternate merit badges. Here are some suggested alternatives:

**For Camping:**
- Backpacking, Canoeing, Pioneering, Rowing, Search and Rescue, Wilderness Survival

**For Communications:**
- Digital Technology, Electronics, Graphic Arts, Photography, Public Speaking, Radio, Salesmanship

**For Emergency Preparedness or Lifesaving:**

There is a special application form to request alternatives. The form contains a longer list of alternative merit badges, but even that list is not complete. The choice of alternative badges should be made by the unit leaders while keeping in mind the purpose of the Eagle Scout Award. Almost any merit badge may be substituted, if the choice provides a reasonable accommodation and reflects common sense.

The Scout and leaders should plan ahead if the Scout intends to apply for alternative merit badges. **An alternative merit badge can not be one that the Scout has already earned.** The Scout should not attempt an alternative merit
badge until after the application is approved. If the Scout has already finished a worthy alternative merit badge, a different merit badge must be proposed on the application.

To apply for alternative merit badges, the Scout’s disability must be severe and permanent. The application must include a statement from a qualified health-care professional describing why the Scout is unable to complete the required merit badges. The application is signed by the Scout’s parents and unit leaders. It is then reviewed and approved at both the district and council level. The council’s advancement committee makes the final decision.

Detailed requirements appear in the *Guide to Advancement*, Section 10.2.2.3. They are also summarized on the Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges.

**Recognizing Abilities**

**How Scouts with Down Syndrome Earn Eagle**

A Scout on the trail to Eagle became a national news story earlier this year when his journey was interrupted. As Bryan Wendell of *Scouting Magazine* noted, the news coverage produced “some misconceptions” about Scouting for youth with Down syndrome. To correct a few of these misunderstandings, let us look at some Scouts with Down syndrome who have earned their Eagle rank.

A brief search uncovered the stories of Coleman and Brandt, Adam, Zach and Mike, Elliott, a second Zach, Max, Daniel, and a third Zach. The Helpful Links section of this newsletter cites the news items about these Eagle Scouts.

Not every Scout can hike and swim, and not every Scout advances as fast as every other. If a Scout has a bona fide medical condition, like Down syndrome, the Scout can still complete the trail to Eagle. Some Scouts follow their own, customized trail with alternate requirements and/or time extensions in special circumstances. These customizations require special approval.

A Scout with Down syndrome earns the same Eagle award as any other Scout. Every Scout is supposed to complete requirements exactly as written, no more and no less. Today’s badge requirements usually allow for reading and/or writing disabilities. If a Scout can’t possibly meet a requirement, there are alternatives to earn the same rank.

If a disability prevents a Scout from meeting requirements for lower ranks, like Tenderfoot and First Class, the local council may approve alternate requirements. The troop must apply to the council, identify the requirements that can’t be met, provide medical documentation of the disability, and describe the alternate requirements. Adam, for example, could not swim unaided. The council approved an alternate requirement in which he used a kickboard as an aid.
Scouts may not substitute requirements within a merit badge. If a Scout’s disability prevents earning a merit badge, the Scout must substitute it with an alternate that can be earned. Again, this requires documentation from a health care professional and the local council must approve the alternative.

Many Scouts, especially those with Down syndrome, learn more slowly than others. Zach #2 found this true for the Citizenship in the Community, Personal Management, and Lifesaving merit badges.

Scouts with a severe and permanent developmental disability may make progress so slowly that they can’t finish their Eagle by age 18. In such cases, the Scout may be eligible to register as a youth member beyond the age of 18. Daniel, for example, finished his at age 20; friends Zach and Mike finished at age 23. Many Scouts with Down syndrome finish at later ages, some in their 50s.

People treat the Eagle rank as an exceptional achievement. There is no “junior” Eagle award for Scouts with disabilities. All Scouts face similar challenges on the trail to Eagle and receive the same award. Scouts with disabilities earn 21 merit badges, each by fulfilling their requirements as written. All Eagle Scouts have completed an Eagle Project and served as leaders in their units. All Eagle Scouts deserve to wear the award with pride.

Stephen Marriott, Advocate for Scouting with Disabilities

Excerpted from Scouting Magazine, March-April 2018

On Action Point, at the Summit Bechtel Reserve, there stands a bronze statue of young Stephen G. Marriott (1957-2013) in his Scout uniform. Stephen was a business leader, Distinguished Eagle Scout, and advocate for people with disabilities. His statue overlooks the site of the Disabilities Awareness Challenge during the 2013 and 2017 National Scout Jamborees. In the future the site will contain a permanent facility dedicated to disabilities awareness.

The planned center will give Scouts the opportunity to experience some of the disabilities that people with physical challenges must live with every day. Scouts will take training and complete exercises to help them get a feel for what it would be like to have these kinds of challenges.

“I think it’s really impactful for Scouts to learn what it’s like to be disabled, if only for a few minutes, and to have a better appreciation for those who are less fortunate,” says J.W. “Bill” Marriott Jr., Stephen’s father.
“I think everybody needs to be more accommodating and everybody needs to have a better understanding of what it’s like to be disabled,” Bill Marriott adds. “But if we’re strong and healthy, we take it for granted. We don’t have the ability to understand what it’s like to be disabled.”

Stephen Marriott died in 2013 from complications of mitochondrial disease. The rare muscle disorder gradually cost him his eyesight, hearing and strength before taking his life at age 54.

Because of the effects of the disease, Stephen began having difficulty seeing and hearing as a boy. He wore hearing aids in high school. As a graduate school student, he struggled to read the blackboard in his business classes. Eventually, he lost all his sight. Muscle disorders caused by the ailment, meanwhile, prevented him from using Braille.

But Stephen accepted his difficulties and never shrank from life’s challenges. After earning his Eagle rank, he completed a two-year church mission. Returning to school, he earned a bachelor’s degree from Brigham Young University. Later he received a Master of Business Administration from Arizona State University.

Stephen was active in his community, including as an adult Scouter who served at the unit and council levels. He also was a board member or otherwise involved with a number of organizations dedicated to helping people with disabilities. They included the American Foundation for the Blind, the American Speech–Language–Hearing Association, and the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

Along with these activities, Stephen had a successful career in the family business, Marriott International, started by his grandfather.

As his illness made it increasingly difficult for him to see, Stephen began using a voice-activated computer. He used a wheelchair to get around and had a guide to assist him when he visited Marriott’s properties. Even as his struggles with the illness increased, Stephen endeavored to go to work every day, his father says.

Stephen was not shy about putting himself in the public eye. He was an energetic advocate for the disabled, as well as a longtime sales trainer. He gave many speeches, which in later years he memorized.

Stephen Marriott’s statue celebrates his advocacy and passion for disabilities awareness. His passion, plus the support of his family and other Scouting philanthropists, will establish a permanent Disabilities Awareness presence at the Summit.
Helpful Links

Official Materials Posted on Scouting.org


Resources from Articles

AbleScouts: Abilities Digest articles posted online – ablescouts.org

Philmont Training course: http://www.philmontscoutranch.org/PTC/conferencesE/DIVERSEabilityAndDisABILITY.aspx

Eagle Scouts with Down syndrome

Coleman and Brandt: https://scoutingmagazine.org/2016/10/dallas-ice-cream-shop-employs-scouts-syndrome/

Adam: https://patch.com/illinois/frankfort/teen-with-down-syndrome-becomes-eagle-scout-years-before-most


Zach #3: http://www.kearneyhub.com/opinions/hubopinions/down-syndrome-nephew-achieves-eagle-scout/article_69760476-9524-11e5-9cd2-ab79b70114c0.html

Other Web Resources

Working with Scouts with disAbilities - www.wwswd.org/

Autism Empowerment website - www.AutismEmpowerment.org

Autism and Scouting website - www.autismempowerment.org/autism-scouting-program/

Social Media

Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165 — Twitter: @AbilitiesDigest

Email your comments and questions to: disabilities.awareness@scouting.org