

F: Methods for Many Types of SND

MODULE F: METHODS THAT APPLY TO MANY TYPES OF SPECIAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

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Fundamentally, supporting a person with a disability is very individualized, taking into account what the person can do and what the person struggles to do. However, there are some methods that apply to disabilities in general or cover a wide range of disabilities. This module covers these methods, and you will find that all Scouts can benefit from them, whether disabled or not. When you develop a plan to support a specific individual, you can use the general information here along with the more specific information and methods you will find in Modules H through S.

About 15% of Scouts have an acknowledged special need or disability^[1] and the majority of those that have a need have one that is “invisible”. That means that there is little about the person’s physical appearance or behavior that indicates that they have a disability or special need. Their needs are not obvious to all, so it is essential to communicate and build a trusting supportive relationship in order to understand what is needed for the Scout to grow.

THE REACH MODEL

The REACH model represents both an acronym for how we interact with all Scouts, including those with disabilities, and a conceptual model for what we hope to do for those with disabilities. The acronym represents:

- **RESPECT** all Scouts as stated in the Scout Law.
- **ENCOURAGE** all Scouts to become their best, to improve, and to achieve their goals.
- **ACCEPT** where each Scout is on his or her journey through Scouting and show tolerance.
- **CARE** and show concern for all.

- **HONOR** each other's differences and help to grow all Scouts' abilities.

The REACH model is an attitude that applies to all Scouts. "Reach" is also a good way to look at how we implement the Scouting programs. The Scouting curriculum is designed to give youth opportunities to strive and reach out to experience and do new things. Often they do not know what they are capable of until they try. Youth with disabilities have the same need to be successful and accepted as others do, both socially and emotionally. Scouting is designed to present some difficulty, but should never be impossible. When we look at adaptations, accommodations, and methods of supporting Scouts with special needs, our goal is to be creative and bring things that are impossible within the **reach** of the Scout. All Scouts build confidence from accomplishing the difficult. All Scouts benefit from the encouragement and support of their fellow Scouts.

JOINING CONFERENCES

There are many factors that may cause difficulty for a Scout, with or without a special need. By knowing these factors in advance, you can prevent unnecessary hardships. Triggering factors may include loud abrupt noises, whistles, PA systems, bright lights, changes in tones, changes in routine, and so forth. As you begin to understand a Scout's special needs, you may observe behaviors you should discuss with the Scout's family. Reach out and talk to the family. Building an initial foundation of trust will help later.

It is essential to learn what each Scout needs in order to have an opportunity to be successful and this begins with building a line of communication with the Scout's parents or guardians. It is highly recommended that a unit have an organized effort to have a **joining conference** for every new Scout joining a unit, before the first overnight outing^[2], within the first couple of months.

A joining conference is similar to a parent-teacher conference at the beginning of a school year. Ideally, the adult leader that will have the most interaction with the Scout will meet with the parents or guardians to get to know the Scout better. In Cub Scouting where new leaders and new youth often arrive at the same time, experienced leaders in the Pack will need to provide some "quick start" mentoring for new leaders to do joining conferences.

Remember, Scouting is open to all youth, so the joining conference happens after the youth has been accepted. It is not a "job interview" and it is not a condition of accepting the youth into your unit. The youth has nothing to prove. It is good to share these words with the family and Scout at the first opportunity to reduce stress and anxiety.

Keep the tone of the conference relaxed and friendly. During the joining conference you want to learn:

1. What are unique strengths and struggles of this youth?
2. What accommodations/adaptations are being made at home and at school?
3. Does anything trigger emotional or behavioral struggles?
4. How does he/she act when things are getting overwhelming?

5. What concerns do the parents have about putting their child in Scouting?

The parents/guardians will decide how open they will be with you. Until they trust you, they might not share their child's diagnosis. If they confide in you, ask their permission before telling anyone else about a diagnosis. Practically speaking, it is more important to know the behaviors the Scout may exhibit than the name of the special need or disability. Asking parents for suggestions on how to handle disruptions will help you know which appropriate action to take. This also shows parents you are willing to listen and work with them on what's best for their son or daughter. If you believe the Scout will benefit from other key adult and youth leaders being brought into the loop, you may ask the family if you can brief others.

If appropriate to do so, include the Scout in the joining conference with their parents. For Cub Scouts, meeting just with the parents is fine. For Scouts BSA and older programs, the Scout is often included in the meeting, but good sense should prevail when deciding whether or not to include the Scout.

This is a candid and private conversation with the family, so the meeting needs to be out-of-earshot of others. It is OK to do this off at the side of a regular unit meeting, but you might have to hold the conference at a different place or time to get privacy.

Here is a **SAMPLE SCRIPT** for a Joining Conference:

Hi. I'm *name* and I'm the *leader position* of *unit type ###*. I'm glad you and *youth name* have joined our unit. The other leaders and I want to give your child the best experience we can. I know we have told you what our unit is like, and it will help if you can tell us what makes your son/daughter unique. Can we have a few minutes? – To start with, is there anything you are concerned about with joining Scouting? What are his/her strengths? Is anything harder for him/her than for others? Is there anything that helps him/her be successful at home or at school? Is there anything I need to watch out for or avoid doing with your son/daughter? Is there anything I need to make sure I do for your son/daughter? When he/she is struggling, how do you help him/her?

.....

Depending on how the conversation goes, this may be a good time to mention how the Individual Scout Advancement Plan works. There is more information on this in Module E.

COMMUNICATION

Ongoing communication goes in three directions, which we will address in turn. The first direction is communication between the leaders and the family. The second direction is communication between leaders and a Scout with a special need, and the third direction is communicating between Scouts (peer to peer). Good communication allows needs to be met and minimizes future conflict.

Before we begin, there is one overarching thing to remember: Confidentiality is

required. You cannot take it back if you gossip or complain about a Scout with a disability around the Scout, his or her peers, parents or guardians, or other leaders. That includes electronic communication.

Parents and Guardians – Conducting a joining conference is the beginning of a regular dialog with parents and guardians. Ideally you will continue to communicate with the parents on an ongoing basis. While all leaders are busy, it is very helpful when you can give honest praise to the parents about their children, even when you don't have to. If you need to talk to parents or youth about a specific situation, it helps for you to "own" the difficulty rather than put in on others. This way no one feels antagonized. A positive approach would be to say, "I want to make sure the Scout is experiencing all that Scouting has to offer" or "How can I make it a success for the Scout?" Focus on the behavior you want to change, not the person.

In general, do not rely on a parent always being able to attend meetings or outings because this tends to be seen by others as a requirement that the parent must be present for the Scout to participate. Requiring a parent to be there places a burden on the parent to handle inappropriate behavior instead of allowing leaders and Scouts in the unit to learn how to do this. It also presents a risk of creating conflict when the parents' natural protective instincts cause them to interact poorly with other Scouts. The need for a parent will need to be addressed on an individual basis however, because there are rare situations when only a parent or caregiver can provide what the Scout needs. When parents attend regularly, it is important to monitor the interaction so that the Scout's independence can grow rather than be hindered.

The Scout with a Special Need or Disability – You don't have to worry about what specific words you use to describe the disability. For example, you can use ordinary phrases like "See you later!" or "Give me a hand!" even when talking to someone with a vision or physical disability. As a matter of dignity, it's best to speak directly to the Scout, not to his or her companion. Let the companion overhear your discussion with the Scout, not the other way around.

It is our goal to help Scouts develop into people who can solve their own challenges in an adult world. A Scout with a disability may need opportunities to practice self-advocacy skills even more than others do. **Remember every Scout with a disability will eventually be an adult with a disability.** These youth may also need more guidance in exercising self-advocacy than others. Involve the Scout in problem-solving discussions. The more you include the Scout in the process, the more ownership the Scout will take in his or her behavior. Encourage all your Scouts to ask for help, speak up when they don't understand something, and ask when they need extra help. With all this said, there are some Scouts who will struggle with self-advocacy because of the nature of their individual disability. These Scouts will need extra attention and you may have to reach out to them for a while, actively offering help, while you coach them to be more effective advocates for themselves.

Other Scouts – It is healthy and appropriate for other Scouts to want to advocate for and to assist a Scout with a disability. They can be a resource to help leaders

understand what the Scout needs. Sometimes peers know the Scout from other situations like school, other extracurricular activities, or religious activities and know how teachers and leaders in those environments have adapted programs to help the Scout with a disability. You certainly should use the information you receive in this way, but **you should not ask or probe for information from fellow Scouts.**

Youth leaders in the Scouting program may need extra information that others do not and experience frustrations with a Scout with a disability that other Scouts do not. You can partner with the parents of the Scout with a disability to decide what additional information to share with youth leaders that will be to everyone's benefit. When a youth leader is struggling with a Scout because of a disability, it is OK to give the youth leader extra advice and encouragement.

CORRECTIVE ACTION AND ADDRESSING CONFLICT

A disability may cause poor impulse control, but it is not an automatic excuse for poor behavior or failure to obey rules. Keep in mind that certain types of youth behavior may be a way of communicating needs or distress in a non-verbal manner. One should also understand that all youth, whether disabled or not, grow into maturity, and their behaviors change along the way. Most difficult behaviors improve with maturity, but in some instances they become more extreme.

Addressing Safety – In the rest of this section, we will talk about how to improve behavior, but at the outset we must acknowledge that maintaining the health and safety of our members takes a priority over managing people's feelings. If a Scout's actions are placing anyone in danger, including him or herself, immediate action is needed to address the danger, and any consequences will be dealt with later. Along these lines, we need to keep watch for possible bullying situations. By definition, bullying is unfair and one-sided behavior, characterized by continued hurting, intimidation, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose. A more subtle form of bullying is taking advantage of another person's inexperience or naiveté to embarrass or humiliate him or her. Confront these behaviors if you see them. Be alert when Scouts are engaged in competitive games. Games can be used to camouflage bullying. Scouts with special needs are not always competitive in spirit, or capable of performing the game, and this may lead to a situation where the Scout becomes frustrated. Having a planned alternative activity may head off difficulties.

Addressing Conflict – A youth with a disability may see the world differently from everyone around him or her. For this reason, some unanticipated events may result in a conflict and the source of the conflict may not always be obvious. As with any conflict between youth, you will first want to separate the participants. Then begin asking questions to find out each youth's viewpoint. It is important to handle situations carefully and take the time you need to gain a good understanding. At that point you can choose a course of action. It may be that all that is needed is for each youth to come to understand the other's perspective on the situation. It may be that one or both need some space and time to regain control of their emotions.

Corrective Action – Our overall goal in dealing with youth who are misbehaving is to improve the behavior. This is true with Scouts regardless of whether a disability is a factor. We never use corporal punishment. In fact, neither the carrot nor stick approach creates the self-awareness and self-control that youth with a disability may need to develop. Feedback and redirection should always be given in a **respectful** manner, allowing the Scout to save face. When Scouts are treated with respect, they are more likely to respect the authority of the Scout leader.

With some disabilities, social activities may cause Scouts with special needs to get more and more anxious and uneasy. It may be best to remove them from participating in the activity before losing control. However, if you have to intervene, it is important to emphasize that this is to give them a chance to regroup and is not a “time out” (punishment by isolation) for misbehavior. In fact, you should encourage the youth to learn to monitor themselves and let an adult know they need to excuse themselves from the activity or game if they feel anxiety coming on. Agreeing on a place he or she can go to “chill-out” helps. This empowers Scouts to take control of their actions, which fosters independence and self-esteem.

In other situations, an adult may need to help guide the youth in introspection. Some self-awareness questions a leader can ask a youth include: “What was I feeling before I acted out?”, “What exactly triggered my anxiety?”, “Was the other person trying to bully me or did I misunderstand?” and “What could I do differently if this happens again?” A responsible adult mentor can help a youth develop personalized strategies for coping in his or her environment. The youth may have to live with the disability, but you can help him or her discover an inner strength despite the disability and develop his or her full potential.

SELF REMOVAL

Self-removal is a great resource for a Scout to use when getting too overwhelmed, building up anger, or just needs to pull him or herself together. The basic idea is that you and the Scouts have some prearranged places and times where they can go during a meeting or event if they need to escape a stressful situation. This empowers the Scout to manage his or her own stress. Self-removal represents a partnership between the responsible adults and the Scout with a disability. Refuge (chill out) spaces can be helpful for many Scouts, not just those with special needs.

The specifics of where the “refuge” is and what the youth does there will need to be tailored to the age and disability. For example, at summer camp you could have a tent set up with coping tools in it, like a book or playing cards or something that might help settle him or her down. It is also OK for a Scout to go to bed earlier than most or catch a nap if needed, as long as that is not disruptive.

The Scout still needs to be supervised. The place of refuge cannot be so far away that a buddy should go along. This system will not work if the Scout has a propensity for mischief or for wandering off. Although the Scout may feel “alone” during self-removal, the adults monitor at a distance. It is important that the Scout knows to make sure the appropriate adult knows where he or she is going, so no one is worried or goes searching for a “lost Scout”. A period of self-removal could extend

to the end of the regular meeting time, but it needs to have reasonable time limits during an outing.

During a meeting, it may be impractical for the Scout to ask out loud for permission to go, and it may be disruptive to the meeting as a whole to let one person go because they will all want to abandon the planned activity. There are ways to avoid the appearance of “special treatment” or drawing harmful attention to the struggling Scout. You can establish a sign language that allows the Scout to ask permission with one sign and you to agree with a sign of your own. You could also use a particular sound from your cell phone to acknowledge the Scout is exiting the area.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations are procedural changes that make it possible for Scouts with disabilities to have a more normal life. An accommodation is just a different way of doing things and it is tailored to the individual needs of a person with a disability. While accessibility features are easy to see and provide opportunities for those with physical disabilities, accommodations also provide opportunities for those with invisible disabilities. Accommodations may not be obvious to others because they don't change the environment for anyone else. An accommodation that works for one person with a disability may not work for everyone else, so it isn't always possible to make everyone happy or to have everyone work in the same space.

Here are some ideas and examples:

- **Timing**
 - Allow extra time for completing a task, like a test at school
 - Do the hard thinking work in the morning or afternoon, or whenever it works best
 - Break a task into smaller pieces and take breaks in between
 - Slow down or speed up the pace
 - Allow time for physical activity or movement

- **Sensory**
 - Move to a place in the room where there are fewer visual distractions from other people or objects in your field of view
 - Change the type of lighting to adjust the brightness or color of the light, or eliminate flickering effects of the light source
 - Use earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones to reduce noise, or perhaps have intentional sources of background sounds or music.
 - Adjust sound louder or softer to a comfortable and functional level
 - Provide special ventilation to eliminate distracting odors
 - Hold or squeeze an object to provide something to do with your hands for needed tactile stimulation

- **Presentation & Communication**
 - Change the group size when teaching
 - Use technology to interact and communicate instead of verbal or face-

- to-face
 - Provide captioned screens or captioning glasses for video presentations
 - Change the method of communication – verbal to visual to written as needed
 - Provide a sign language interpreter for meetings, performances, ceremonies, etc.
 - Use hands-on activities or demonstrations instead of words
- Organization, Memory, and Attention
 - Provide an assistant to keep tasks in order or keep the schedule
 - Use electronic devices, or paper and notes to retain important information
 - Have an aide redirect a person’s attention back onto the topic when they drift off or become distracted by another idea
- Social
 - Use a peer buddy
 - Supplemental social skills coaching

ADAPTATIONS

In Scouting we want to avoid Ableism. Ableism (or Able-ism) is a belief or attitude that leads to discrimination and denial of opportunities, much like racism or sexism. It begins by making assumptions about what people with disabilities cannot do, and then making no effort to give them an opportunity to try. Ableism is harder to spot than other forms of discrimination because the person doing the discriminating appears to be looking out for the best interests of the person with the disability.

Adaptations are physical adjustments to ways of doing things so that people with disabilities can participate in activities that others do. Adaptations differ from accommodations in that the focus is using technology to enhance a person’s physical abilities or to make an activity doable.

The key point for Scout leaders is to make an effort to make the same activities that you would do with any other Scout available to those with disabilities. Yes, there will be situations where it is not possible, but if a Scout is willing to try, there is almost always a way to make something possible.

Here are some examples:

- Mobility
 - Wheelchairs
 - Motorized Chairs
 - Utility Task Vehicle
 - Golf Cart
- Hearing
 - Text to Voice Devices or Phone Apps

- Voice to Text Devices or Phone Apps
- Video Displays
- Flashers in place of Alarm Sounds
- Vision
 - Text to Voice Devices or Phone Apps
 - Tactile Signage and Braille Resources
 - Voice Messaging in place of signal lights
 - Spelled out signs along with color coding (for color-blindness)
 - Sighted guides
- Fine Motor
 - Pointing and typing with eye or mouth controls
 - Use of tools to enhance grip
 - Modifying tool handles for easier control
- Sports
 - Hand crank bicycles
 - Sit-down skis and in-line skating
 - Swimming flotation aids
 - Beep baseball
 - Wheelchair sports (basketball, road racing, soccer, etc.)
 - Seated volleyball

PEER BUDDIES

A peer buddy can be a useful accommodation for a Scout that struggles with social behavior, navigating from place to place at camp, or with self-organization. Since the concept is new to most Scout leaders, we explain it here. It is not the same as the Buddy System we use for safety in the Scouting program. A peer buddy is a volunteer Scout providing ongoing support for another Scout with a special need. It is a position of responsibility where one Scout is committed to helping another Scout for an extended period of time or in special situations. (Note that while this service may be used for some advancement credit, it is not one of the listed positions of responsibility for the Eagle Scout rank.) A peer buddy can be thought of like a youth leader and needs to be supported by adult mentors in that role. A peer buddy will need to be matched well in maturity and temperament to the person being aided. The parents and guardians of both Scouts should be aware of and agree to this arrangement.

ABOUT MEDICATIONS

Medications are useful tools for helping with the symptoms of some disabilities. In this context, medications may include non-prescription medications and dietary supplements along with prescribed medications. They do not take the disability away and they won't make all of the difficulties go away. There are many laws and rules that limit how medications can be used, especially for youth. If a youth takes a medication, there needs to be a responsible adult keeping track of when and how

much medication is given. Depending on the medication and what it does, a person with a disability may have to plan to do some activities at certain times to get the most benefit from the medication. Scout Leaders should refer to the *Guide to Safe Scouting, Medication Use in Scouting* (BSA 680-036), and the Personal Health and Annual Health and Medical Record section for BSA guidance about handling prescription medications for Scouts. Camps may have their own rules for medication handling, and state and local laws vary. Some local councils offer additional training on this topic.

As a matter of good manners, you should never talk about a Scout's medications with anyone other than the Scout or the Scout's guardians/parents. Whether a person is "on his meds" or "off his meds" is never a joking matter. If you are truly concerned about a Scout not receiving the medications he or she is supposed to have, talk to the Scout directly, the parent or caregiver, or the adult responsible for the outing or event.

ABOUT SERVICE ANIMALS

For a long time, "seeing eye dogs" and "helper monkeys" have been used to support people with disabilities. In recent years, the use of trained animals to support different types of disabilities has broadened and more and more productive uses for trained animals are being found. As of the time of this writing, it is hard to anticipate which additional uses may be found and what species of animals might be included as service animals.

Just as in other public venues, it is necessary to distinguish between pets and trained service animals^[3]. Where councils have made rules restricting or prohibiting pets from events or facilities, those rules need to make exceptions for trained service animals. In facilities belonging to charter partners, the unit will have to abide by their rules, however Scout leaders may need to advocate with a charter partner so a Scout that makes effective use of a service animal is not denied this aid.

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[1] The numbers are almost certainly higher as many moderate disabilities are not formally diagnosed by professionals and others are kept secret by the family.

[2] Long and overnight events are more likely to have triggering situations than a typical Scout meeting.

[3] As of this writing (2021) current federal regulations are found at https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.html.