

# ABILITIES DIGEST

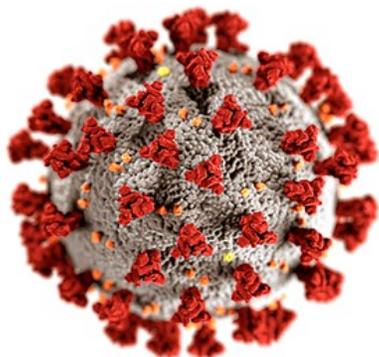


Prepared. For Life.® Vol. 7, No. 2

Spring 2020  BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

## Enhancing Awareness

### Q&A on COVID-19 and Special Needs Scouting



Here are questions we have received. Please email additional questions to [Disabilities.Awareness@scouting.org](mailto:Disabilities.Awareness@scouting.org) or post them to Facebook Group [No Scout Left Behind](#). In addition, be aware of ongoing adjustments to schedules, requirements, and procedures in Scouting activities and advancement. Your local council can provide information, or visit [Scouting.org](https://www.scouting.org) and look for [COVID-19 policies](#) and [#ScoutingAtHome](#) recommendations.

**Q: When will it be safe for my Scout with complex medical needs to return to group Scouting?**

A: Take direction regarding social distancing from your Scout's medical provider. They know your Scout's overall health and needs better than the Scouting unit leadership and can make the best decision for the safety of your Scout and family.

**Q: What can my special needs Scout do to stay active in Scouting?**

A: Many merit badges can be earned virtually or with limited to no public access. Watch your local council Facebook and websites for virtual MB opportunities. This is also a time to go back and review what you've already learned! Refresh materials you may have not reviewed in several months/years. Plan a staycation, spend some time outdoors. Find a virtual camporee and camp in your yard.

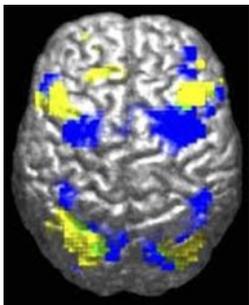
## In This Issue

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## Q: How can I support my anxious Scout?

A: Mental Health is incredibly important during this time. See the next article on “Mental Health First Aid.”

## Mental Health First Aid



Within the Scouting program, we have all heard about the First Aid merit badge, First Aid CPR classes, and First Aid competitive meets. Our kids learn about it beginning at a young age and then as they grow they are exposed to opportunities to practice it. Some of them like it so much they become our future first responders, paramedics and medical personnel. However, first aid can move beyond bandages and breathing techniques, especially in the area of mental health.

Administering mental health first aid is not new. There are thousands of mental health care professionals throughout the world. Individuals and families may rely on them to help when there is a need. However, in our Scouting life there may be times when Scout leaders must deal with Scouts who seem on the edge, anxious, melting down, raging, despondent, withdrawn, or just plain sad. What do we do to help them through a meeting, an event, or an activity when they seem so far away from us? Band aids may not be the answer. Here are some steps we can take to help ease these Scouts through all such meetings, events, and activities:

**Awareness** – Knowing your Scouts is critical when it comes to special needs, especially in the area of mental health. Have conversations with both the parents and the Scout when all is calm. Research different strategies and cueing techniques that can be used during times of crisis, so that they can be applied before an issue occurs. Familiarize yourself with the Scout’s tendencies, likes and dislikes. On-going conferences are a big help and will keep you up to date.

**Prevention** – Be alert to precursors to agitation: outbursts, running away, meltdowns, defiance and other unwanted events. Sometimes a Scout who has issues may exhibit excess movements, tics, verbal outbursts, extreme pacing, rapid eye movements and so on before an episode. Consider that, like the rumblings of an earthquake or a volcano before eruption, there are signs in youth that signal distress as well. Learn them!

**Be Interactive** – Interact with all of your Scouts. Be encouraging and positive throughout the activity or event. It is critical for the leadership – including youth leaders – to be active and involved as much as possible in all facets of any meeting, event, or activity. Keep an eye out for possible disruption, especially with Scouts who have a tendency to overreact.

**Listen** – Always listen non-judgmentally. You may become that trusted adult to whom a Scout will eventually disclose information. Be encouraging and understanding. When suspected abuse is relayed to you, follow youth

protection policies by reporting any suspicion of child abuse, regardless of the Scout's pleas to keep it a secret. Keep calm and use a soothing voice. Watch your own body language and remain non-threatening. Ease the Scout through the issue and then notify authorities, if warranted.

**Utilize Action Plans** – Most Scouts grow and mature. Most learn to handle their feelings and emotions eventually. A Scout with disabilities, with the help of professionals in mental health care, usually learns techniques and strategies to help work through uncomfortable mental health episodes. Encourage the Scout and parents to share these action plans with you. Using key phrases or visual cues from the leadership, the Scout should be able to self-regulate with a bit of encouragement and reminding. Because of your efforts, the Scout will feel safe utilizing these strategies.

**Get educated** – there are courses in your area similar to CPR classes that deal with mental health and youth. Visit [www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org) for more information.

## **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](mailto: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.

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## Awareness Events

### Adaptive Special Needs Conference at Philmont



Philmont Scout Reservation July 26th – August 1st. This national training conference teaches best practices in outdoor and camping programs for Scouts with special needs. Volunteers and professionals alike will learn how to integrate Scouts with special needs into everyday outdoor/camping programs. Adults will also learn about the latest

adaptive programs including field sports, Project COPE and fishing. The conference includes discussion on risk management, program and facilities management, health and safety, and program development for serving Scouts with special needs. Finally, this course will also share how you can use your camp properties for outside special needs groups, including schools and special needs agencies.

Philmont has canceled conferences earlier in the summer, but this conference remains on the schedule. Register on the [Philmont Training Center web site](#).

## Philmont Zia Experience

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philmont Zia Experience is being rescheduled to the summer of 2021.

## Adapting Activities



### New Scout Orientation and Beyond

New Scout Orientations are meetings held by Scoutmasters or Cubmasters with their groups of new Scouts. The meetings let Scouts and parents know what the ins and outs of their new Scouting unit entail. During the orientation, the leadership may discuss the frequency of meetings, the intent of activities, the rank requirement sequences, the outing schedules and the dues and fees required. In addition to the group New Scout Orientation meeting, we encourage leaders to have a *joining conference* with each Scout family to learn about individual differences. In the next edition of Abilities Digest we will have an article about how to conduct Joining Conferences.

The New Scout Orientation meeting always prompts questions from parents who have specific concerns about their child. Continue the conversation! You could set up mini meetings during outings. You could have

side conversations during unit meeting activities. Your Scout should be an active contributor to the discussion as well. Never underestimate what the Scout knows and can relay to you. Keep the conversations ongoing!

- You have a parent whose daughter recently joined your Scout unit. The daughter is fairly reserved, but she is willing to try it out as long as it doesn't hurt. Say what? As long as it doesn't hurt? What does that mean? The best way to find out is to ask! Ask Mom; ask the Scout!
- You have a new member who looks like a typical Scout, but when he is with his patrol he has a hard time keeping up and is very uncoordinated when playing games or doing something requiring eye-hand coordination. You discovered, through discussion with his dad, this young man is a whiz with electronics and sound systems. The next event that required this kind of set up you utilized his abilities. Best show on earth!
- You have recently been taken into the confidence of one of the Scout moms who has told you her son is intellectually challenged, yet he wants to be in Scouts because his brothers were in Scouts. Is there any way we can make this happen, so he is happy and included? You are able to get him situated into a patrol comfortably and all of his buddies have been a great help including him in games, activities and camping events. This Scout earned his Scout Rank with the help of a patrol buddy who prompted him while reciting the Scout Oath and Law. You never saw anyone so happy in your life!
- One of your Scouts really loves camping. He is becoming an enthusiastic expert outdoorsman. However, he consistently "forgets" to stop what he is doing to take his medication. His behavior is dangerously impacted when he doesn't take it. This is threatening his privilege of attending campouts. After a discreet discussion with the Scout, you find that the Scout's concept of time does not exist and his attention to his medication wearing off is spotty. You have a brief conversation with his parents, then two of you together develop a visual, tactile, and verbal system for when it is time to take his meds. The problem has not occurred since.

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar? Have you yourself experienced something similar? Continued mini conferences can benefit the Scout and fuel his/her desire to stay in Scouts. This should become a natural way to lead and empower your units.

Know your Scout. Gather information on his or her strengths and weaknesses. Encourage and enjoy this new relationship. Educate the patrol, den or large group as long as the Scout and parents are okay with it. Figure out, with the help of the family, what is needed for smooth Scouting during all activities. You will find ongoing communication beyond that initial orientation meeting are well worth the effort. Keep up with your Scout and utilize the amazing resources you have in the families and friends who surround each one. These are the Scouts who need you most to do your best.

# Recognizing Abilities

## Rich Gambrill Honored with the 2020 Woods Services Award



Richard W. Gambrill, Jr., of White Marsh, Maryland is the 2020 recipient of the Woods Services Award for 2020.

The Woods Services Award is given annually by the Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center, to one BSA volunteer for exceptional service and leadership in the field of Special Needs Scouting.

Rich has been a Special Needs Scouter in Baltimore Area Council for years and his advice is sought after by Scouters throughout the Council. He is the founder of Pack and Troop 117, which were formed for Scouts with special needs, and he continues to serve Troop 117 as the Scoutmaster. He also founded Crew 117 in 2018. He is active in Chesapeake District, having served as District Chair, and, since 2010, serves as a member of the Baltimore Area Council Special Needs Scouting Committee. He also continues to serve as a Member at Large of the Council Advancement Committee on the sub-committee responsible for special needs reviews.

Rich has been honored with the Silver Beaver and Torch of Gold award by his Council. He has also received the Maryland Governor's Volunteer Award.

Rich has taught at the Baltimore Area Council's University of Scouting for the past 5 years in the area of "How to Advance your Special Needs Scout." This class has been full each of the years he has taught it.

He participated in two National Scout Jamborees (2005 and 2010) before discovering the Disabilities Awareness Challenge (DAC). He staffed that activity in both 2013 and 2017. He was an integral member of the DAC team delivering the message of what Scouts who have disabilities can do despite the challenges they face. He enjoys working with - Scouts with and without disabilities and gives a good perspective of what it is like for a Scout with a disability.

### **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](mailto:disabilities.awareness@scouting.org).

The Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center, established in 1913 in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, is a leading advocacy and service organization that provides educational, residential, and vocational services to children and adults with special needs. The Woods Services Award was established in 1978 in memory of Luther Wellington Lord, who served as a residential supervisor for more than 23 years at the Center, in recognition of his service to youth through Scouting at the local and national levels.

## Adapting Advancement

### Being Prepared for Physical Disabilities



*An edited version of this and the next article also appear in the May/June 2020 issue of Advancement News.*

Physical disabilities require thorough advance preparation. Every kind of mobility equipment has limitations and, even with mobility equipment, there are places a Scout cannot go unless access provisions are made in advance. There are many activities that a Scout with a physical disability can participate in, but only if special equipment is available and already put into place. You cannot count on being able to improvise on short notice. Preparation is important for everyday meetings at the regular unit meeting place. This is easier than at other locations because you get “do overs.” You can take advantage of the learning curve and put permanent access solutions into place. You can also focus on the specific needs of your Scout to make adaptations. Outings are a greater challenge for preparation, but “outing” is essential to “Sc-outing,” so preparing for outdoor activities and locations is important as well.

Communication with the Scout is a key part of the preparation. The Scout and family need to know as much as possible about an upcoming event. This includes details about both the activities and the venue where the event is being held. While you may be confident as a leader and organizer, it is very hard to spot all the potential trouble spots when you don’t live with the disability every day. Think of the family members of the Scout as your teammates in spotting the needed adaptations and keeping you from wasting time and energy on unnecessary ones.

Communication from the Scout and family to the staff of an event is equally important. Unlike the regular leaders of the Scout’s unit, camp staff members have no history or experience with the Scout and are responsible for many more Scouts than just the one with a disability. Someone needs to reach out to the camp director long before the camp season opens to explain what the Scout’s needs are likely to be and what activities and merit badges the Scout wants to attempt. This allows a chance to be inventive and create solutions that are easy and effective.

Advance previews are a great tool. Five minutes of looking at something is better than five hours of talking about it. See if there is a way for the Scout and family to go out to the location in advance of an event to spot the problem areas. In some instances, a simple item brought from home will address a lot of challenges. For summer camp or day camp, see if you can go out during the staff training and set-up days for the camp. Not only can you address the physical obstacles of the camp, the Scout can make friends with some staff members and you can talk to staff about how to include the Scout in the camp's activities. These conversations go so much better when the staff is not in the mad swirl of holding camp with large numbers of Scouts.

## Advancement Considerations with Physical Disabilities



Physical disabilities can be accommodated in most cases by an open-minded reading of the requirement, keeping in mind the intent and learning objective of the requirement.

**Demonstrate/Show** – There are many requirements that use the word demonstrate or show. While for many Scouts that will mean “do the task by yourself, while I watch you,” this is not a realistic option for Scouts with some physical disabilities. What we need to point out is that it is reasonable to allow an able person to amplify the force a Scout can exert or to steady a shaking hand while the Scout does the advancement task. For a Scout with missing or non-functional hands, it is reasonable for another person to “be the hands” of the Scout while the Scout directs the task. (On a practical basis, this is no different than allowing a deaf scout to be assisted by a sign language interpreter.) The person serving as the “robot” needs to carefully follow the instructions of the Scout and not think on behalf of the Scout.

**Write/Draw/Sketch/Diagram** – Here we address a Scout who is unable to wield a writing implement. Otherwise, we should be willing to accept a product that is not elegant as long as it communicates what it needs to. In a low-tech environment, the practical solution for writing requirements is to allow a scribe to take down the information the Scout gives verbally and write it on the page. However, if you look closely, many requirements that we assume require a written product don't actually say that. Report, describe, discuss, and explain can all be done verbally. In a high-tech environment, it may be possible for the Scout to type directly or to use voice recognition software to create a document.

There are a variety of ways to adapt to produce a graphical product without the traditional pen and paper. Will a verbal “word picture” suffice, or is it OK for a scribe to draw what the Scout tells them? Could the Scout work with pen on paper with someone to help move the hand to a starting position and steady the hand while the Scout draws? Fingerprint can also be used to draw on a larger scale.

**Physical Fitness Requirements** – In many cases, there will be no way for the Scout with a physical disability to do certain kinds of exercises that are identified in advancement requirements. You will need to get alternative requirements approved, but we still prefer to have them be a physical activity. If the Scout works with an occupational or physical therapist, ask questions and try to use exercises that the Scout already needs to do for therapeutic purposes. Even with a disability, a Scout benefits from the discipline and activity of exercise, and the Scout can certainly show improvement as the physical fitness requirements ask.

## Helpful Links

Here are links to materials to aid volunteers and Scouts with special needs and disabilities:

### Official Materials Posted on Scouting.org

Scouting with Disabilities landing page: [scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/](https://scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/)

### Resources from Articles

AbleScouts: *Abilities Digest* articles posted online: [ablescouts.org](https://ablescouts.org)

BSA COVID-19 policy adjustments: [scouting.org/coronavirus/](https://scouting.org/coronavirus/)

Joining Conference article from 2016: [ablescouts.org/2020/05/18/joining-conf/](https://ablescouts.org/2020/05/18/joining-conf/)

Guide to Advancement, section 10: [scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/](https://scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/)

Mental Health First Aid: [mentalhealthfirstaid.org](https://mentalhealthfirstaid.org)

Philmont Training Center: [philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/](https://philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/)

#ScoutingAtHome: [scouting.org/scoutingathome/](https://scouting.org/scoutingathome/)

Woods Services Award nomination form: [filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf](https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf)

## Social Media



Twitter: @AbilitiesDigest



Facebook: [www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165)

Facebook No Scout Left Behind: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1967878213431320>



Email your comments and questions to [disabilities.awareness@scouting.org](mailto:disabilities.awareness@scouting.org)