

Ability Awareness and Your Troop



A Guide for Girl Scout Leaders

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My Notes

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MANUAL REFERENCES



Activity suggestion



Caution / Important to remember



Visit *Tips and Tools* end of this manual



Internet Links



Practical Tips



Important Note

INTRODUCTION

Girl Scouts welcomes those whose limitations or medical conditions may limit their activities but not their hopes and achievements. The Girl Scout Leadership Experience is flexible enough that most girls and adults of any ability can participate.

While all girls are welcome in Girl Scouts, it can be challenging for a leader to accommodate girls that are different than their peers. However, this does not mean that Girl Scouts cannot be a beneficial experience for all girls. Girl Scouts increases socialization skills that help them to interact with others, learn about accepting differences, and developing patience. They can learn to understand others and move past first impressions and get to know someone as an individual.

Please respect the privacy of the medical diagnosis of the child unless the parent has given permission to discuss or inform others. Prior to sharing any information about the girl's needs or diagnoses, it is critical to attain the parent or caregiver's written permission.

Additionally, it is our policy that there are specific ratios of adults to girls that must be upheld during Girl Scout activities. Any adult that is counted in the ratio or interact with all the girls must be registered and background-checked directly by GSGLA. An aide assisting an individual girl is not counted in that ratio and does not need to be background-checked by GSGLA. A background check via that aide's employer or agency will suffice.



It is highly recommended that you keep current certification in First Aid CPR/AED.



NEED TO KNOW

- When communicating with parents or caregivers, it is important to discuss any necessary accommodations the girl may need. Sometimes it might be desirable for the parent or caregiver to stay for a few meetings until she feels comfortable. When the girl is comfortable, the parent or caregiver might want to progressively stay in the back of the room, then move to a room next door, and then to their car.
- It might be necessary to develop a plan with the girl's parents or caregivers to address any challenging behavior and to support proper conduct.
- When talking with the parents or caregivers ask if they are willing to come and talk with the girls if not, what would they have you share.
- Girls may require Service Animals to attend meetings with them. These animals should not be approached, petted, spoken to, or otherwise distracted from their purpose unless you have been given permission. Note: If an animal is identified as a service animal, you may ask what tasks the animal has been trained to perform, but you may not ask to see their paperwork, per ADA law.
- First and foremost the child is a Girl Scout, and should be the focus of your introductions. However, some impairment such as Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, or Autism Spectrum Disorder may be more visible, and girls may be curious. It may be appropriate to have a discussion with the girls in your troop during the meeting prior to the girl being introduced.
- When talking to a girl with an impairment speak directly to her, and treat her as you would any other girl. It is important that we not talk about any girl as though she is not present. All girls deserve the respect of being included in discussions which involve them as long as they're comfortable.
- Girls with impairments may be easily frustrated, or have unpredictable reactions.
- All girls, regardless of their ability, will not achieve the same level of ability with their skills. As long as they are participating, and doing their best, praise them. It doesn't have to be perfect, just be sure they are doing what they can to accomplish the task.
- Please be aware it is offensive to call anyone a "retard". It is a hurtful and rude word, even when referring to yourself.



Check Tips and Tools for self-awareness activities which allow girls to experience limitations and impairments themselves.



SUGGESTIONS FROM OTHER LEADERS

- ❖ Talk to leaders who have worked with girls with limitations and impairments as they have years of experience and are happy to help new leaders.
- ❖ A good way to start a discussion with the troop is to emphasize 'we're all different and all have something to offer in our own way.' Starting this way will encourage them to be more open-minded and accepting.
- ❖ Another suggestion is to point out that many children have special needs. For example, a girl who needs a walker to walk is really not very different from a girl who needs glasses to see.
- ❖ Any discussions with your girls are best handled in an age-appropriate manner. An example of an age-appropriate talk for Brownies: "Kelly has Cerebral Palsy. This means that the part of her brain that talks to her muscles doesn't work the way yours does. Any time that she



tries to run, or jump or move like you do, it's like doing it with bags of flour around her legs or hands. So that means she might not move as quickly, or as well as we do, but she will still do her best and we should do our best to help her if she asks for it. And sometimes when people can't do things the way other people can, it makes them sad or frustrated. Girl Scouts are like sisters, and sisters help each other. That means if Kelly is frustrated because she can't do something, we should make sure that we understand that she is upset and try to help her in the best way we can." However, not all girls feel comfortable being singled out. It's best to use one's own judgment based

on information provided by the parents or caregivers. Some girls with disabilities want to be treated just like everybody else, as much as their situation allows.

- ❖ Reaching out to older girl troops to help at meetings is a win-win situation. The girls with impairments receive the support they need and the older girls learn leadership skills. Many Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors are earning leadership or service hours; Cadettes can earn the LiA (Leadership in Action) award which is tied to assisting a troop with Brownie Journeys.
- ❖ Girls will make their own best effort to complete the tasks. Some may require more time, or requirements may need to be adapted. They may need a change in equipment, a buddy for running or jumping activities, or a change of terrain. Be aware of the needs of all the girls and adapt when necessary.
- ❖ It's a good idea to have an extra activity planned for the girls who finish early.



AWARENESS OF INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

As a leader you may feel inexperienced with including a girl with a limitation or medical condition in your troop. It can be hard to know what to do, what to say or not to say, and it can be hard to predict how members of your troop will react. It is important that the troop leader be the most welcoming person in the room as the girls will follow the example set by the leader. Girls are often a little bit leery of a new girl, regardless of her challenges. However, it is often surprising to see how welcoming girls can be. They may be more inclusive than we expect.

As the leader learn what you can about the challenges that the girl may face, and share the information with the girls in your troop. It is important for the parents or caregivers of the girl with challenges to help with the education of the troop. Seek their input, as they know their child's unique challenges and tried-and-true adaptations better than anyone else. The parents or caregiver will likely be more than happy to share information with you in order to help their daughter have the best experience possible.



There are many types of disabilities, impairments, conditions, and disorders that affect individual people in different ways. This manual was designed to help leaders understand and help the girls in the troop be welcoming and inclusive to all girls. In this manual, we will discuss ways that activities can be adapted for girls who have varying levels of abilities in a variety of skill areas, including intellectual, emotional, and physical diagnoses.

DISABILITIES AND IMPAIRMENTS

The important thing to remember about including a girl with a disability or impairment in your troop is that you can still do many of the same activities that you had planned before the girl joined the troop. While it may take a little more effort and creativity on your part, there's no reason that a girl of any ability cannot complete the same activities and tasks as other girls in your troop.

Tips for Adapting Crafts - When you are working with girls with intellectual disabilities, simplicity is the key. Offering directions in one or two steps will help the girls to be able to follow them.

- For example, if you have five pieces to be glued together, rather than passing everything out at once you can give the girls the first three pieces and say "glue the circle to the square."
- Then tell them the next step, and then pass them the rest of the materials.
- That way the girls will have a concrete number of steps and will not be bogged down trying to remember too much at once.
- You can also prepare samples ahead of time for visual learners so they can see what it should look like as you go along.

Tips for Adapting Games - Giving directions in one or two steps is much easier to remember.

- An overwhelmingly bright or loud location for games can make it harder for girls to pay attention when they are given directions.
- Make sure to have everyone as quiet as possible when you give the rules of the game this will help all the girls be successful.
- If the noise cannot be lessened or tuned out try muffling the sound with earbuds, noise-canceling headphones or earplugs. Make sure the ear protection just muffles the sound as blocking it altogether may cause safety issues.

It can be a challenge when a girl in your troop has a disability, but remember that what is frustrating to you may be ten times more frustrating to the girl. Girl Scouts should be a safe place for girls to grow and change, while remaining a stable place for all girls.

Intellectual Disabilities or Processing Delays

Girls with intellectual disabilities or processing delays can be diagnosed with an array of disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Down Syndrome, brain injuries, or an Intellectual Disability. If a girl is diagnosed with an intellectual disability she can continue in Girl Scouts until 21 years of age.

Processing Delay is exactly what it sounds like - it takes longer for the individual to process and respond to information. Therefore it is helpful to speak at a somewhat slower rate and pause to allow her to process. It may take an individual up to 30 seconds to respond to questions or directions.

Need to Know About: Intellectual Disabilities or Processing Delays

- She may behave in ways that appear to be younger than her age.
- Her verbal skills may not be as strong and so she may act out physically.
- She may tend to cry more easily.



Adapting Games - When introducing a game:

- Break the instructions down into just one or two steps in order to help her understand as much as possible.
- Asking her to repeat your directions may also help her to follow. Do it in a way so she is not singled out in front of the other girls e.g. you can ask different girls to repeat parts of the directions, so that she is not the only one who speaks.
- If she needs further instruction, another adult or girl can work with her individually to ensure she understands.

Adapting Activities - During activities you might want to:

- Match her up with a buddy. This girl can be her helper so that she has cues to follow during the activity, and someone to lean on for assistance.
- Have girls work in buddies to break up cliques and to make sure all girls are included. Rotating buddies means that no one girl is always a helper, and will help all the girls to feel like they are doing something for their sister Girl Scout.



If a girl with Intellectual Disability or Processing Delay is being left out:

- Plan activities involving teams. Count off 1, 2, 3 to form the teams to discourage cliques.
- Invite a troop of older girls to mentor your troop to encourage inclusiveness. Pairing one older girl with two younger girls discourages cliques.
- Reviewing and discussing the Girl Scout Promise and Law in a circle and asking each girl to give real-life examples of how she practices Girl Scout values.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

This is one of the most commonly diagnosed processing disorders in the United States today. Even though it is more prevalent in boys, there are many girls who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Children who have ASD tend to have delayed verbal and social skills, and a variety of sensory issues as well processing delays. Of course, this is not the case with every girl; as in all things there is a range that you can expect to see.

Don't hesitate to ask the girl's parent or caregiver to stay and help, they will probably know some techniques to share with you to calm her down. In some cases, the parents or caregivers will want to stay for at least the first few meetings to help make the transition smoother for their daughter. However, it isn't all on you. As with all children and teens, they sometimes will behave worse when their parents or caregivers are present. Asking a parent or caregiver to stay in the next room or in their car during the meeting can be a solution to behavioral issues.

You can ask her parent or caregiver if there is anything that she usually uses, i.e. a small, inflated ball with rubber spikes or a small piece of cloth. The girl's parents or caregiver will know if she has something that she can bring or you can get.



Need to Know About: Autism Spectrum Disorder

- When speaking directly to a girl she can be uncomfortable especially when delegating duties, in front of the other girls. It might be helpful to email the parent or caregiver ahead of time to let them know what will be taking place at the meeting.
- Prior to doing a seated activity, it might help to have a physical activity to help the girls focus, e.g. having the girls walk in a circle with a peacock feather on top of their hands or doing yoga postures.
- Some girls might need a break after an hour or so of being around other girls, especially if she has been in school all day.
- Have a plan in place in case the girl becomes emotional. If she is crying, restless, or is beginning to hand-flap, hit or bite herself, redirect her attention by offering another activity or ask her if she wants to leave the area.
- She may get overwhelmed by other girls running around, making noise, and being distracting.
- A girl will do better with structure so it's a good idea to structure every meeting and activity.
- It is helpful to have a visual schedule, so she can understand the flow of activities for the meeting or event.
- Social stories can be used to explain social situations that she may be having difficulty with.
- Check out <http://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/> and <http://www.educateautism.com/social-stories.html> for more information.

Adapting Games - When setting up a game consider the playing area.

- Let her know what she will be doing and what is expected of her.
- Make sure there is a quiet place where she can go if she needs to calm down.

Adapting Activities - If you are doing a seated activity, such as listening to a speaker or a writing task, she may have a harder time concentrating.

- Make sure she has a chair that allows her feet to sit on the floor, and offering a favorite object may help her to pay attention.
- Last-minute changes might upset her i.e. a co-leader not being there because she is sick.



Announcing “All right girls, take five minutes to finish up,” and then updating the girls as the time to transition gets closer will help the girls to prepare. These transitions can make changing activities less stressful for everyone involved. Keeping it simple such as “Five more minutes, then we will move on to tag” is enough information. Step-by-step instructions seem to work best. While the girls finish up their craft or activity, you can describe what will be going on next.

Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common childhood disorders. ADD/ADHD is a broad term for a condition with symptoms such as inattentiveness, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. The condition can vary from person to person. Girls with ADD/ADHD find sitting still very challenging, so consider offering a variety of activities.

Need to Know About: Attention Deficient Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- Girls are easily distracted by environmental stimuli, especially if it is not a favorite activity.

Adapting Games -

- Alternate between quiet, sitting activities and more active, gross motor activities so the girls will focus better.
- With younger girls, it is a good idea to keep activities active if you meet after school or for longer than an hour.
- You can also try a calming activity, i.e. like yoga or brief meditation.

Adapting Activities -

- Use an adaptive kaper chart that lists or includes, written information, to help the girl organize her thoughts.
- Create a short list of task steps for kapers to help the girls keep track of what needs to be done, e.g. handing out items, keeping supplies well-stocked, what clean up includes.
- Ask an older Girl Scout to work with her and gently remind her to stay focused on the activity.



Check Tips and Tools for information on adapting badges, journeys and Bronze/Silver/Gold awards.



Talking bean bags are a fun and gentle way to ensure everyone gets a chance to take part in meeting discussions. This is a gentle reminder that ‘we only talk when we’re holding the talking bean bag’. Pass the bean bag around to each girl so she can share. This can help the girls to remember to take turns. The girls might like to decorate the bean bag with feathers, sequins, or paint.

Emotional Disorders

Emotional disorders are a little more difficult to pin down. The term "emotional disorders" is not a fully accurate medical term, but is commonly used in ordinary context to refer to those psychological disorders that appear to affect the emotions. Examples of emotional disorders include depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, etc. Girls may act out or act differently than other girls for no apparent reason. This can be difficult for other girls to understand. Flexibility and patience will be most helpful, as well as understanding the reasoning behind the girl's difficulties and addressing them at an age appropriate level.



While all girls may have emotional disorders, girls in foster care may have a higher instance as they live in an uncertain environment, and not sure how long they will be staying with the family. Most have not come from healthy environments to begin with and often their home lives have been drastically changed. It is important to realize that Girl Scouts may be the first stable, nurturing environment she has experienced.

Talking to the parents or caregivers is essential, as they may have techniques and approaches to help you.

Need to Know About: Emotional Disorders

- She may have difficulty getting close to other girls.
- Her social skills may be less developed than other girls which may require more prompting for social niceties.
- She may be less likely to want to share with others, may get into fights and be more physical than other girls.
- She may show signs of frustration by shouting, clenching her fists, crying, or breathing hard.
- She may snap at other girls, push, or deliberately disobey leaders, or not participate appropriately.
- She may have a hard time sitting still and feel the need to get up and run around.

Adapting Games -

- Physical activity that involves running, jumping or spinning may help her settle down.
- Give her a choice of joining the activity or identifying a 'relaxation corner' where she can compose herself, as this might help her learn a positive coping strategy.



Adapting Activities -

- If a girl is displaying disruptive behavior, redirect her to another activity and, then the 'relaxation corner' if needed.
- Display and review the rules often to ensure all girls understand behavioral expectations.
- Have a supply of tongue twisters, jokes or songs to bring the focus back to the group activity, if your need to remove the focus from her, as this removes the object of frustration.



If she needs a break try to avoid any decision-making, and saying anything to the other girls so she is not blamed. If she needs more time to regroup, she may miss out on some decision-making as it can't always be avoided. Or ask another girl to accompany her and walk around the room. For younger girls, the break might only be 4 or 5 minutes. For older girls, it might be 10 minutes. Hopefully, the amount of time needed to regroup will reduce over time.

Physical Disabilities

When hearing the word disabilities, most likely physical disabilities comes to mind before any others. Physical disabilities can stem from many causes and conditions that can impair mobility and movement. The inability to use legs, arms, or the body trunk effectively because of paralysis, stiffness, pain, or other impairments is common. It may be the result of birth defects, disease, age, or accidents. As with other disabilities, physical disabilities come with degrees of impairment.

Activities need to be adapted to the impairment. Cerebral palsy, for example, can have a wide range of impairments from leg braces to a motorized wheelchair. Some girls may require a wheelchair for all activities, while others may be able to participate in activities with the use of leg braces, crutches, or a walker with frequent breaks in a wheelchair. For some girls it means she just needs a little more time. Talk to the girl and her parents or caregivers to find out what kind of accommodations she needs and what makes her comfortable.

When the facts are properly presented, Girl Scouts can add positively to the experience for the girl and she can provide a powerful lesson in perseverance and empathy for all the girls in the troop.



If you have girls with mobility challenges, please call or check the website of the location prior to any meeting/event to make sure they can accommodate any needs your girls might have.



Need to Know About: Physical Disabilities

- Offer assistance but wait until your offer is accepted before you begin to help.
- A girl-led troop helps her by promoting independence.
- It's important to be sensitive to her need to be independent and have minimal adaptations.
- Listen closely to any instructions she may have.
- When speaking with a girl in a wheelchair, leg braces, crutches, or walker, position yourself at her eye level.
- Keep in mind that leaning on a girl's wheelchair is invading her space
- For a girl in a wheelchair be sure the meeting place:
 - Is accessible.
 - Has a ramp to get in and out of the building.
 - Has a meeting room on the first floor or has an elevator.
 - Has a bathroom large enough to accommodate a wheelchair.
 - Has smooth floors and is free of barriers.
 - Has tables and chairs that can be moved out of the way.

Adapting Games -

- When playing a game outside ensure it is on a flat area like a parking lot so she can move safely with her braces, crutches, walker, or wheelchair.
- When playing competing games, have the girls pair up or work in teams.
- A girl who wears leg braces or uses crutches may need an extra few minutes to complete her lap of a relay race.
- A girl who only needs braces or crutches may be able to play more actively on her own, but still requires a flat, smooth surface in order to play safely.
- Playing wheelchair kickball:
 - A girl in the same game might require a friend to be a substitute kicker while she runs the bases in her chair.
 - If she has a hard time moving her chair, an adult or the girls may need to help her with games that require a lot of movement.



It is a good idea to keep competitive games to a minimum and focus instead on an 'everyone can be a winner' mentality. Competitive games can be fun, but there should be a good balance so that everyone can be successful. If a girl feels that every time she comes to Girl Scouts she is failing, she will not want to return.

Adapting Activities -

- Plan crafts or games where all girls can have fun e.g. tie-dyeing, modeling clay, candle-making, and soap-making.
- The chart below has suggestions for adapting activities for girls with fine motor skill limitations.

Adapting Writing and Drawing Activities

- Invest in markers and crayons in a range of sizes - triangular crayons and colored pencils are easy to grip.
- If something needs to be nicely hand-written print in gray ink so the girls trace.
- For coloring activities, start with simple pictures and work up to more complex ones - it's easier to stay inside the lines if the picture has thick, dark lines.



It's not essential that the handwriting be perfect. The girls will do what they can and it is most important that the girl be satisfied with what she did.



Adapting Scissor Activities

- Using Scissors requires a great deal of fine motor coordination and hand strength – consider using 'loop scissors'.
- Simple, straight lines are easier to cut than circles.
- Consider pre-cutting if the activity has many small pieces or hard to cut - this speeds up the activity and the girls can focus on completing the activity.



'Loop scissors' are connected by a loop of plastic at the end that acts as a spring. When the pressure is released the scissors will spring open. This requires less coordination and strength than conventional scissors, so the girl will have many chances to build her skills.



Adapting Gluing and Painting Activities

- Glue sticks and preloaded paintbrushes allow the girls to hold the stick without having to squeeze and move at the same time.
- Squeeze white glue or paint on a plate and let the girls use different types of tools – popsicle sticks and paintbrushes for gluing; sponges and cotton swabs for painting.



When using glue or paint from a plate, girls will have greater control over what they are doing, will use less, and the project will dry faster.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

A deaf person has little to no hearing, while a hard of hearing person may be partially or totally unable to hear. Hearing loss may occur in one or both ears. Genetics, exposure to noise, birth complications and trauma are some causes for hearing loss. It is correct to refer to a person who cannot hear as Deaf or Hard of Hearing (HH). "Hearing Impaired" is considered by many to be politically incorrect because they are not disabled or impaired and are completely capable of doing anything except hear.

Deaf or hard of hearing girls may have an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter. ASL interpreters are individuals who facilitate communication between hearing and deaf individuals. They are trained to interpret what is being said and signs it from someone who can't hear, but understands ASL. The interpreter will also interpret and speak the words which convey the meaning of whatever the signing person signs so hearing people can "hear" what is signed.

When communicating, asking them for feedback on what has just been said can provide a clear idea of whether or not they have understood. This will encourage appropriate interaction with interpreters. In order to provide an inclusive, accessible, and supportive environment, it's important to focus on the girl rather than the interpreter.

Need to Know About: Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- It's important for girls to feel empowered and independent so only offer help if requested.
- When speaking to a girl who is using an interpreter, speak to the girl, not the interpreter.
- Hearing aids only amplify volume, they don't actually clarify sounds.
- Some girls are strong speech readers, however, even the best speech readers only get about 30% of what's being said just by reading lips. She gains the rest of the information through context.
- There are a variety of other factors that can prevent girls from understanding even further, i.e. the speaker has a mustache, an accent, or speaks rapidly.
- When rooms are noisy or when multiple people are talking, it's hard for girls to follow.

Adapting Games -

- She may need to ask questions to understand or clarify instructions.
- Use attention getting signals, e.g. hand signals, lights.

Adapting Activities -

- Small groups work best so she can see all girls.
- Use visual aids.
- Send home written information in case information was missed.



When participating in activities around and in water, it is important to take extra caution as hearing aids and cochlear implants can easily be damaged if they get wet or drop in the water. The girl may need to remove her hearing aid or implant to participate in an activity involving water, e.g. swimming, looking over fish ponds, or crafts that use tubs of water. When removed the girl may be completely deaf.

Blind and Visually Impaired

Visual impairment is a decreased ability to see to a degree that causes problems not fixable by glasses or contact lenses. Blindness is a complete or nearly complete vision loss. Genetics, eye disorders, eye injuries and birth defects can cause loss of vision. Whatever the cause, lost vision cannot be restored. It can however, be managed. If there is some vision, visual aids like special glasses, magnifying glasses large print books may be used. There are also tools to help those with no vision, i.e. white cane with a red tip, guide dogs, and Braille books.

Girls that are blind or vision impaired, can take part in sports, games, and other activities with a little adaptation. Involve the girl in determining the adaptations. As her other senses are sharpened, she uses smell, touch, and hearing help her to manage her world. Certain smells can be associated with specific areas and help her remember a familiar area.

- Touch gives an immense amount of information in her immediate surroundings.
- She uses sound to locate objects by making a sound and listening for the echo.

When greeting a girl, speak directly to her in a normal tone of voice, and always identify yourself and others. You might say, "Hi, it's Sheryl. Tara is on my right and Chris is on my left." When you leave, say you are leaving. Remember, blindness doesn't change character or personality, it just affects vision.



Need to Know About: Blind and Visually Impaired

- Be yourself, relax, and don't be afraid to approach her.
- Guide dogs are not pets, they are always working. They should not be approached, petted, spoken to, or otherwise distracted from their purpose unless you have been given permission. When describing a location of an object, use clock numbers as a reference point (table at 12 o'clock, chair at 3 o'clock, and so on).
- Don't move personal items or rearrange items as she does not see changes in her surroundings.
- Keep cabinet and closet doors closed as well.

Adapting Games -

- Utilize active games that use sound, i.e. clapping games like Miss Suzie, Miss Mary Mark.
- Also, games like musical chairs, Duck Duck Goose or games where music stops, everyone has to freeze, and who ever moves is out.
- Ask her or her parent or caregiver if she has a favorite game.
- For traditional games, try adding sound, making the target bigger, or using a slower-moving ball.

Adapting Activities -

- Activities should be either 3-D or in some other way tactile.
- Beading, string or sand art, and modeling clay are examples.



If you can't decide if the girl needs help, ask if she would like you to help. If so, let her take your arm, just above the elbow, and follow your body movements. Before you start walking, ensure that she is a half-step behind you and slightly to your side. When you come to a door, mention how it opens (in or out, left or right). Indicate the direction of stairs (up or down), and if they are wide or narrow. When showing her a chair, place her hand on the back of the chair. She'll do the rest.



If the girl uses a cane, the other girls need to be careful of her cane so they don't trip. She can't see them to help them avoid her cane. Also, don't pull on the cane.

DISEASES AND DISORDERS

Diseases and disorders are medical conditions that have specific signs and symptoms that impair the normal function of the body. Medical issues and treatment are handled the same way as with any other girl. These cannot be cured, but are managed with medication and avoidance of triggers. It is highly recommended that a First-Aider be present during your meetings and events.

It is essential parents or caregivers complete the [Over-the Counter \(OTC\)](#) and [Provided Prescription and Provided OTC Form](#) (as needed) medication forms giving you permission to administer medication and specific instructions on how to handle an emergency. If the parent or caregiver has given permission for OTC medicines, such as; Benadryl®, antibiotic ointment, specific sunscreen, the medication should be carried in your first aid kit at all times. Use the [Provided Prescription and Provided OTC Form](#) for prescription medication when girls need to carry and administer their own medications, e.g. bronchial inhalers, epinephrine injector (EpiPen®), diabetes medication or for permission to administer antibiotics or OTC's provided by the parent or caregiver. Provided prescription and OTC medications need to be in their original packaging with girls' name, Dr's instruction and expiration date visible. Younger girls' may need the first-aider or troop leader to administer their medication. Ask the parent or caregiver if the child has ever used this medication.



Remember for the safety of the girl, the troop first-aider attending the activity or event should have the first aid kit near them (not in the car) ready to respond.



Treatment for medical emergencies must be provided promptly. Call 911 for all emergency situations.

Allergies

Allergies are abnormal responses to the immune system that can be severe or become a life-threatening allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis. In contrast, for instance food intolerance does not affect the immune system. In most instances, knowing the trigger and avoidance is the most effective way to prevent a reaction.

The chart below lists the common triggers for allergies.

Allergies	Common Triggers
Food	Peanuts, tree nuts, dairy products, shellfish, eggs, fish, strawberry, melons, citrus, wheat, soy
Insect Stings	Bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets, fire ants
Medication	Penicillin, aspirin, ibuprofen
Latex	Disposable gloves, Adhesive tape & bandages (Band-Aids®)

Need to Know About: Food Allergies

- Food allergies are very common so do not make a big deal out of them, which can make the girl feel uncomfortable. It is easy to put something on the side for each person, so everyone feels included.
- There is no medication to prevent food allergies. The goal of treatment is to avoid the foods or other similar foods in that food group.
- Everyone should wash their hands before eating, touching anything or anyone especially if they have been eating peanuts or dairy.
- It's very important to prevent cross-contamination during snack time. If there are foods containing allergens, keep them separate from the other foods.
- Let your troop parents or caregivers know what foods to avoid for snacks and suggest they bring fresh fruits or vegetables.
- The girls' parents or caregiver might want to provide a snack for her just in case the snack isn't safe.
- Depending on the severity of the girl's allergy an adult should be in the room when girls are eating.
- Discourage serving processed foods as they frequently contain dairy by-products and peanut oil. Review the ingredient list on all packaged foods.
- If a girl has food intolerances or allergies make sure there is an option she can select. If she has an intolerance or allergy to chocolate, s'mores can be served but hers will be with graham crackers and marshmallows only. The goal is to make her feel included without depriving the other girls.
- When camping, if there is no running water and you're using the 3-basin method, it's a good idea to have the girl with food allergies wash her dishes first to avoid contamination. Hand wipes are useful also.
- It is advisable to have the parent or caregiver of the girl attend overnight trips, as the location of medical care may be unknown.



Need to Know About: Insect Stings

- Any sting may cause a reaction.
- Serious reactions require medical attention.

Need to Know About: Medication

- Most reactions occur within hours to two weeks.
- Rashes may develop up to six weeks.



Need to Know About: Latex

- Reactions may occur after coming into contact with latex or inhaling airborne particles.
- Symptoms range from mild to severe



Anaphylaxis restricts the airway and is a life-threatening condition. It can occur when susceptible individuals are exposed to certain allergens, the most common being food, insect stings, medications, and latex. Girls who have had severe allergic reactions before are more likely to experience anaphylaxis even if the offending allergen didn't cause anaphylaxis in the past.

Asthma

Asthma is a common long term inflammatory disease of the airways of the lungs. It is characterized by variable and recurring symptoms. Symptoms include episodes of wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath. These episodes may occur a few times a day or a few times per week. Depending on the individual they may become worse at night or with exercise. There is no cure, but symptoms can be prevented by avoiding triggers, such as allergens and irritants and the use of inhaled corticosteroids. Inhalers should never be given to someone that it is not prescribed for.

Need to Know About: Asthma

- Medications to treat symptoms are divided into quick-relief and long-term.
- Exposure to air pollution and allergens may trigger attacks.
- Other triggers include medications and exercise.



Symptoms are usually worse at night and in the early morning or in response to exercise or cold air. Some girls may require a nebulizer to manage their symptoms.

Diabetes

Diabetes is commonly referred to as a group of metabolic diseases in which there are high blood sugar levels over a prolonged period.

- Type 1 Diabetes results from the pancreas's failure to produce enough insulin. The cause is unknown. Children usually have Type 1.
- Type 2 Diabetes begins with insulin resistance, a condition in which cells fail to respond to insulin properly. As the disease progresses a lack of insulin may also develop. The most common cause is excessive body mass and not enough exercise.

The key to managing diabetes is to keep blood sugar levels in a target range. To do this, the individual needs to take medication, eat controlled meals several times a day, eat about the same amount of carbohydrates at each meal, and exercise. Some diabetic conditions are entirely managed with diet. Part of their daily routine includes checking their blood sugar levels at certain times. It is essential that parents or caregivers be involved.



It's important to know the symptoms of both low and high blood sugar. The chart below shows some common symptoms.

Low or High Blood Sugar Symptoms	
• Bad breath	• Headache
• Blurred vision	• Hungry
• Change in skin color	• Irritable
• Difficulty speaking	• 'Motor Mouth'/constant talking
• Dizziness/ Lightheadedness	• Nauseous
• Difficulty concentrating	• Restlessness
• Drowsiness	• Shaky/hand tremors
• Fainting/Blackouts	• Sweating
• Fatigue	• Thirsty (High)
• Frequent urination (High)	• Tired

Need to Know About: Diabetes

- It is important to communicate with the parent or caregiver of the girl who has Type 1. They will give you information on what needs to be done and if they need to provide you with insulin dispensing instructions.
- It is important to balance the blood sugar levels with the food the girl eats and the activities she does.
- Even when careful, the girl may have problems with stabilizing low or high blood sugar.
- She may need to test her blood level and/or administer medication.
- The signs and symptoms of low blood sugar happen quickly while high blood sugar usually develops slowly.



It is important for parents or caregiver to complete the Over-the-Counter (OTC) medication form giving you permission to administer medication or blood tests when needed. Also parents or caregiver should give detail procedures for a medical emergency. It is advisable to have a first-aider or parent/caregiver attend your troop overnights.

Seizures

Seizures in most cases are linked to unknown brain malfunction with variations of involuntary shaking from brief undetectable to long vigorous shaking. The episodes can result in physical injuries including broken bones. Some cases occur as the result of a fever, an infection, or head injury.

Need to Know About: Seizures

- Seizures are controllable with medication in most cases.
- Not all cases are lifelong, and improve to the point treatment is no longer needed.
- During a seizure, ease the girl to the floor so she doesn't fall, roll her onto her left side with her mouth turned downward, loosen clothing around the head or neck and efforts should be taken to prevent further self-injury.
- Never restrain a girl who is having a seizure. Instead, move any objects that could harm her.

→ A seizure can last from a few seconds to more than five minutes. After the seizure there is typically a period of confusion that can last from 3 to 15 minutes, sometimes longer. Other common symptoms include: feeling tired, headache, difficulty speaking, abnormal behavior, and losing bodily functions. Discuss with the parent or caregiver how they have handled their child's seizures. If this is the first time, call 9-1-1.



SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness is one of the first components of the self-concept to emerge. While self-awareness is something that is central to each and every one of us, it is not something that we are acutely aware of at every moment of the day.

Instead, self-awareness becomes woven into the fabric of who we are and emerges at different points depending on the situation and our personality. However, we are not born with self-awareness. Researchers have demonstrated that the awareness of ourselves begins to emerge at around one year of age and becomes much more developed by around 18 months of age.

There are 2 types of self-awareness

- Public – This type emerges when people are aware of how they appear to others.
- Private – This type happens when people become aware of some aspects of themselves, but only in a private way.

Transgender Girls

Usually, children don't think too much about their gender. It feels normal and natural for many girls to be female and for many boys to be male. But that's not true for everyone. When they become aware of their gender identity, transgender people who are born as boys feel they should be female, and those who are born as girls feel they should be male.

People who are transgender feel like they're living inside a body that's all wrong for them. They often say they feel "trapped in someone else's body." Some transgender people know they feel "different" from the time they are young children and once they do, they want to be recognized as the opposite gender.

When a child is recognized by the family, school and community as a girl, and lives culturally as a girl, Girl Scouts can provide a setting that is both emotionally and physically safe for her. The welfare and best interests of the child are the top priority. It is important to work with the girls' family to ensure that she has a safe and supported experience as a Girl Scout.

Need to Know About: Transgender Girls

- The most important factor troops need to take into consideration is that families will have differing viewpoints about their daughter's privacy.
- GSUSA strongly recommends the troop/group leader, or the adult most closely involved with the girl be aware of her transgender status. This must be clearly communicated to the parents or caregivers and framed as a concern about the safety of the girl.
- If you receive a request for membership and have any concerns, please feel free to contact the AbilityGS Go Team at Support@girlscoutsla.org.



Some families will be very open about their child being transgender, and will believe that raising awareness in their community about transgender children will be an essential part of creating a safe community for their child. Other families will feel just as strongly that their child will be most safe if no one knows that their child is transgender. Neither thought is "right" or "wrong," and both are to be respected.



TROOP MEETINGS

Even though it is the girls' troop, the troop culture is a reflection of the leaders. As leaders, our goal is for girls to try things for themselves, and to accept others for who they are. It takes determination to implement and sustain a troop that includes everyone. Working with the girls, your troop can become an inclusion culture troop.

In an inclusion culture troop:

- Everyone makes accommodations for each other's differences
- Everyone helps each other
- There is no pressure to keep up



An inclusion troop gives everyone a chance to have something to look forward to! It might be to play games, sing songs, go on field trips, explore the outdoors, or just try something new!

Need to Know About: Troop Meetings

This manual is just one of many resources to help your troop become an inclusion troop. There are:

- “Troop Meetings” modules are available to view for every level that gives information on the different parts of a meeting and helpful tips on leading your girls <http://gsqglaonlinetraining.org>.
- For meeting space information refer to Chapters Two and Three of *Volunteer Essentials*.

Tips for Adapting Activities for All Girls -

- **Reflection Circle** - If an incident takes place where a girl's feelings are hurt, a reflection circle is a good way to discuss the situation in a positive and caring way. Girls and leaders either sit or stand in a circle.
 - **Leader:** “It was a great activity for the following reasons (emphasize positive). However, it was brought to our attention that one of the girl's feelings were hurt.”
 - Ask the girl beforehand if she wants to speak. If she does, ask her to say what happened.
 - After the girl speaks, the girls who made the hurtful comments apologize and write a note to explain why they're sorry. They are encouraged to include the girl.
 - Girls can make a friendship bracelet or a card.
- **Closing Circle:**
 - **Leader:** “We've talked and shared a lot today about respecting other people. But I want you to always respect yourself as well. When you refuse to use put-downs, or when you stand up for what you believe in, that shows self-respect.
 - **Say:** “I'd like to start the Friendship Squeeze around the circle with a wish that you will always show respect for yourself as well as for others through your words and actions.”



Bronze Award Projects

The Bronze Award can be earned by girls of all abilities. Most troops choose to work on their project as a group. As the leader, just as with badges and journeys, you decide what needs to be adapted to the needs of the girls and when the requirements are completed. You are also responsible for ensuring each girl has completed the requirements to the best of her ability.

Silver Award Projects

Flexibility is also allowed for Silver Award Projects. There can be variations in the number of participants. Just as with badges, you, as the leader, are allowed to determine when a girl has completed the requirements to the best of her abilities. This means you are responsible for ascertaining if she has indeed, done her best and has been challenged. This makes the earning of silver award projects attainable for all abilities. Please reach out to your local program specialist for guidance in making determinations.

Gold Award Projects

Girls of all abilities can apply to earn their Gold Award. All gold award candidates must participate in an interview. On the Gold Award application, parents or caregivers can indicate any special accommodations needed for the interview process. The final project will be evaluated on fulfilling criteria set during the initial interview. One can apply for extensions of deadlines; medical diagnoses or disabilities do not have to be disclosed. Mentors can be asked to facilitate note-taking or breaking down a task or part of a project so the candidate is not overwhelmed and stays motivated. It might be helpful to seek a mentor who is familiar with the girl's diagnosis. Girls are allowed to choose their own mentors.



TIPS AND TOOLS

Frequently Asked Questions

“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.
- Leaders have a wonderful opportunity to influence girls for the rest of their lives.
- Work with a parent/caregiver or possibly an aide to ascertain the best process for the girl.

“Do I have to take a girl with a disability into my troop?”

- We encourage leaders to take girls of all abilities.

“I’m not a teacher or therapist. I don’t know what to do.”

- 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.
- We’re not asking you to become an expert or nurse or therapist – just a Girl Scout leader.

“I can’t handle the thought of working with a disabled child.”

- 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 okay 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.”

SELF-AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Learning more about one's self is a big part of discovering and knowing who we are. It means understanding that how we act on our thoughts and feelings, affects ourselves and others. When the girls know themselves well, they understand their own feelings, thoughts, and actions and can make better informed choices. As they get to know themselves and reflect on their own strengths and struggles, they are able to appreciate the beauty of diversity as well as the attributes that make them unique.

The activities below will help the girls develop self-awareness while working alongside one another and learning to work cooperatively. As you do the activities with your girls, please use your own judgment to create a positive, learning environment for all girls.

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

Purpose: This activity helps girls accept differences

Supplies: Red paper circles (about 2" for older girls, 3" or 4" for younger ones); dark markers with a fine tip.

Instructions:

- 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 didn't like 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 – it can be 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’, 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 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!”
- **Say:** “Let’s close with a Friendship Circle . . . In Girl Scouts we 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 sister Girl Scouts and we get along.

Saying Goodbye to Put-Downs

Purpose: This activity increases sensitivity towards one another

Supplies: Slips of papers; pencils; box with lid or cover, N.P.D. Zone sign (No-Put-Down)

Instructions:

- Hand out paper and pencils.
- **Say:** Part of respecting others is using respectful language. I want each of you to write a put-down you never want to hear again. A put-down could be a name someone calls you, hurtful teasing, or a sarcastic remark. If it makes you feel unliked, it's a put-down.



- Share and invite anyone else who would like to share what they wrote and, explain why the word(s) hurt.
- **Say:** I hereby proclaim that all the put-downs that have hurt your feelings in the past are dead! I have a box here to bury them in. So please fold up your deceased put-downs and come up one at a time to place them in the box.
- When all put-downs are in the box, solemnly put the lid on or cover it with a towel or piece of cloth.
- **Say:** Girl Scouts, please join hands and form a circle around the box that contains all the put-downs.
- **Say:** Friends, we are gathered here today to say goodbye to Put-Downs. While she was with us here on earth, she touched the lives of everyone, some more than others. We have provided Put-Downs with a final resting place. May Put-Downs rest in peace and may everyone present pick up their lives and move forward in her absence.

(If this is an evening program, you could place the box or the strips of paper in the campfire at this point. During the day, you could - with permission – bury the box or slips of paper, or ceremoniously put them in the trash!)

- Show the N.P.D. Zone sign.
- **Say:** To help keep put-downs from ever coming back, we're establishing an N.P.D. Zone in troop _____. N.P.D. stands for No-Put-Downs. In our troop, we care about one another's feelings and avoid put-downs.
 - We don't use hurtful teasing.
 - We don't call each other names.
 - We treat others the way we want to be treated.
 - We use good manners.
 - We treat others well even if they look, act, or believe differently than we do and when we have disagreements, we deal with them peacefully.
- **Say:** If you agree, please make the Girl Scout sign and say, No More Put-Downs!

**If you ever wonder why I'm treating you different,
take a step back and look at how you treat me...
That'll tell you all you need to know.**

DISABILITY AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

It is important for the girls to understand and experience a day in the life of a girl with a disability. One way to introduce the girls to the different disabilities is through hands-on or learning by doing activities. The activities are not meant to capture the real-life experience or focus on the negative. They are intended to build empathy and understanding about disabilities, and to stimulate a conversation about accommodations, individuality, sensitivity, and inclusion. The open discussions will help girls learn what underlying thoughts create discrimination and exclusion. At best, all discussions following the activities will focus on how to better include anyone with a disability.

As you do the activities with your girls, please use your own judgment to create a positive, learning environment for all girls.



HEARING AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Placing Cotton in Your Ears

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of deaf issues; activity should be built-in to a troop meeting

Supplies: set of padded earphones, or clean cotton balls with scarf/tie

Instructions:

- Have half the girls use earphones or gently place a cotton ball in the outer part of each ear and tie the scarf/tie around their heads to hold the cotton.
- Do nothing special for the girls with earphones or cotton balls.
- Halfway through have the girls switch.
- After the activity discuss the girls' feelings as they were struggling to hear.
 - Discuss how they felt towards others – the leader, and the other girls.
 - Discuss the feelings of others with hearing impairments.
- Help the girls develop a list of helpful hints for working with someone with a hearing loss.



Taking a Spelling Test

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of deaf or hard of hearing issues

Supplies: recorder, washcloth or towel, pencils, paper

Preparation:

- Make a recording of words listed below as if you were calling out spelling words. Hold a washcloth over the microphone as you say the words. Do not repeat any of the words. Do not use the words in a sentence. Read the words slowly, allowing five seconds between each word.
- Before using the recording with the troop or group, have your assistant leader or a friend take the spelling test. She should get from one to three words correct. If she gets more than three words correct, cover the microphone with the washcloth again, and re-record the words. The reason for using these particular words is that they sound very similar to other words.

Spelling Words

1. feel	2. cash	3. thumb
4. heat	5. rise	6. ledge
7. fish	8. shows	9. dread
10. juice		

Instructions:

- Ask the girls to number their papers from 1 – 10.
- Explain this is an important test.
- Play the recording.
- Ask the girls to write the words they hear on their numbered paper. While the recording is playing, you should refrain from repeating words or answering questions.
- At the end of the recording, ask the girls to check their papers while you read the correct words.
- Have the girls tell how they felt during the testing.
 - Ask, “Did they give up trying to understand the words?” Some of the girls may have given up and not finished the activity.
 - Discuss why they did not finish. “Did they feel angry during the test?”
 - Discuss how they felt toward you when you would not help or would not repeat any of the words.
 - Encourage them to talk about all of their feelings. They may express anger, fear, or feelings of failure.
- Then discuss how someone with a hearing impairment feels when she cannot hear a conversation.
 - Encourage discussion about feelings and about how any person with a disability might feel in many different situations.
 - Help the girls identify the barriers in the day-to-day life of a person with a hearing impairment.
- The girls should end the discussion by listing some important things to remember when talking with a person who has a hearing impairment.
- This exercise can also be done using sentences:
 - I don’t want to meet at the show tonight.
 - Put that lid back on the box.
 - How do you spell your name?
 - This hat should be put in the closet.
 - Where have you put the clothes this time?

VISUAL AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Wearing a Blindfold

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of blind or visual impairment issues, activity might be built-in to a troop meeting

Supplies: blindfolds, fork, knife, plate, glass, food, water

Instructions:

- Have half the girls put on a blindfold.
- Have the blindfolded girls with a sighted helper:
 - Go to the restroom.
 - Go to the water fountain.
 - Eat with a helper giving directions on food location.
- Have the girls switch.
- After the activity discuss the girls' feelings:
 - Discuss how they felt when blindfolded and what was helpful and what was not helpful.
 - Discuss how they felt as a helper.
- Help the girls develop a list of suggestions for guiding and for helping a person with a visual impairment.

Assembling Puzzle Blindfolded

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of blind/visual impairment issues

Supplies: blindfolds, ultra-simple jigsaw puzzles

Instructions:

- Work in teams of 3; two girls wear blindfolds with third help the others build the puzzle.
- Halfway through have the girls switch.
- After the activity discuss the girls' feelings:
 - Discuss how they felt when blindfolded and what was helpful and what was not helpful.
 - Discuss how they felt as a helper.
- Help the girls develop a list of suggestions for guiding and for helping a person with a visual impairment.



LEARNING AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Reading Paragraphs

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of learning disabilities – appropriate for Juniors and above

Supplies: reading material with distorted text

Instructions:

- Hand out the reading materials to the girls.
- Have each girl – one at a time – to read their paragraph out loud.
- After the activity discuss the girls' feelings discuss how they felt when reading.

Help the girls develop a list of things to remember when helping a girl with a learning disability.

Writing on Paper on Your Forehead

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of learning disabilities

Supplies: paper, pencils

Instructions:

- Give each girl a piece of paper and a pencil.
- Have each girl place a piece of paper on her forehead and write her name on the paper.
- Some of the girls will write their names backwards.
- Lead a discussion on how the girls felt when they realized this later.
- Point out that the girls who wrote backwards did not realize, at the time, they were writing backwards.



Writing and Swinging Your Foot

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder

Supplies: paper, pencils

Instructions:

- Give each girl a piece of paper and a pencil.
- Ask the girls to place their feet flat on the floor.
- Have each girl lift her left foot and swing it in a counterclockwise motion.
- At the same time that the girls are swinging their feet, ask them to write their names.
- Following this activity:
 - Discuss how difficult it was to write well.
 - Discuss how the girls had to think hard about what they were doing even though it was a simple task.
- Discuss how difficult it is for a person with a learning disability or an attention deficit disorder to do many activities.
 - Discuss focus on feelings of failure and frustration after not doing well on a simple task.
 - Point out that although they do not usually have to swing their feet while writing, many girls are unable to keep still while working.
- Help the girls develop a list of ways to help someone or alter an activity.



PHYSICAL AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

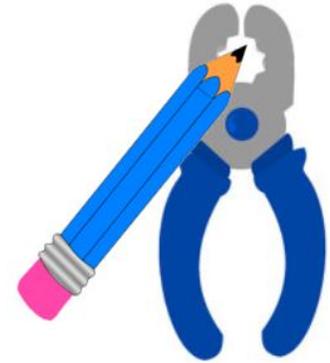
Writing with Pliers

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of physical disability issues, activity should be built-in to a troop meeting

Supplies: pencils, paper, several pliers

Instructions:

- Have half the girls hold a pencil with a pair of pliers while she writes.
- Do nothing special for the girls with pliers.
- Halfway through have the girls switch.
- After the activity discuss the girls' feelings as they were struggling to write.
 - Discuss their feelings of failure when they were having trouble.
 - Discuss their feelings of success when they had accomplished part of the task.
- Help the girls develop a list of helpful hints for working with someone with a physical disability.



Using Wheelchairs, Canes, and Crutches

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of physical disability issues

Supplies: wheelchair, canes, crutches

Instructions:

- Have the girls try to do everyday activities while in a wheelchair, or on crutches, or using a cane. Suggested activities are:
 - Go to the bathroom.
 - Make a phone call.
 - Wash their hands.
 - Make a sandwich.
 - Get a drink of water.
- After the activity discuss the girls' feelings:
 - Discuss how they felt when using a wheelchair, crutches or cane.
 - Discuss what change would have to be made to have a barrier-free building.
- Help the girls develop a list of:
 - Places in the building that a person in a wheelchair cannot go.
 - Things that a person with a physical disability would have difficulty doing.



Buttoning a Shirt

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of physical disability issues

Supplies: large shirts/blouses

Instructions:

- Have half the girls put on the shirts/blouses and ask them to button it with one hand while other half watch.
- Have the girls switch.
- After the activity:
 - Discuss how they felt when trying to button the shirt/blouse.
 - Discuss how they felt as they watch a girl buttoning the shirt/blouse.
 - Discuss what they could have done if they would have gone to the girl and assisted her.
 - Discuss how to let people with disabilities know they are accepted as individuals with their own strengths and weaknesses.
- Help the girls realize:
 - If they do things for people with disabilities, they send a message that these people are not able to do things for themselves.



Threading a Needle

Purpose: Intended to increase awareness of physical disability issues

Supplies: a bulky pair of socks or a pair of mittens, needle with small eye, thread

Preparation: on table, place needle and a piece of thread that has been broken – not cut – from the spool of thread

Instructions:

- Have half the girls put the socks or mittens on their hands.
- Ask the girls to pick up the needle and thread, and thread the needle.
- Have the girls switch.
- After the activity discuss:
 - Discuss how they felt when attempting to thread the needle.
 - Discuss how they may not want to try something new or might want to stay away from groups of people.
- Help the girls develop a list of suggestions for assisting the girl with a physical disability without doing the tasks for her.
- Girls can help a girl with a disability thread a needle by offering her a needle threader.



Resources

Internet support groups

There are a variety of free online support groups. Most of these have a number of skilled, experienced leaders willing to lend a hand. Researching can help you find the one that's right for you.

Websites

There are websites that focus on specific conditions. Browsing the internet for information on a diagnosis can be very beneficial. It's best to look for the official websites whenever possible. Many conditions have a national group which is working towards awareness and a cure, and these often have the most current information and the clearest, most accurate definition of what the condition is. Some of these websites include:

- **Down Syndrome:** National Down Syndrome Society, <http://www.ndss.org/>
- **Cerebral Palsy:** United Cerebral Palsy, <http://www.ucp.org/>
- **Deafness:** American Society for Deaf Children, <http://www.deafchildren.org/>
- **Autism:** Autism Speaks Foundation, <http://www.autismspeaks.org/>
- **Spina Bifida:** Spina Bifida Association, <http://www.spinabifidaassociation.org>
- **Attention Deficit Disorder:** Attention Deficit Disorder Association, <http://www.add.org>
- **Blindness:** Junior Blind, <http://juniorblind.org>

Books

There are many age-appropriate books that deal with disabilities of all kinds. Check out the local library, the special education teachers at elementary schools, or other local leaders. Again, don't forget to ask parents or caregivers!

If you have a new girl joining the troop and you want to talk to your girls about it, a story book might be useful. Some parents make photo books of their own children to explain the disability, or have their own favorite books to recommend. Some examples of these books are:

- ***Susan Laughs*** by Jeanne Willis, Tony Ross – A wonderful book about a young girl who sings, plays with her friends, and swims with her Dad. At the end there is a picture of her in her wheelchair, and by then it's clear that Susan is just like me, just like you. This might be a good book to read to the younger girls at the meeting prior to introducing a girl in a wheelchair to the troop.
- ***My Brother Charlie*** by Holly Robinson Peete, Ryan Elizabeth Peete, Shane Evans
Actress and national Autism spokesperson – Holly Robinson Peete collaborates with her daughter on this book based on Holly's 10-year-old son, who has ASD.
- ***My Friend Isabelle*** by Eliza Woloson – Isabelle and Charlie are friends. They both like to draw, dance, read, and play at the park. And, like most friends, they are also different from each other. Isabelle has Down Syndrome, Charlie doesn't. Written by Isabelle's mother, this charming tale encourages readers to think about what makes a friendship special. It opens the door for young children to talk about differences and the world around them.
- ***Don't Call Me Special: A First Look at Disability*** by Pat Thomas – A book which provides a broad look at disabilities; aimed at children aged 4-8.
- ***Taking Cerebral Palsy to School*** by Mary Elizabeth Anderson – Even though Chad has cerebral palsy, he can still attend school and do many of the same things as his classmates. Written from Chad's perspective, this book answers many of the questions his classmates have but may be too scared or uncomfortable to ask.

TEN THINGS EVERY CHILD WITH AUTISM WISHES YOU KNEW

Excerpt from the book Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew, by Ellen Notbohm 2nd edition Bronze Medal in Psychology, ForeWord Book of the Year Awards. Reprinted in its entirety with permission of author.

Some days it seems the only predictable thing about it is the unpredictability. The only consistent attribute—the inconsistency. Autism can be baffling, even to those who spend their lives around it. The child who lives with autism may look “normal” but his behavior can be perplexing and downright difficult.

Autism was once labeled an “incurable disorder,” but that notion has crumbled in the face knowledge and understanding that increase even as you read this. Every day, individuals with autism show us that they can overcome, compensate for and otherwise manage many of autism’s most challenging characteristics. Equipping those around our children with simple understanding of autism’s basic elements has a tremendous impact on their ability to journey towards productive, independent adulthood.

Autism is a complex disorder but for purposes of this article, we can distill its myriad characteristics into four fundamental areas: sensory processing challenges, speech/language delays and impairments, the elusive social interaction skills and whole child/self-esteem issues. And though these four elements may be common to many children, keep front-of-mind the fact that autism is a spectrum disorder: no two (or ten or twenty) children with autism will be completely alike. Every child will be at a different point on the spectrum. And, just as importantly, every parent, teacher and caregiver will be at a different point on the spectrum. Child or adult, each will have a unique set of needs.

Here are ten things every child with autism wishes you knew:

1. I am a child.

My autism is part of who I am, not all of who I am. Are you just one thing, or are you a person with thoughts, feelings, preferences, ideas, talents, and dreams? Are you fat (overweight), myopic (wear glasses) or klutzy (uncoordinated)? Those may be things that I see first when I meet you, but you’re more than just that, aren’t you?

As an adult, you have control over how you define yourself. If you want to single out one characteristic, you can make that known. As a child, I am still unfolding. Neither you nor I yet know what I may be capable of. If you think of me as just one thing, you run the danger of setting up an expectation that may be too low. And if I get a sense that you don’t think I “can do it,” my natural response will be, why try?

2. My senses are out of sync.

This means that ordinary sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches that you may not even notice can be downright painful for me. My environment often feels hostile. I may appear withdrawn or belligerent or mean to you, but I’m just trying to defend myself. Here’s why a simple trip to the grocery store may be agonizing for me.

My hearing may be hyper acute. Dozens of people jabber at once. The loudspeaker booms today’s special. Music blares from the sound system. Registers beep and cough, a coffee grinder chugs. The meat cutter screeches, babies wail, carts creak, the fluorescent lighting hums. My brain can’t filter all the input and I’m in overload!

My sense of smell may be highly sensitive. The fish at the meat counter isn’t quite fresh, the guy standing next to us hasn’t showered today, the deli is handing out sausage samples, the baby in line ahead of us has a poopy diaper, they’re mopping up pickles on aisle three with ammonia. I feel like throwing up.

And there’s so much hitting my eyes! The fluorescent light is not only too bright, it flickers. The space seems to be moving; the pulsating light bounces off everything and distorts what I am seeing. There are too many items for me to be able to focus (my brain may compensate with tunnel vision), swirling fans on the ceiling, so many bodies in constant motion. All this affects how I feel just standing there, and now I can’t even tell where my body is in space.

3. Distinguish between won't (I choose not to) and can't (I am not able to).

It isn't that I don't listen to instructions. It's that I can't understand you. When you call to me from across the room, I hear “*&^%\$#@, Jordan. #\$\$%^&^%\$&*.” Instead, come over to me, get my attention, and speak in plain words: “Jordan, put your book in your desk. It's time to go to lunch.” This tells me what you want me to do and what is going to happen next. Now it's much easier for me to comply.

4. I'm a concrete thinker. I interpret language literally.

You confuse me by saying, “Hold your horses, cowboy!” when what you mean is, “Stop running.” Don't tell me something is “a piece of cake” when there's no dessert in sight and what you mean is, “This will be easy for you to do.” When you say, “It's pouring cats and dogs,” I see pets coming out of a pitcher. Tell me, “It's raining hard.” Idioms, puns, nuances, inferences, metaphors, allusions, and sarcasm are lost on me.

5. Listen to all the ways I'm trying to communicate.

It's hard for me to tell you what I need when I don't have a way to describe my feelings. I may be hungry, frustrated, frightened, or confused but right now I can't find those words. Be alert for body language, withdrawal, agitation or other signs that tell you something is wrong. They're there.

Or, you may hear me compensate for not having all the words I need by sounding like a little professor or movie star, rattling off words or whole scripts well beyond my developmental age. I've memorized these messages from the world around me because I know I am expected to speak when spoken to. They may come from books, television, or the speech of other people. Grown-ups call it echolalia. I may not understand the context or the terminology I'm using. I just know that it gets me off the hook for coming up with a reply.

6. Picture this! I'm visually oriented.

Show me how to do something rather than just telling me. And be prepared to show me many times. Lots of patient practice helps me learn.

Visual supports help me move through my day. They relieve me of the stress of having to remember what comes next, make for smooth transition between activities, and help me manage my time and meet your expectations.

I need to see something to learn it, because spoken words are like steam to me; they evaporate in an instant, before I have a chance to make sense of them. I don't have instant-processing skills. Instructions and information presented to me visually can stay in front of me for as long as I need, and will be just the same when I come back to them later. Without this, I live the constant frustration of knowing that I'm missing big blocks of information and expectations, and am helpless to do anything about it.

7. Focus and build on what I can do rather than what I can't do.

Like any person, I can't learn in an environment where I'm constantly made to feel that I'm not good enough and that I need fixing. I avoid trying anything new when I'm sure all I'll get is criticism, no matter how “constructive” you think you're being. Look for my strengths and you will find them. There is more than one right way to do most things.

8. Help me with social interactions.

It may look like I don't want to play with the other kids on the playground, but it may be that I simply do not know how to start a conversation or join their play. Teach me how to play with others. Encourage other children to invite me to play along. I might be delighted to be included. I do best in structured play activities that have a clear beginning and end. I don't know how to read facial expressions, body language, or the emotions of others. Coach me. If I laugh when Emily falls off the slide, it's not that I think it's funny. It's that I don't know what to say. Talk to me about Emily's feelings and teach me to ask, “Are you okay?”

9. Identify what triggers my meltdowns.

Meltdowns and blow-ups are more horrid for me than they are for you. They occur because one or more of my senses has gone into overload, or because I've been pushed past the limit of my social abilities. If you can figure out why my meltdowns occur, they can be prevented. Keep a log noting times, settings, people, and activities. A pattern may emerge.

Remember that everything I do is a form of communication. It tells you, when my words cannot, how I'm reacting to what is happening around me.

My behavior may have a physical cause. Food allergies and sensitivities sleep problems and gastrointestinal problems can all affect my behavior. Look for signs, because I may not be able to tell you about these things.

10. Love me unconditionally.

Throw away thoughts like, "If you would just—" and "Why can't you—?" You didn't fulfill every expectation your parents had for you and you wouldn't like being constantly reminded of it. I didn't choose to have autism. Remember that it's happening to me, not you. Without your support, my chances of growing up to be successful and independent are slim. With your support and guidance, the possibilities are broader than you might think.

Three words we both need to live by: Patience. Patience. Patience. View my autism as a different ability rather than a disability. Look past what you may see as limitations and see my strengths. I may not be good at eye contact or conversation, but have you noticed that I don't lie, cheat at games, or pass judgment on other people?

I rely on you. All that I might become won't happen without you as my foundation. Be my advocate, be my guide, love me for who I am, and we'll see how far I can go.

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Contact the author for permission to reproduce in any way, including posting on the Internet. Award-winning author and mother of sons with ADHD and autism, Ellen Notbohm's books and articles have informed and delighted millions in more than twenty languages. Her work has won a Silver Medal in the Independent Publishers Book Awards, a ForeWord Book of Year Bronze medal, Honorable Mention and two finalist designations, two Mom's Choice Gold Awards, Learning magazine's Teacher's Choice Award, two iParenting Media awards, and an Eric Hoffer Book Award finalist designation. She is a contributor to numerous publications, classrooms, conferences and websites worldwide. To contact Ellen or explore her work, please visit www.ellennotbohm.com.

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