



WHAT SHOULD A SPECIAL EDUCATOR KNOW ABOUT SCOUTING?

OVERVIEW

Since its founding in 1910, the Boy Scouts of America has supported full participation by members with physical, mental, and emotional challenges. The BSA builds awareness in all its members of the special needs of youth and creates inclusion opportunities to maximize the experience of each youth member.

Scouting has a great deal to offer to youth with special needs and challenges, who are more heavily represented in the BSA (15.1 percent) than in the general population (8.4 percent). The Scouting program provides firsthand experiences that support academic performance, development of social and life skills, career exploration, and independent living. Special educators can help their students and families take advantage of this resource.

PROGRAM

Basic aims of the BSA program are character development, citizenship training, and mental and physical fitness. Although many learning goals are common for all the youth members, the teaching methods and rate of progress are flexible to allow participants to grow in their individual ways. The program has adaptations for physical and intellectual limitations similar to the federal government's "least restrictive environment" (LRE) principle with which you are familiar.

Cub Scouting is a family-centered program for grades 1 through 5. Boys are typically grouped by grade level to ensure age-appropriate challenges. Parents, caregivers, and siblings are encouraged to work together with the boy as he accomplishes goals. The intent is to make the learning so much fun that the boy doesn't even realize he is learning.

Boy Scouting is for boys in grades 5 through 12. At this program level, there is still an emphasis on experiential learning, with the added dimensions of youth-to-youth mentoring and youth leadership. The core curriculum emphasizes life skills and citizenship. In addition, more than 130 merit badges are available from Backpacking, Fishing, Hiking, and First Aid to Art, Chemistry, Digital Technology, and Engineering. Earning a merit badge provides a youth with basic knowledge of a subject without requiring complete mastery.

The Venturing program is for young men and women ages 14 through 20, or 13 and having completed the eighth grade. This program emphasizes adventurous outings, personal growth, community service, and age-appropriate social and leadership skills. Youth in Venturing set their own goals and learn how to achieve them.

The BSA advancement system is designed to offer challenges that support the aims of Scouting and to recognize accomplishments with meaningful awards. Special education students appreciate that they are honored for real achievements.

Accessibility—Scouting is committed to maximizing access to outdoor experiences and matching the intensity of the experience with the ability of the youth. We accomplish this with rigorous safety protocols that are continuously updated and with extensive training of our volunteer adult and youth leadership. Age and ability-appropriate limits are placed so that everyone stays safe and has fun.

At all program levels, adults use **individual mentoring** and interaction as a learning tool. Scouting is an **experiential education** program and uses the outdoors as a classroom and laboratory. Youth learn about teamwork, cooperation, and personal leadership from the simple challenges of eating, sleeping, cleaning, and living with others in the outdoors.





ENGAGING A STUDENT WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR DISABILITIES IN SCOUTING

The BSA has procedures to allow an alternative path for a student to earn ranks and awards when the regular requirements are not achievable due to a disability. Students with developmental delays can participate at their intellectual age rather than their chronological age. Men and women over 18 years old with significant impairments can participate in BSA programs as youth members for as long as they can benefit from the activity.

Any student who functions for part of the school day in an inclusive classroom should be able to participate in a traditional Scouting unit. Specialized units can be organized for those with more significant limitations. These units are often established in partnership with specialized schools.

When a student with special needs joins Scouting, it is useful to hold a family meeting with the unit leaders, called a “joining conference,” to create a common understanding of the student’s abilities and what accommodations are needed. At the Boy Scout level, BSA uses an Individual Scout Advancement Plan (ISAP) that is similar to the Individual Education Plan (IEP) used in educational settings. The ISAP forms a contract between the student and the BSA about what alternative requirements will be substituted to create a viable and challenging path to rank advancement.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

A parent may attend any Scouting event, and we encourage parents to be involved and volunteer as leaders. However, a parent is not required to attend every event with their child. As long as a student’s condition allows him or her to be safe in our care without a parent present, we are happy to serve both the student and the family.

MAKING A REFERRAL

If you want to direct a family toward Scouting, the best place for them to start is www.beascout.org. On this website, users can find contact information for the BSA local council and nearby units. The council office can put the family in touch with the district executive and district commissioner, who are familiar with the Scouting units in the area and can help them make a good match for the student.

If you have other questions about education or inclusion for those with disabilities, send an email to disabilities.awareness@scouting.org.

Your interest and support of Scouting is appreciated

