



Welcoming Girls with Autism into Your Troop

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a group of developmental disorders that are characterized by difficulties in the areas of social skills, communication, and unusual, repetitive behaviors. The spectrum includes autism, Asperger's Syndrome (sometimes referred to as "high functioning autism"), and pervasive developmental disorder. The core features are the individual's inability to understand the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of other people and to use this understanding to regulate their own behaviors. Due to the diversity and complexity of this disability, one may not see all the general characteristics that are typical in an individual with an ASD in any length of time. Often behaviors that seem atypical, unusual, or even rude, are in fact unintentional symptoms of ASD.

Some suggestions and strategies for preparing for and including girls with ASD in your troop:

1. Provide clear expectations and structure of the troop meetings (this can be done using a picture chart or written schedule, as well as utilizing a communal "troop rules" agreement that's visible to all with clear directives)
2. If the individual is disruptive to the troop, arrange to meet separately (including parents or guardians) to let them know what behavior is disrupting the troop, to help them understand why their behavior is disruptive, and to come up with a clearly defined plan of action going forward to avoid that disruptive behavior in the future
3. Don't use absolute words such as "always" or "never" unless that is exactly what you mean
4. Supplement oral instructions with written or visual instructions as needed for activities
5. Set limits on participation if needed (ex. Only one helper per activity and it rotates though alphabetically by first name, or only allowed to tell one story/ask one question per activity per individual)
6. Limit use of metaphors as they are often misunderstood
7. Discuss clear rules, boundaries, or safety concerns (such as emergency procedures) before each activity (refer to the "troop rules" or "troop agreements" as applicable for a visual reference)
8. Be aware that individuals with ASD may be distracted by the actions of others or they may be disruptive to others unintentionally and will need to be redirected with gentle reminders
9. Many individuals with ASD are visual learners, so pictures or visual substitutes/reminders may be helpful to them
10. State expectations for the troop, meetings, and activities clearly and briefly
11. Fidgets (something to hold in her hands and fidget with) can be provided for those activities when everyone needs to remain relatively still and focused for a longer period of time; the whole troop can each have their own so no one girl feels singled out
12. Unless the girl and her parent/guardian prefer confidentiality within the troop, have the girl share about her differing abilities and special needs with the troop and allow the other girls to ask questions in a sensitive and caring manner. This will promote better understanding and allow everyone to work together as a troop to ensure that everyone's needs are met
13. Always consult with the parent/guardian beforehand to be sure you're providing for the girl's needs to the best of your ability-- they will know the best methods and strategies to help their child

For more help and information please visit Autism Speaks <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library> and Top Ten Tips for Working with Autistic Children <https://txsource.com/2016/11/21/ten-top-tips-working-autistic-children/>

If you have other questions or concerns you may contact GSEP via email at memberservices@gsep.org or via phone at 215-564-2030

This document is not intended to replace or supersede any doctor's instructions nor should it in any way be taken as medical advice or directions. This resource is a suggestion for GSEP volunteers to use while welcoming girls with special needs to their troops and is for informational and educational purposes only. Please follow a parent/guardian's instructions in the medical care of their child and make sure you always have the appropriate medical and troop permission forms completed and available for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel.