



Welcoming Girls with Learning Disabilities into Your Troop

Learning disabilities are neurologically-based processing problems. These processing problems can interfere with learning basic skills such as reading, writing, and/or math. They can also interfere with higher level skills such as organization, time planning, abstract reasoning, long or short term memory and attention. It is important to recognize that learning disabilities can affect a girl's life beyond academics and can impact her relationships in all areas of life including troop involvement.

"Learning Disabilities" is an overarching term used to describe a number of other, more specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia, AD/HD, and language processing disorder.

Some suggestions and strategies for preparing for and including girls with Learning Disabilities into your troop:

1. Try not to make her the center of attention because of her disability. If she needs special accommodations, support, or company then generalize it for the rest of the troop or allow her to designate what she's comfortable with around the other girls
2. If she is very active, then start meetings with a physical activity -- even Ambassador Girl Scouts love to swing on swing sets at the park
3. If she has difficulty reading, plan ahead and provide opportunities before the meeting time to meet with her and go over any written lines, directions, or guides for the meeting in advance-- guide books and Journeys are not solely reading based and can be adapted to fit her needs
4. Redirection, Troop Agreements (Code of Conduct), and short activity periods with active transition times will help with high energy and low attention levels
5. Make a point of important times to listen-- if she has problems listening, then give a verbal cue such as, "I need everyone to listen for the next two minutes."
6. Don't let the other girls leave her out of things-- every girl has something to bring to the table, she might be your best hiker. Talk to the girls about how everyone has certain gifts. You can point out that as a leader you are better at some things than others. Maybe you aren't artsy, but you can pitch a tent in a rainstorm. Celebrate everyone's achievements and if you see a clique forming, rotate who is in which group
7. Fidgets (something to hold in her hands and fidget with) can be provided while needing to remain relatively still and listening for a longer period of time during an activity; the whole troop can each have their own so no one girl feels singled out
8. 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. Better understanding will allow everyone to work together as a troop to ensure that everyone's needs are met
9. 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 information, visit Learning Disabilities Association of America <https://ldaamerica.org/educators/> or LD Online at <http://www.ldonline.org/>

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.

