

A Guide for Enabling Scouts with
Cognitive Impairments



What cognitive impairments are discussed in this manual?

Autism Spectrum Disorder
Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder
Depression
Down Syndrome
Tourette Syndrome

How to use this manual

This manual can be used to provide scout leaders with information on a few of the more common cognitive impairments. The manual provides information on the cognitive impairment to give the scout leader a background on the impairment. It then provides a few examples of common symptoms that are associated with the disorder. Lastly, this manual provides several tip that will allow a scout leader to enable a scout to succeed in the scouting program.

This manual does not give anyone the education or authority to diagnose a cognitive impairment.

The BSA's policy is to treat members with disabilities as much as other members as possible. Scouts with disabilities participate in the same program as their peers. A scout is expected to meet the requirements as stated; no more no less. If an accommodation is needed, the Scoutmaster may provide an alternative requirement that is "as challenging" to the scout, **ONLY** if it is approved by the Council Advancement Committee.

About the Author

This manual was put together by Pat Louzon. Pat Louzon is an Eagle Scout from Troop 1589. As an adult leader, he is an assistant scoutmaster in Troop 1589, in Madison Heights, Michigan. Pat Louzon has been an active camp staff member, spending four summers at Camp Greilick in Traverse City and one summer at Gerber Scout Reservation. Pat Louzon has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology with a minor in Child Development from Central Michigan University. Pat Louzon hopes to attend graduate school to pursue a Ph.D. in School Psychology. Feel free to contact Pat by emailing him at PatLouzon@gmail.com.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

About Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which is commonly referred to as Autism, refers to a developmental impairment that affects cognitive, communication, and social development. As of May 2013, with the publication of the DSM-5, all autism disorders were merged together under ASD. These disorders were autistic disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder - not otherwise specified, and Asperger syndrome. ASD affects approximately 1 in 88 children, with boys being about four to five times more likely than girls to be diagnosed. ASD has become more prevalent over the last few decades. The cause of autism is not yet known, but it is believed to be a combination of genetics and environmental factors that influence early brain development.

Common Signs

-difficulty understanding others' feelings -unaware of nonverbal cues, such as body posture
- lack of eye contact -repeating themselves -self stimulatory behaviors, such as rocking

How to Enable

1. Think and teach visually.

Many people with autism are visual learners. Allowing them to see pictures or a demonstration is an effective way to teach a skill.

2. Use their talents and interests.

Discover what their talents and interests are, then think creatively to figure out a way to apply it. Help him start a merit badge that interests him or take a break to discuss a topic of his choosing.

3. Be aware of your surroundings.

People with autism can often become overwhelmed by bright lights and loud sounds. They may miss cues or directions due to sensory overload, even if it doesn't seem like much is happening.

4. Avoid figurative language.

Make expectations and directions as simple and clear as possible. Use concrete example while avoiding long directions. Allow time to complete one step before moving to the next one.

5. Be patient.

Work at their speed. They may be distracted or processing the directions. It is ok to check on their progress, but avoid rushing them.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

About Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common childhood disorders and can continue to affect the individual for their entire life. The causes of ADHD are not known, but research suggests that genetics play a large role. The research also suggest that cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption during pregnancy may increase the chances of developing ADHD. Approximately 9% of American children age 13 to 18 years of age are affected by ADHD, with boys being four times more likely to have it than girls. Studies show that ADHD is becoming more prevalent. Medication has been shown to relieve the symptoms of ADHD, but it does not cure ADHD.

Common Signs

-difficulty focusing -difficulty paying attention -missing details -forgetful
-constantly moving -moving task to task -touching or playing with all items in sight

How to Enable

1. Make and follow a schedule.

Schedules and routines can help a person with ADHD see the things that need to be done and when they need to be done by. By writing it down, the person doesn't have to rely on memory.

2. Keep organized.

When things are out of place, going to look for them can be a distraction. By knowing where things are, it is easier to focus on the task at hand.

3. Be clear and consistent.

Chances are, a person with ADHD may be day dreaming during an explanation. Being clear helps the individual understand, while being consistent helps build a routine.

4. Give praise or rewards when rules are followed.

By praising or giving a reward, it is likely that the behavior is going to be repeated. It helps to provide an incentive to keep the child wanting to pay attention to the task at hand.

5. Allow time for breaks.

People with ADHD can have lots of energy. Allow them a time to expend some of that energy so they can focus when it is time to focus.

Depression

About Depression

Everyone feels sad at some point during their life, but sometimes these feelings of sadness can last for a prolonged period. This is what is referred to as depression. Depression is common and a serious condition that can affect any person of any age or race. There are many causes of depression. Genetics may make someone more likely to develop depression, but it is not the only cause. People with low self-esteem are more likely to become depressed. Some medications have side effects that cause depression, and of course, there are situational events, such as a divorce or the loss of a loved one, that can cause depression. While there are many causes of depression, it is believed to be the most treatable cognitive impairment.

Common Signs

-sadness or hopelessness - withdrawn from friends -loss of interest in activities
-changes in eating or sleeping habits -lack of energy -thoughts of suicide*

How to Enable

1. Offer support.

Allow the individual to know that you are available for them. Try not to ask too many questions, as they may feel cornered. Let them know you are willing to help them however you can.

2. Be gentle but persistent.

Opening up about depression can be difficult. Many will not open up the first time the topic is brought up. Respect the individual's comfort level while expressing your concern.

3. Listen without lecturing.

Listen to the individual and what he has to say. It is important to resist any urge to criticize or pass judgment. Asking too many questions may cause the individual to withdraw.

4. Validate feelings.

Help the individual see that his emotions are normal and acknowledge the sadness he is feeling. Do not try to talk him out of his depression, even if his reasons seem silly.

5. Remember that feeling better will take time.

Do not expect for someone to just feel better overnight. Healing is a process that takes time. It is important to help the individual realize that life will get better.

***If you suspect that a teenager you know is suicidal, take immediate action! For 24 hour suicide prevention and support, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.**

Down Syndrome

About Down Syndrome

Down syndrome is a common impairment that has physical and mental symptoms. About 1 in every 691 babies born in the United States is born with Down syndrome, making it the most common genetic condition. Down syndrome is due to an extra full or partial copy of chromosome 21. Down Syndrome is diagnosable early in life. While it is easily diagnosable at birth, there are several tests that can determine whether a child has Down syndrome prenatally. It is very common for a person with Down Syndrome to also be affected by heart conditions. While there is no cure for Down syndrome, advances in medical technology and increasingly integrated societies have helped people with Down syndrome to live independent lives.

Common Signs

Physical: -low muscle tone -small stature -upward slant to the eyes -crease across the palm
Cognitive: -short attention span -poor judgment -impulsive behavior -slow learning

How to Enable

1. Inclusion.

Place the individual into a patrol as soon as possible. Treat them as you would treat any other scout in your unit. You may want to talk to the scouts beforehand to educate them.

2. Encourage.

Encourage the individual to take on challenges, big and small. He may need encouragement to try cooking or to run for patrol leader.

3. Understand.

Read about Down syndrome so you are aware. Do not punish the individual for any impulsive behaviors. Without making a scene, you can assist the individual and set him on the right track.

4. Be patient.

Work at their speed. They may be distracted or get off track. It is ok to check on their progress, but avoid rushing them or setting unnecessary time requirements.

5. Set them up for success.

Talk with the individual regularly. You may need to prompt him to see where he is and what his plan is. If he needs any help or tools, help provide them.

Tourette Syndrome

About Tourette Syndrome

Tourette Syndrome (TS) is a condition that causes people to make sounds and movements that they cannot control. These sounds and movements are called tics. There are motor tics, which refer to physical movements, and vocal tics, which refer to the sounds that may be made. It is currently estimated that about 3-6 children out of 1000 will be effected by TS. There is no known cause of TS, but it is believed to be related to the brain. There is no official test for TS, but tests can be used to rule out other conditions. Generally, TS tic symptoms are mild and don't require medication. However, for those tics that become too much to handle, medication can be a solution. There is no known cure for TS yet, but most people show noticeable improvements in their late teens or early twenties, and some even become tic-free!

Common Signs

Motor tics: -head jerking -eye blinking -jaw movements -head bobbing -hand shaking

Vocal tics: -throat clearing -grunting -sniffing -shouting -an out of place word or phrase

How to Enable

1. Talk with the individual.

Some individuals with TS are nervous about meeting new people. Talk to the individual and learn about his comfort level regarding TS. He may want the troop to know about TS, and he may want to speak to the troop about it himself.

2. Ignore the tics.

When working with the individual with TS, learn what tics he may have. Once you recognize them, ignore them. The individual is aware of them and may be self conscious about them.

3. Treat them like everyone else.

Children with Tourette Syndrome want to be treated like everyone else. They do the same activities and attend the same schools, so why treat them any differently.

4. Be aware of other scouts' behaviors.

People who are unknowledgeable about Tourette Syndrome will pick up on the tics and think they are weird. Many people with TS report of bullying, especially in the school setting. Be aware of this and stop any bullying before it has a chance to start.

For more information, see these websites:

Autism Spectrum Disorder

<http://www.autismspeaks.org>

<http://www.autism.lovetoknow.com>

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

<http://www.chadd.org/>

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/index.shtml>

Depression

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_teen.htm

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>

Down syndrome

<http://www.ndss.org/>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/downsyndrome.html>

Tourette Syndrome

<http://tsa-usa.org/>

http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/tourette/detail_tourette.htm