

## Including Girls with Disabilities

As a volunteer, your interactions with girls present an opportunity to improve the way society views girls (and their parents/guardians) with disabilities. Historically, disabilities have been looked at from a deficit viewpoint with a focus on how people with disabilities could be fixed. Today, the focus is on a person's abilities—on what she can do rather than on what she cannot.

If you want to find out what a girl with a disability needs to make her Girl Scout experience successful, simply ask her or her parent/guardian. If you are frank and accessible, it's likely they will respond in kind, creating an atmosphere that enriches everyone.

It's important for all girls to be rewarded based on their best efforts not on the completion of a task. Give any girl the opportunity to do her best and she will.

Sometimes that means changing a few rules or approaching an activity in a more creative way. Here are some examples of ways to modify activities:

- Invite a girl to complete an activity after she has observed others doing it
- If you are visiting a museum to view sculpture, find out if a girl who is blind might be given permission to touch the pieces
- If an activity requires running, a girl who is unable to run could be asked to walk or do another physical movement

In addition, note that people-first language puts the person before the disability.

Say ...	Instead of ...
She has a learning disability; has a developmental delay	She is learning disabled, mentally retarded
She has autism	She is autistic
She has a seizure disorder	She has epilepsy, has fits
Typically developing peers	Normal kids
She uses a wheelchair; has mobility issues; has a disability	She is wheelchair-bound, handicapped, crippled, confined to a wheelchair

When interacting with a girl (or parent/guardian) who has a disability, consider these final tips:

- When talking to a girl who has a disability, speak directly to her, not through a parent/guardian or friend
- It's okay to offer assistance to a girl with a disability, but wait until your offer is accepted before you begin to help. Listen closely to any instructions the person may have
- Leaning on a girl's wheelchair is invading her space and is considered annoying and rude
- When speaking to a girl who is deaf and using an interpreter, speak to the girl, not to her interpreter

- When speaking for more than a few minutes to a girl who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level
- When greeting a girl with a visual disability, always identify yourself and others. You might say, “Hi, it’s Sheryl. Tara is on my right, and Chris is on my left.”

## Registering Girls with Cognitive Disabilities



Girls with cognitive disabilities can be registered as closely as possible to their chronological ages. They wear the uniform of that grade level. Make any adaptations for the girl to ongoing activities of the grade level to which the group belongs. Young women with cognitive disorders may choose to retain their girl membership through their 21st year, and then move into an adult membership category. If you have questions, please contact the Answer Center directly at 314.400.4600 or [answercenter@girlscoutsem.org](mailto:answercenter@girlscoutsem.org).

## Adapting the Girl Scout Program

The flexible Girl Scout program allows you to adapt your troop activities so every girl can achieve success. Practical advice is available on how to plan activities and experiences to meet the needs of all girls while maintaining a challenging Girl Scout program for every girl in the troop. Information about how to obtain Girl Scout publications in Braille, large print or on tape also can be provided.

- **Disability Awareness Patch Program**

Girl Scout Daisies through Ambassadors may earn a Disability Awareness patch.

Requirements to earn the Program are available on the Council website:

[Girls>Programs>Patch Programs](#) and in the Emerson Resource Center.

- **Assistance Funds**

These scholarship funds provide financial assistance for troops that serve girls with disabilities and need financial assistance to provide program supplies or for individual girls who are disabled and are requesting financial assistance to participate in international/ national events (including destinations), Council-sponsored events (individual or troop, and camp), district/neighborhood events, and troop camping. For information on how to apply for an Assistance Fund Scholarship, contact the Answer Center.

For more information on Girl Scout programs and resources for girls with disabilities or to discuss an accommodation, please contact the Answer Center directly at 314.400.4600 or [answercenter@girlscoutsem.org](mailto:answercenter@girlscoutsem.org)