

ABILITIES DIGEST

Prepared. For Life.® Vol. 7, No. 4

Fall 2020  BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Adapting Advancement Swimming Deferments for Advancement



For many leaders there has always been concern when working on advancement with Scouts with special needs in aquatics. Commonly we find these Scouts terrified of water and unable to complete the swim tests at camp or the swimming merit badge itself. For whatever reasons, these Scouts will not

touch the water. Your council's advancement and special needs committees have probably assisted many leaders in finding alternatives to this conundrum. COVID-19 has given Scouts a reprieve of sorts.

BSA has posted its decision regarding swimming and advancement for all Scouts (as per [scouting.org](https://www.scouting.org)): *"Swimming remains a major health and safety concern and cannot be abandoned by Scouts BSA. With that in mind, the Swimming rank requirements for Second Class (5b Demonstrate your ability to pass the BSA beginner test: Jump feet first into water over your head in depth, level off and swim 25 feet on the surface, stop, turn sharply, resume swimming, then return to your starting place) and First Class (6a Successfully complete the BSA swimmer test) may be deferred until each Scout's next rank, as necessary (through Life, but not Eagle).*

In This Issue

- **Adapting Advancement:** Swimming deferments for advancement; Disabilities Awareness Merit Badge.
- **Adapting Activities:** Managing behavior in an active den; Philmont offers the Zia Experience.
- **Enhancing Awareness:** National training events in 2021; the Inclusion Toolbox is coming soon.
- **Recognizing Abilities:** Your fellow Scouter deserves the Torch of Gold, and perhaps the Woods Services Award.
- **Helpful Links:** Accessing special needs and disabilities materials.

“This temporary deferment will allow Scouts to advance in rank up to, and including Life Scout, but not beyond. All other rank requirements must still be earned to advance. When conditions warrant and upon direction from the National Council, these requirements will be reinstated with 30 days’ notice to our Scouting family via Workplace, Bryan on Scouting, Scouting Wire, social media, and any other means determined appropriate.

“For clarity, the following swimming requirements can be completed on dry land and are not a hindrance to advancing:

“Second Class requirement (5c) Demonstrate water rescue methods by reaching with your arm or leg, by reaching with a suitable object, and by throwing lines and objects.

First Class requirement (6e) With a helper and a practice victim, show a line rescue both as tender and as rescuer. (The practice victim should be approximately 30 feet from shore in deep water.)”

For any aquatics activities, BSA notes: *“Aquatic activities require current and valid swim testing for both Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat. If swim checks for these events cannot be done, then the aquatics activities cannot take place.”*

This deferment for all Scouts may give you an opportunity to help those Scouts with special needs. Water terror issues may not have to be permanent. With creativity and patience Scouts can learn to tolerate, accept, and enjoy water activities. Find an instructor who is sensitive to the needs of Scouts experiencing water terrors and have him/her work with the Scout in ways acceptable to the Scout and the parent. Together, both parties may be able to help the Scout overcome his/her fear. Remember, that for Eagle required merit badges, hiking or cycling can replace swimming. This provides other opportunities to achieve rank. If it is not possible to help the Scout conquer his/her fear or sensitivity to water, an Individual Scout Advancement Plan can be written with the help of parent, Scout, educational personnel, and/or medical team. Refer to the Guide to Advancement (10.0.0.0) for further information.

Disabilities Awareness Merit Badge



Did you know?

The Disabilities Awareness Merit Badge is not the low badge on the totem pole, so to speak. Although many of us would like to see it as a required badge, it does have a fair ranking in the grand scheme of merit badge acquisition.

In 2019, the Disabilities Awareness Merit Badge was number 80 out of 137 on the list of merit badges earned. Last year, a total of over 5,900 of the badges were earned. Bugling had the fewest earned at 452 and First Aid had the most at over

62,000. If you think of how many First Aid Meets there have been around the country, it's no wonder that First Aid tops all.

Disabilities awareness is essential to understanding how to work and live with all people. If we would like to see this merit badge be more popular, we really need to work on making it more popular in our councils and districts. After all, probably many of us live, work, and/or play with people who have a disability, known or unknown to us. How can we ramp up the popularity of this badge? Exposure and interactive activities are a beginning! Set the goal of making progress in your districts and councils and watch the numbers continue to grow!

Adapting Activities

Managing Behavior in an Active Den

You have a den full of very active WEBELOS. You have discovered they are mostly kids who have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). and a couple of them are "on the spectrum" too. You don't really know what all of this labeling means; all you see are the results of whatever it is that they "have." Kind of reminds you of a tornado at moments, but you have noticed you can keep semi-control if you keep a schedule and keep shifting the activities to suit the interest levels. With planning, observation, and perseverance you can actually help calm the storm!

Managing Subscriptions to *Abilities Digest*

Abilities Digest is designed for any leader who would offer a Scouting program to youth who have special needs. Any Scouting volunteer or professional may subscribe.

Subscribing by email. Send a message to specialneedschair@scouting.org, with "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line. Indicate your name, email address, and council in the message text.

Unsubscribing by email. To decline future issues please reply and enter "REMOVE" in the subject line. We will remove the subscription within the next two weeks.

Receiving Multiple Email Copies. If you receive *Abilities Digest* at more than one email address, choose the one to be removed and reply with "REMOVE" in the subject line. Include a message requesting that we re-move only that email address.

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Address Change. If you want *Abilities Digest* sent to a different address, reply and enter "ADDRESS CHANGE" in the subject line. In your message, enter your council name and the email address you prefer.

Subscribing online. Visit the web site ablescouts.org. The page's lower left corner displays a small gray rectangle with the word "Follow" and three dots. Click on the word "Follow" and enter your email address. You will receive an email whenever a new *Abilities Digest* appears, plus an email when articles are republished.

Let's have a closer look at this situation. First of all, you mainly need to know that both those Scouts with ADHD and some who are on the spectrum (Autism) have this common thread:

they can be very easily distracted. For children with ADHD, their focus shifts at the speed of lightning. They may not be able to focus on what is in front of them, because there are too many other things their brains are thinking about. The thoughts go off on tangents often. For some children with autism, their focus may be elsewhere, based on what they may be feeling, hearing, touching, or smelling. This leads to distraction from the topic at hand. These sensory distractions could also lead to "meltdowns." When a



den leader has to deal with the outcomes of several distracted Scouts, it is not even sort of amusing. Many of us do not have a clue as to where to begin to calm everyone down so that something can be accomplished.

Below are some suggestions for helping create a more structured environment for these Cubs.

- 1) **Planning is paramount.** Keep in mind age related activities are critical, but some of these Scouts are more immature than others, so the techniques you may use to "hold the fort" may shift with the maturity level. Be aware of your Scouts' reactions to your plans and techniques. If something is not working, reflect on it and then make a change as necessary.
- 2) **Know your Scout** This is an especially helpful idea! Suppose you have a Scout on the spectrum who is very clumsy and uncoordinated in physical activities or eye/hand coordinated activities? These issues could leave him/her open to ridicule and avoidance from other Scouts causing emotional discomfort. When you know your Scouts, you can prepare accommodations ahead of time thus preventing any kind of ostracizing. Sometimes having a craft pre-started or color coded is all you need to facilitate the ease and enjoyment of an activity.
- 3) **Preplan** and share the plan beforehand with parents and Cubs. Knowing what will happen during the meeting will help the Scout know what to expect. Scouts may suggest an activity that could be enjoyed by everyone. When they have the plan ahead of time, the parent can help the youth know what to expect and have supplies ready.
- 4) **Display a visual schedule** for everyone to refer to. The display board can be made from a foam core tri-fold board with Velcro pieces prepared so that the schedule can be edited each week you hold a meeting. For example, you can print "Opening," "Instruction," "Activity," "Project," "Game," "Closing" on strips of laminated card stock. Attach pieces of Velcro to the paper strips and the board itself. Attach and detach as needed. Make your board specific to the meeting so that it will be utilized at

each meeting and will not be a waste of time for you or for the Scouts. It should become a reference



tool for all involved. You may or may not want to include timing (some youth with autism will fixate on the time and totally lose all meaning while participating) on the schedule board. Whether you do or not is up to the way the Scouts need help. You can set your phone on silent vibrate to help you remember to change activities every 20 minutes or less. This will give you time to experience in small chunks the

theme for the week/month without losing control of the interest factor.

5) **Chunking** or breaking up tasks into smaller more manageable steps may help lift pressure and stress off of your Cubs' shoulders. Even though as leaders we would like everyone to "keep up" with the program, some children simply need time to move around, experience the theme or project, and not be pushed into a corner in order to immediately accomplish an objective. Chunking allows the leader to teach and enables the Scouts to process important information to be learned. An example of chunking would be allowing 20 minutes to learn a part of a concept, 20 minutes to experience/practice it, and 20 minutes to move in a related game. Small steps at a time help the learning process and frees the Scouts up to move and enjoy the learning itself.

6) **Board of Den Rules** can be set up and should have no more than five "rules." Make the rule statements positive. Avoid negatives: Don't, Not Allowed, NO. Positive examples include: *Use the Talking Feather, Raise your hand, A Scout is friendly.* Have the Scouts help you make up the rules. When a rule is broken bring it to the Scout's attention by either a predetermined signal to that Scout, or by discussing on the sidelines. The Scout should take ownership of his/her behavior if made aware of the problem. Point to the rule that is broken and with a gentle, calm voice use these suggested questions: *What are you doing? What should you be doing? Are you doing it? What are you going to do to fix that? Okay, now do it.* Watch your tone of voice as you ask these questions. Be sensitive to the Scout's needs but be firm. Parents can be your best partners at times such as these. If the Scout understands and is aware of his/her gaff, and notably corrects the issue, make sure you pay attention to the effort being made. The Scout should always be recognized for efforts to improve. Sometimes simply providing an "If...then"....solution is all that is needed as long



as you are prepared. “If you grab supplies from Kenny again, you will need to go to the cool off area so that you can get yourself settled down. When you’re ready you can come back.” Remember your Youth Protection training; do not denigrate the Scout. **The goal is recognition of a behavior and the opportunity to learn how to rectify it.** Remember, you didn’t learn how to fix an issue instantaneously when you were a kid either. Scouts with special needs need extra care and you need to be aware in order to teach appropriate ways to get the Scout back on track. More than likely the school is also working on a behavior plan with the Scout. Sometimes working with the parent and school may be helpful for all.



7) Yes! Do Reward Them! Scouting is full of patches, badges, pins, totems, beads, feathers, and the like. Yes, everyone likes to be noticed for a job well done (even you).

This DOES include behavior and some youth thrive on this type of recognition. Your perspective should not be that you are bribing anyone to behave. Your perspective should shift to how you are helping a youth, who happens to be in more need of help

than their neurotypical friends, develop a sense of right and wrong along with responsible behavior that upholds the common good. Everyone loves stickers, patches, beads, and fun awards. Plan this into every meeting. “Most helpful,” “Most kind,” “Most Cheerful,” “Friendliest” . You get the idea. Plan for parties

once a month for a specific accomplishment that may have been particularly daunting to the group (examples could be behavior related, relationship related,

or skill related). Be creative and have some fun with this. Your enthusiasm can be infectious and the desire to please may become pervasive.

Maybe behavior management is manageable! Try using the above suggestions as a start. Remember you can always contact your council’s special needs committee. They may be able to offer more ideas and support resources. You can also contact specialneedschair@scouting.org with questions.

About *Abilities Digest*

Abilities Digest is the official e-letter of the Boy Scouts of America National Disabilities Awareness Committee. Its mission is to expand membership through helping parents and Scouting volunteers to improve their understanding, knowledge, and skills related to including and serving the special needs population. Therefore, districts and councils may reprint articles from this publication. Our plan is to distribute four issues of *Abilities Digest* annually, but special editions may go out whenever there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at disabilities.awareness@scouting.org.

Philmont Offers the Zia Experience

An Adaptive Philmont Adventure for Scouts with Special Needs and Disabilities



The Zia Experience is a modified BSA Family Adventure Camp at the Philmont Training Center focusing on giving Scouts with special needs and disabilities, their parent(s), family members, and/or caregiver(s) new and exciting Philmont adventures! This experience is designed to build bonds and create memories for the entire family through fun and interactive programs.

The Zia Experience embraces the Zia rayed Sun symbol, which has four arms each of which has four parts. 'Four' is an auspicious or sacred number for the Zia: the four points of the compass, the four periods of each day, the four seasons of the year, the four stages of life, and the four sacred obligations for

one's physical, mental, spiritual and social health. The Zia Experience will be built around the four sacred obligations for each Scout, parent, family member, and caregiver.

Our team of Philmont staff and highly trained volunteers will support Scouts with a wide-range of functioning and abilities, from low-functioning to high-functioning. The range includes Scouts who have physical, intellectual, emotional, and/or hidden disabilities. Scouts who are verbal and nonverbal, as well as toilet-trained and untrained will be welcomed. Assistance may be provided for bathing, feeding, medicating, and supervising nighttime risks. Parents and caregivers will have some time each day to rest, for self-care, and for some outdoor adventure of their own while their Scout is cared for by qualified staff and volunteers. Our goal, as always, is physical and emotional safety, comfort, fun, satisfying experiences, and achieving the aims of Scouting!

Our team will finalize program registration long before the experience begins, so that parents/caregivers and Scouts can meet in-person, via video conference, or phone call with our leadership team one or more times before arrival. The goal of these pre-experience conversations will be to understand the type of experience your family wants to have, as well as your Scout's abilities, special needs, special health care challenges, medications, allergies, diet restrictions, housing and personal care needs, transportation and mobility issues, advancement goals, and other associated risk management issues.

The Zia Experience is designed to work alongside other Philmont programs, including Training Center Conferences, NAYLE, PLC, Philmont Sneak Peak, and some trek arrival and departure dates.

The Zia Experience is limited to 15 Scouts and their parent(s), family members, and/or caregivers! This program has an application and approval process to register and participate. To make sure we are able to give

you, your Scout, and your family the best experience possible, families will apply to participate and we will reach out to you to discuss what your specific needs will be and to help create a positive Philmont experience with you. Not all of those who apply to participate will be selected.

No one Scout or family will have the same experience, but all will have a Philmont experience nonetheless! We're prepared to meet your Scout's and family's needs!

Enhancing Awareness

National Training Events in 2021



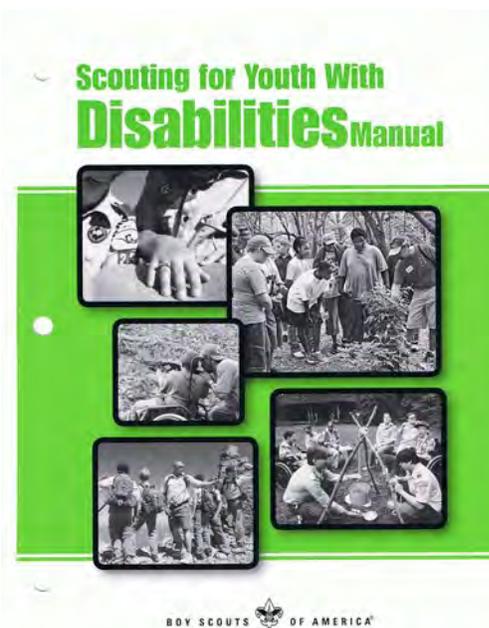
The National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee (NSNDC) has organized three training events for 2021. The training originally planned for SeaBase in January has been moved to the Summit in August.

- June 23-July 3: Adaptive Special Needs & Outdoor Camping Program Conference, at Philmont.
- August 2-7: Special Needs Membership and Growth Conference, at the Summit.
- August 2-7: Special Needs and Disabilities Conference, at the Summit.

The Inclusion Toolbox Is Coming Soon

For the last two years the national committee has been hard at work on the replacement for the 2007 *Scouting for Youth with Disabilities Manual*. The new product will be rolled out on Scouting.org as a web-based information resource and the title will be the *Special Needs and Disabilities Inclusion Toolbox*, or *Toolbox* for short. The *Toolbox* is designed to support several different audiences with actionable knowledge. Families new to Scouting will find information about how Scouting works and how to get the most from the programs. Unit-level leaders will find ideas and techniques for building inclusive units.

In the *Toolbox* we provide information for ten major classes of special needs and disabilities, so you can adapt the activities we do in Scouting to the needs of individual Scouts. It includes new sections on food allergies, mental health, learning disorders, and speech/language that were not in the 2007 manual, and it has



expanded sections on autism and ADHD. We have partnered with many specialty disability organizations to make sure you are getting accurate and useful information.

The *Toolbox* is built to work like a physical toolbox, where you can look around and quickly find what you need without having to read through a book. Everything is indexed and hyperlinked in a two-level table of contents and it will have a search feature as well. You will be able to download and print out sections to share with others or to carry with you in the field.

You don't need a background in special needs to use the *Toolbox*. We have worked hard to make it easy to read and have avoided medical, special ed, or disability-specific jargon. We did not spend time or space on background information you don't need to deliver the Scouting program.

It was important to create a resource that would be available to anyone who needed it on a 24/7/365 basis. We wanted volunteers and professionals to be able to get answers quickly when a situation arose because human experts are not always handy. Difficulties are resolved best when they can be handled quickly at a local level.

We are really excited to get this resource into the hands of the Scouting community. Even though it is still in a draft state, we are already making use of the material to respond to questions from the field and as a resource for training activities. We plan to expand the Toolbox over the next couple of years to help even more volunteers and professionals with "job specific" ideas and adaptations for advancement specialists, commissioners, camp directors, outdoor program coordinators, facilities managers, and more.

Recognizing Abilities

Your Fellow Scouter Deserves the Torch of Gold



If you are reading this newsletter, you probably know a fellow Scouter who has been working diligently in support of Scouts with special needs or disabilities for three years or more. If so, they are a candidate for the BSA's Torch of Gold Award. Like the Silver Beaver, the Torch is awarded to a nominated Scouter. It is up to you to nominate a worthy candidate.

The Torch of Gold is a council award given annually to an adult Scouter. It is not an award that is earned by simply fulfilling specific requirements. It is given in recognition for service in multiple areas for many years. The nominee should show a level of dedication and service comparable to a Scouter receiving the Silver Beaver Award, but for service specifically in the area of working with Scouts with disabilities.

A Scouter must be recommended to his or her council by another individual. Although there are specific criteria for this award, each council should have its own selection procedure. The nomination form can be found at scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf.

...And Perhaps the Woods Services Award



If you have nominated a worthy Scouter for the Torch of Gold Award (see above), consider nominating that same Scouter for the Woods Services Award. This is a national award presented once a year at the BSA National Annual Meeting.

The Award nomination form, BSA form #512-258, can be found at scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf. After being completed, the nomination must be signed by the nominee's Scout Executive and received by the national BSA office by January 31 for the 2021 award. Because of the limit of one award per year, each council may only submit one nomination per year. You may email your application to specialneedschair@scouting.org.

The Woods Services Award is given annually by the Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center, in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, to one BSA volunteer each year for exceptional service and leadership in the field of Special Needs Scouting. The Center is a leading advocacy and service organization that provides educational, residential, and vocational services to children and adults with special needs. The award was established in 1978 in memory of Luther Wellington Lord, a residential supervisor for more than 23 years at the Center. An active Scouter, the award was established in recognition of his service to youth through Scouting at the local and national levels.

Helpful Links

Scouting with Disabilities landing page: scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/

AbleScouts: *Abilities Digest* articles posted online: ablescouts.org

Guide to Advancement, section 10: scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/

Philmont Training Center: philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/

#ScoutingAtHome: scouting.org/scoutingathome/

Torch of Gold Award: scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf

Woods Services Award: scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf

Social Media



Twitter: @AbilitiesDigest



Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165

Facebook No Scout Left Behind: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1967878213431320>

Email your comments and questions to ablescouts@airpost.net.