

Special Issue #228 - Girl Scouts with Special Needs - Part 2 of 3
Scouting Links Newsletter - September 19, 2003

* * * ADVICE FROM GSUSA * * *

The following is from

<http://www.girlscouts.org/adults/needs.html#resources>:

Girl Scouts is about inclusion. Learn the terminology. Do some research, using some of the resources available from Girl Scouts of the USA and online. And remember, the Girl Scout Program Goals address a girl's individual needs and potential - this inherent flexibility is a recipe for success for girls of all abilities.

A Leader Should:

ASK parents, doctors, teachers, and the girl herself about the disability and any health and safety limitations. Learn about any allergies, triggers, and special concerns. Have a procedure in place for any kind of medical emergency. Do not be afraid to ask for special assistance, if needed.

PREPARE the girls who are not disabled in the troop for what to expect when a new girl with a disability is joining it. For disabilities that interfere little with typical functioning, give the minimum information for girls to understand the condition. More explanation may be needed for visible disabilities or for those that affect a girl's ability to function.

CHECK OUT meeting spaces, field trip sites, and transportation to make sure they accommodate individual needs.

ADAPT the Girl Scout program to meet special needs as they arise. (Think ahead, and encourage girls to assist you in this effort.)

* * * INTELLECTUALLY CHALLENGED/LEARNING DISABILITIES * * *

>>Submitted by Barb, <mailto:Mountklein8500@aol.com>

My son has learning disabilities. He is about as smart as he can be. The problem is that he processes information slowly, therefore most people misinterpret his knowledge (this same kid passed the learners after 2 tries). He has a learning disorder called Sensory Integrated Dysfunction. Basically it's a planning problem. If you give him several things to remember, he may remember part 5, 2 and 10 in that order. Understanding and patience would be the key in this. Sometimes remembering to give him the final outcome of an event, say the Civil War, and backing out of it helps.

Helpful Websites:

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

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

<http://www.learningdifferences.com/>

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

<http://mentalhealth.about.com/library/h/docs/bld03446.htm>

<http://www.ldanatl.org/> - Learning Disabilities Association of America

* * * ADD/ADHD * * *

>>Submitted by Carly, <mailto:dysfunctionalmother@comcast.net>

My name is Carly and I'm a new Cadette. I made a web site for my Bronze Award project called <http://www.understandme.org>. It's where girls with ADD/ADHD can post about how their lives are affected by it and, their parents/Girl Scout Leaders can read some tips by my mom. I am hoping that you will help me spread the word. I would really like girls to share and Leaders to learn and share. I have a flyer on the site you can download. Thank you to anyone who takes the time to read this!

>>Submitted by Lisa, <mailto:emyers@gte.net>

For girls with ADHD, keep them moving and focused. Activities need to be short and tactile. Projects like making Gack work great, (You know the 2 parts liquid starch one part white glue, add food coloring, and squish till thickens.)

>>Submitted by BrownieTrp4110@aol.com

My daughter has ADHD. She is on medication but she only takes it during school hours so by the time we have our meetings it has worn off. My solution is when my daughter needs to be corrected my co-leader does it for me. I keep her busy by having her sit with me or work with her and her activities. It doesn't away time with the other girls. It helps when my co-leaders corrects her, believe me that works when you have a co-leader that can step in and do that. She is a big help to my daughter and me. ADHD children need organization and steps to follow a routine; they need one at every meeting and through life.

>>Submitted by Wendy, <mailto:themama61@yahoo.com>

Two of my girls have ADHD and I always count on them to be my "runners". They go and get (so to speak) so they are not always expected to sit still. They also make great leaders of games. Take them off to the side and teach them so that they can teach others. If they are not always expected to be still they will do better when it is time.

>>Submitted by Dianna, mailto:da_wolff@hotmail.com

I'm the mom of two kids with ADHD and have had to deal with some pretty emotionally disabled kids over the years.

One girl was undiagnosed for 2 of the 3 years she was with me and became worse and worse until she was institutionalized ... I can't imagine how the mom handled it. Needless to say the number one thing in this situation was communication with her mom about what the counselors encouraged us to do. Behavior contracts can be very helpful. I found

that giving this little girl "special" attention was helpful. I had to eventually sit down with her peers and explain that she was having problems that we couldn't see that were in the inside and I expected all her "sister" Girl Scouts to be patient and help her through this. Her behavior was bizarre and frankly I was happy to bridge her up after 3 years. The other kids grew to hate her... she was stealing their stuff, lying and basically doing tons of things that she should not have been and it was very difficult for everyone. As a last resort I was getting to the point I was going to ask the mom not to bring her to meetings anymore because I was afraid of her hurting other girls. In no instance is a girl allowed to scare another girl in the troop.... When that happens the girl with the behavior problem MUST leave. The safety of all is most important.

I make lots of calls to the parents reminding them since the girls are so forgetful. Yes I have over 20 girls and this can be time consuming, but it cuts back on the frustration. In order to try to help girls remember things like permission slips we instituted scout bucks last year. It did help and now my Senior troop wants scout bucks also... go figure! Of course you will hear pro's and con's on the scout bucks. We were very careful to make sure the rewards were for things in the girls control.... dues and money are NOT involved in the bucks system. Just things like remembering to bring permission slips, wearing vests and pins, bringing pencils etc.

>>Submitted by Laura, <mailto:REDHEDINKY@aol.com>

I have ADD/ADHD, my 4 kids have it, my husband and I both have dyslexia. I'm a Cubmaster at my sons' special ed school. My 7th grade daughter just started there this year. Here are my thoughts:

Remember, not EVERYONE gets "diagnosed" with an attention problem. They can even be intermittent so one meeting a kid can pay attention and another they can't. They might be distracted by things in their personal life and not even have a "learning disability" but be exhibiting the signs.

Another thing to remember when you are fed up and going to penalize a girl for being chronically late and you're furious with her parents for not being "responsible" -- the kid got it from somewhere! True some children have learning differences from some unknown source, but I can't tell you how many kids I work with at my children's school for Dyslexia and specific attention disorders who OBVIOUSLY got it from their parents! You DON'T "grow out" of these things, you learn to adapt and overcome.

I am a VERY responsible person and simply have NO CONCEPT of time. I'm

38. I still haven't learned how to adapt and overcome my time issues. I've got organizational issues as well -- I can plan a campout for 150 people with NO PROBLEMS. I can organize a badge workshop or Service Unit event for a hundred and the girls love it and things run smoothly. BUT, figure out a schedule to do my laundry or how often to clean the bathrooms, forget it! It is absurd, but that's how my brain functions.

1. Keep things uncluttered and simple. Do not over-decorate or it will distract people with attention differences and make it hard for them to focus.

2. Include QUIET activities before you want the kids to pay attention to something important. You may want to play soft classical music. The kids usually don't listen to it at home and it's different. It will get their attention just because it's a change in the normal music routine. Also, they probably will say they don't like it and that will raise their tension levels and help them pay attention.

3. Follow the SAME routine for EVERY meeting. We do this with my dyslexic and ADD/ADHD Cub Scouts. If we change the least bit, a couple of them used to get REALLY upset and refuse to participate.

4. Tell the kids what you are going to be doing ahead of time, review it at the beginning of the meeting (maybe during a snack time?), do the activity, then review it again.

Example: Send home a monthly schedule saying what you'll do at each meeting. Tell the kids what the following meeting will be about. Week 1: "Today we're going to talk about knife safety." Ask who has ever used a knife before. This will help you establish who can help you lead an activity, who is excited, who is apprehensive and who might be AFRAID of a new activity. (Usually, if there is a strong reaction, the kid needs an adult to be their buddy.)

Next do your talk, but give each kid something to hold or color while you are talking about knife safety. (They could color a paper knife that will be cut out and assembled at the next meeting.)

Then get up and do some moving around -- maybe a song or fast paced game about knives. We use a LOT of relay races with my group. These races do not necessarily have any purpose other than to expel excess energy. Winning is NOT emphasized.

Regroup, but in a different setting -- you were at the table before they expelled excess energy, so you could arrange chairs in a circle, move to a different area of the room, sit in a circle on the floor, etc..

Now you are ready to demonstrate knife safety and let the kids watch. At the NEXT meeting, THEY will get to demonstrate knife safety with their paper knives that they colored themselves earlier in the meeting. After your demonstration, let them play. They have concentrated enough for one meeting and need to do some silly and fun stuff. At the NEXT meeting, they will remember what you've taught then and be able to build on that knowledge. By the 4th meeting, you will have them cutting something with real knives, using safety circles, correcting each other on safety violations, etc.

This type of procedure can be used for ANYTHING you are trying to teach. Building a fire, knife safety, sewing, pitching a tent, using a camera ... anything!

5. If someone is having a bad day, respect that and don't FORCE her to participate. They will join in when they are ready. Forcing them, glaring at them, or other "negative" attention will only feed their bad mood. BLOW IT OFF and don't let them steal your thunder! It's really no big deal if they want to sit at a table by themselves and pout. Tell them where they can go to be by themselves and that you'd love them to join you when they are ready.

It took me half the year to figure out what was going on with my son's best friend in 3rd grade. He'd immediately say something was stupid and he wasn't going to do it. He was afraid of trying new things and didn't want to fail in front of all his friends. I told him he could go sit in the chair and do his homework if he didn't want to participate, but that I was tired of him calling the activities stupid. He'd always come over after he saw what was going on and felt confident enough to try it. FINALLY, I figured out what was going on. I asked him if that was it and he said yes, so, we agreed that I'd ALWAYS tell them what we were going to do and how we were going to do it before we did it -- I didn't have to change anything. You ALWAYS have to give the kids instruction before they do something, right? But, HE felt better and it gave him confidence that I wasn't going to let him make a fool out of himself.

6. ESTABLISH EYE CONTACT and stop talking when the child looks away. If they don't look back as soon as you stop talking, remind them "Eyes on me" and start talking when they look back. You may find you are doing this little process several times before you can get one sentence out. BUT, the kids have probably heard it before if they have an attention problem and you are showing them that you understand how they work and aren't MAD at them. You are PATIENT and want them to UNDERSTAND.

7. When you correct misbehavior, SAY WHAT YOU WANT them to do, not "Don't RUN!" The kids may only hear you say "RUN!!!" and take off. Go

ahead and laugh, but I've seen it a million times! I'm a yeller and it's was hard for me to redirect myself to say, "WALK!!!" instead of "DON'T RUN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" Another good command is "STOP!" It applies to a plethora of behaviors.

8. DON'T make all the kids in your troop READ in front of each other!!! Horror of horrors is all I can say. To help a kid with learning differences feel a part of the group and not like an idiot, make a general announcement that "I know some of you love to read out loud and some of you hate it. If you'd like a turn reading, let me know. No one HAS to read out loud." This also covers the bases for the shy girls. You will likely have more outgoing, attention seeking volunteers.

9. DON'T make ALL the kids in your troop stand up in front of people. When we do ceremonies, some of the kids stand behind the other ones up on stage, hiding so no one can see them. I make them all get up on stage, but they don't have to stand in a nice neat orderly line so all the parents can see them. The shy ones hid and gradually, as they get up there more and more, they realize lightening will not strike them. Their comfort level increases and after 4 or 5 ceremonies, they are readily visible.

10. Don't ASSUME they don't care about earning their badges. But don't FORCE badge work on them either. Remember their parents may have time and organizational difficulties just like they do. It might just be too hard for the families to combat behavior, family activities, schoolwork, and everything else to get those badge requirements done. The child may not be able to read the requirements themselves even if they are in 5th or 6th grade. You may even need to adapt the requirements slightly so the child can earn the badge or Try-it. I couldn't memorize when I was young and I still can't. If my leaders had waited for me to memorize my Promise and Law, they'd still be waiting today. I was also the Cadette who never finished that last requirement to earn by badge. I didn't want to bother with the reading. I didn't want any MORE school work. It was just too much stress and trouble to bother with for me. You may have kids like that too. You can help them by taking them aside at a meeting or allowing a meeting every now and then for the whole troop to finish up badge work. Even though I didn't finish my badges as a Cadette, I still had a sense of accomplishment from scouting because we camped a LOT. I enjoyed that more than the work of badges. As long as the kids are learning and having fun, that is what is important.

11. ALL kids (adults too) learn better using a multi-sensory approach. Involve as many senses in your training as possible.

Make GIANT game boards out of sheets, shower curtains, tablecloths,

etc., and permanent markers. You can make a generic game board using a #10 can to make BIG circles, smaller cans for smaller circles, different size boxes to make rectangles, etc. You can use stencils if you are artistically challenged or just draw some things on there freehand. **DO NOT OVER DECORATE THE BOARD!** This will distract your kids with attention "differences" and make it hard for them to concentrate.

To use canoeing as an example, here is how I'd make a game:

1. Go through my training manual and pick out "vocabulary" words. Put all these words with definitions on one set of cards and label them "Vocabulary" on the back.
2. Pick out all the different types of strokes. Put all these on "Demonstrate" cards. When you land on a Demonstrate spot on the board, pick one of these cards and the **WHOLE GROUP** has to demonstrate the stroke. You can also add how to put on a PFD.
3. Make a generic board on a **PLAIN** flannel backed vinyl tablecloth with 2 squares for my decks of cards. Make circles or squares on the board for a path to get from Start to Finish. Color some of the spots a special color. When a player lands on one of them, they get to pick a card from a special deck -- Wave cards and Life Rings in this case.
4. Assemble 1 or 2 giant cubes and color the dots on them for dice.
5. Cut out 4 to 6 paper canoes from colored paper to use as "men" and have them laminated.
6. Make some "Wave" cards that have a scenario to act out. "You and your partner are in the middle of the lake and a storm comes up. What would you do?"
7. Make some "Life Rings" cards to mix in with the Wave cards. These cards would contain safety related topics.
8. I'd probably include 4 to 6 paddles and PFDs (Personal Flotation Devices) for the demonstration cards. If you have access to **REAL** items; that will only reinforce the retention of what you are teaching.

Again, with this method, you can adapt the generic game board to **ANY** skill you are trying to teach -- knife safety, hiking (add some stretches to the demonstration cards), fire building (include real twigs or fun foam for demonstrations), cooking, sewing, anything!

I was thinking of younger kids when I wrote the above. For older girls, remember they don't outgrow their learning differences. That girl who is always talking too loud? Maybe that's how loud she needs to **HEAR** things to be able to focus on them. The girl who's always interrupting? She probably can't control her impulses. Don't get mad at the girls, just say to yourself that they can't help it and what can **YOU** do to help them?

Often, these kids get teased at school or made fun of for being

immature, having a low stress tolerance level, and/or get frustrated VERY easily. You can make an immature/frustrated girl your partner if she is bothering other kids. YOU will be kind to her and that is what she will remember, that her leader is nice to her; that an ADULT in her life thought she was WORTH teaching. She may not let YOU know it, but that's exactly what is going on. Gradually, as she gets the message from YOU that she's ok the way she is and you will still like her; that will translate to how she is with the other kids. The other kids will also see that YOU think she's ok the way she is and they can accept her too.

So many kids think you have to be a certain way to be OK. By having a kid with disabilities around, your actions will show the other kids that it's ok to be different. There is a LOT of "same" in there too. To help emphasize the "same" play getting to know you games. You can find a lot on the internet. This will help break down the walls and start team building within your troop. Scouting is a GREAT place for kids with learning disabilities!

* * * ASPERGER SYNDROME * * *

>>Submitted by Kate, <mailto:wishlisty@yahoo.com>

I have included info I saved from, I believe, AGS list on Asperger Syndrome. I am sorry now that I did not save contacts for postings, but I only planned this for personal use; never expected the need to share.

>>1. STRUCTURE, STRUCTURE, STRUCTURE. Knowing what, when, and how something is going to happen is very crucial. What I did in the beginning of the year is we sat down decided what the rules would be. She needs to be nice to others, not blurt out things, etc. When she can't comply she would need to sit outside the room, until she felt better in control. Sometimes it helped sometimes it didn't. But everyone needed to know that this behavior would not be tolerated. The rest of the troop was aware of what was going on, and have been very supportive of her.

But when things started taking a slide downward, it was back to the doctor for a med adjustment, and in my daughter's case, hospitalization. At times it is difficult for these kids to control their behaviors. That is where meds come in. If these behaviors are going on consistently, something more needs to be done, behavioral approaches can't always help.

Have you seen her without her mother? My daughter can control things a little better when I'm not around. Have you talked to the troop about her disorder? How at times she may not be able to control things? This was very beneficial.

>>2. For a long time Asperger Syndrome was not recognized. I try and explain it to people that it is almost like a borderline Autism. I also say that people with this, well their elevator goes to the top floor but it skips a few floors in-between. For more information, go to <http://www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/>

I have also seen this referred to as the "geek syndrome" -- that is, many high functioning people with Asperger's tend to become computer geeks. They seem to function well in that field (hint: try to channel interests in that direction).

Some things about Asperger's: above average intelligence is one of the hallmarks, which makes it difficult as the people have the "smarts" to get into more trouble, but not the "wiring" to understand why. They really, really need structure and any deviance causes them to act out. My girl friend has an Autistic son and an Asperger's son and just moved. All I can say was chaos reigned for several weeks afterwards until the two settled into their routine. Asperger's get a "passion in life", sometimes 2. Everything else takes a back seat to that passion. They also tend to be incredible pack-rats.

Many people with Asperger's syndrome are Celiacs -- that is allergic to wheat and anything that has wheat or barley in it (that includes mustard, mayo, ketchup and you wouldn't believe what else). My girlfriend put all her sons on a Celiac diet and within 3 months you could see a real improvement in behavior. A word of warning, most doctors don't believe in this -- she fought with her doctor for several years before he accepted her assessment of the situation. Also, when you put a person with Asperger's on the Celiac diet at first they will get worse. It is easier with an older person with Asperger's as after a while they will realize that they feel better without the wheat than with it. Do a search on celiac, there are several lists also for this.

>>3 .I had a girl about 7 years ago that wasn't diagnosed with Asperger's and we didn't know what to call it back then. One of the things we did was talk to her A LOT. We said "you are such a pretty girl when you smile, smile once during every meeting." We slowly increased that request. By the end of the year she was actually a pleasant girl to be around.

Remember . . . you are a sister to every Girl Scout. I WILL NOT TOLERATE any behavior that deviates from this. No picking on each other. It takes about 6 weeks for new girls to adjust to this. However, it slowly dawns on them that while it means they can't pick on other girls, guess what, other girls can't pick on them! Aha!!! I know some leaders tell me that it is not practical to demand this behavior. The girls will

behave as you expect them to behave. More I can't say.

>>4. Children with Asperger's need the social interaction with their peers that organizations such as Girl Scouts provide.

It may help you to look at the girl with Asperger's in a different light. One from how much this girl has achieved rather than how far she has to go. I speak from experience because my 9 year old son has Asperger's and is in Cub Scouts. When my son was 4 his speech was unintelligible, his eye contact was minimal, and he had no friends. Now at 9, he reads at the high school level (or above), has excellent eye contact and has a couple of good friends. His ability to take turns has greatly improved and due to a fantastic, loving teacher, 3rd grade was a good year in school. He still has a very limited diet (only eats cereal, peanut butter on toast or crackers, chicken tenders - not nuggets, and fries) and he has great difficulty with team sports. His particular sensitivities are to sounds and smells. Other children with Asperger's may be hypersensitive to touch (even textures), temperatures, and light, as well.

I suggest that you first sit down with the girl's mother to discuss her daughter. Ask her about her daughter's history and the things she has achieved that she didn't think were possible - I guarantee you there are many. Then, ask her what her ultimate goal for her daughter is - our goal for our son is that he eventually becomes indistinguishable from his peers during normal everyday interactions. Hers may not be so grand or may even extend to total recovery depending upon her philosophy. Next, ask her if there are any specific areas they are currently working on with their daughter that you can help with or that can be achieved through Girl Scouts.

People with Asperger's tend to become fixated on certain things. For instance, my son prefers the number 5 and the color blue. We used to HAVE to accommodate this fixation, but now it is not as important - we let him decide. Right now he talks endlessly about time machines, chemistry formulas, and black holes. Other kids think he is strange and tend to avoid him. He has made a couple of close friends that put up with his odd behaviors because he can be very interesting and a lot of fun if given the chance - and of course, their parents teach them tolerance and the value of having differences.

I am sure there are those that think he is spoiled, difficult, and temperamental. Fortunately there are also those that recognize that he is an amazingly bright child that has a mind that sometimes refuses to cooperate with him. Most children with Aspergers that lash out do so because of provocation. They are NOT stupid and resent being treated as

such by other children and adults. In fact, many children with Aspergers are extremely bright and usually excel in one or more subjects because of their innate ability to concentrate (fixate) on one subject for extended lengths of time.

I would end the conversation with the girl's mother by focusing on two topics. Preparation and Discipline. When preparing for meetings specifically plan how best to include her daughter and what to do when her daughter simply can not participate in an activity. What alternate activity can she do while the rest of the group continues on? Can she help set up the next activity, read a book she has brought, etc?

Discipline - How does she handle it with her daughter? What works best with her daughter? Are there certain methods that work and others that do not? What goes for one does NOT go for all. Every child has his or her own differences and responds to different methods of discipline. Long lectures with a child with Asperger's are usually useless. The consequences for our son usually involve removing television viewing (fixates on cartoons) and/or Legos for serious offenses - hitting someone, etc. For minor offenses, a short time-out. Consistency is the key.

Do not expect the child to meet your expectations when/if she apologizes. Many children with Asperger's have not mastered the ability to "show" genuine sorrow on their faces. If you receive an apology do NOT insist on a better one. Accept the one you were given just as you usually would and try to withhold judgment on the adequacy of the apology. Let her mother decide what is genuine or not since she knows her daughter.

Also, do not assume the child is on medication. Many children on the spectrum are not on any medication.

Some suggestions: With the mother's permission, discuss her daughter with the other girls (and maybe the other parents). Remind the girls that EVERYONE needs and wants friends and the importance of being a friend to every Girl Scout. Some friends are not as easy as other friends, but that does not make them less important or less valuable. Explain that people with Aspergers, unlike say a quadriplegic, is something wrong on the inside. Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it is there and doesn't mean that the child can do anything about it. Just like a quadriplegic can't walk just because she wants to. You may want to try blindfolding the girls and handing them sticks to guide themselves across the room or to lace their shoes. Another idea involves using ear plugs AND ear protection headgear while they try reading the lips of their partner. You can't really duplicate the Asperger

experience, but you might be able to show your girls that empathy and understanding are always preferable than fear and avoidance.

If applicable, have all the girls fill in a "Favorites" sheet without their names on top and then have them try to figure out which sheet belongs to which girl.

Give the girls some ideas on how to help include the child with Aspergers and how to deal with things they don't like. If the child with Asperger's hits them, rather than hit back, say, "Please don't hit me on the head, it hurts me when you hit me." Language with a child with Asperger's needs to be very specific, not vague. "Don't hit" is too vague.

I know it sounds like a lot to expect from young girls, but I bet the girls will surprise you if you just help them find ways to include the child with Aspergers. For instance, you may assign the "Leader Helper" for the day to be the one to go out of her way to help the child with Asperger's to participate. Of course, the child with Asperger's mother should be agreeable to this.

Use a buddy bin to "pair-up" the girls for group activities rather than having the whole group congregate together. We use a coffee can with Popsicle sticks (names printed on them). Children with Asperger's tend to have problems in groups - so break your group up in smaller settings whenever possible.

Try to tailor one or two activities in areas of interest to the child with Asperger's - if she is capable, let her lead the group in that activity. Children with Asperger's like structure and control so they know what to expect and how to behave. Some days my son will tell me his head is acting all funny inside - some days are worse than others for him. He can't help it, so we do what we can to accommodate him and help him to function better. If it is his day to lead an activity and he is having a bad day, we change it to another day - Flexibility and planning helps.

Something as simple as changing the room you are meeting in may solve a host of behavioral problems - the noise level or the lighting may be affecting her behavior.

* * Down Syndrome * * *

Submitted by R. Jingle, mailto:

For a Girl Scout with Down Syndrome, how about a buddy? One of the kapers for each meeting is that one of the girls works directly with the young lady with Down Syndrome as her buddy for that meeting. The helping

buddy realizes that she helps, not does for. This may mean that the helping buddy will not get the craft or activity done for themselves. The leader needs to make sure there's a way for the girl with Down's Syndrome to be a helping buddy too (help the leader greet new members of the troop, show them where to put their things, etc.) Of course all of this hinges on the level of independence and functioning the girl with Down Syndrome has.

The helping buddy idea can work for any girl who needs special accommodations, extra hands and legs.

Create a troop language that indicates when a girl needs special assistance. Maybe if she says "butterscotch pudding", everybody knows she needs help going to the restroom or if she says "kites fly high" that she needs someone another hand. If the girl is nonverbal what are the signs she uses to communicate with her caregivers? How can those signs be incorporated into the troop's vocabulary?

Submitted by Katy, <mailto:furryfeathers@mindspring.com>

My daughter is 13, almost 14, going into her second year of Cadettes. I've talked with members of our council staff, and they all have encouraged me to keep my daughter as involved as possible. A couple things we have done are...

1. I have an assistant leader whose main responsibility is helping my daughter while we are planning. She can plan, to some extent, even if it's making a choice between two choices. This other leader may even be taking my daughter camping next month, to an older girl event, where they will plan an event for Brownies. I took her last year, and she loved it. This would be the first time my daughter camped without me.

2. Find something the girl wants to be involved in. My daughter is mostly non-verbal, but loves to sing! She is active in the council choir, and gets excited about practice, as well as performances. This will also be her council committee, when she gets to Senior Girl Scouts, and needs to be on a committee for one of the pre-requisites. They do ask the Cadette and Senior members of the choir to come early for planning purposes once every few months, so this is legit for her.

3. Be flexible. Will the girl in your troop finish the requirements to the same level as some of the other girls? Probably not. But will she learn something from each activity? Hopefully she will. While working on the Safety Award, the other girls had a requirement about making a list of emergency numbers, to take with them when they baby sit. My daughter learned to dial 911. For her, this was very hard, but now, quite an accomplishment. We made a game of it, and the other girls in the troop ask her sometimes, "Who do you call for a fire" she answers

"911". If they ask, who do you call if your sick, she still answers, "Mom!" But she knows the difference between an emergency and just being sick, so this is wonderful.

A lot of keeping a girl with a disability in your troop depends on your outlook, and that of the other girls in the troop, and even in the service unit. Honestly, it is why I first became a leader. My daughter wasn't welcomed into the first troop we tried, and I wanted her to be a part of Girl Scouts. So I got involved. Girls who join my troop are told up front about my daughter, and are given the option of another troop, if they aren't comfortable with working with my daughter. Best of luck!