



disAbility Awareness Night Planning

(Editorial Note: Though written for Cub Scouts, this article is applicable to all Scouting and Guiding units. - WWSWd)

Planning a disAbility Awareness Night can be a rewarding experience for you and your boys. Incorporating this into your program follows the Ethics in Action program and reinforces the character-building goals that have always been part of the Scouting program.

Cub Scout age boys are often faced with conflicting messages that sharply contradict the positive values taught in their families and in the Boy Scout program. Packs that incorporate programs that teach awareness, tolerance, respect, understanding and kindness can play an important role in combating the peer pressure boys face.

As you begin planning a disAbility Awareness Night, consider these things:

- Check with your council offices to see if they have a professional assigned in this area. If they do, it could be an invaluable resource.
- Check with your District Advancement Chairman to obtain the names of the Disability Awareness Merit Badge Counselors. Many of them are professionals in the field and are more than willing to assist.
- Check to see if there is a Cub Pack or Boy Scout Troop in your area that has some of these special Scouts. Remember, for their rank advancement, disAbled Scouts must meet the same requirements as all others. Perhaps they are working on their Communications or Public Speaking Merit Badge and would take the opportunity to assist you.
- All Boy Scouts have the opportunity to earn the Disability Awareness Merit Badge. By putting on a disAbility Awareness Night you are assisting them in achieving several of the requirements. Check with a Boy Scout Troop in your area, as they can be a great assistance in helping to obtain information (it's one of the requirements).
- Your local hospital or medical center have education programs and could provide instruction and explanation to the Scouts. They also have a variety of other resources available.
- Your District Executive, Merit Badge Counselors, or medical professionals can also obtain copies of materials from some of the local organizations that you can distribute.
- Check with local schools for special children to see if they would like to participate. It's quite heartwarming to see a large group sign the Pledge of Allegiance. Perhaps they will assist your Scouts in signing the Cub Scout Promise as part of the opening ceremony.

If this is your first time, please be aware of the sensitivity of others. Some of your Cubs may be introduced to disAbility awareness for the first time. It is important to make them aware that Scouts are...Courteous, Helpful, Friendly and Kind...

You should visit the Working With Scouts With disAbilities web site at <http://boyscouts-marin.org/wswd/wswd.htm>. This site is run by volunteer Scouters who believe that every boy deserves the opportunities of Scouting. The WWSWd site is constantly enhancing and improving the material available, so be sure to check back often.

Go to <http://www.main.org/boyscout/mpwdisab.htm> and take a look at what Troop and Pack 49 have done to make their Scouts aware. Perhaps you can obtain some similar literature for a handout.

While much is made over the use of "politically correct" language in our society, teaching our Cubs that their words can hurt is essential. These words are suggested to teach your Cubs words that do not hurt those they are trying to learn to be empathetic toward: enAbled, disAbility, disAbled...not

handicapped, wheel chair user...not wheel chair bound.

Equally important to language is our attitude toward equipment : wheelchairs, crutches, braces, walkers, etc., are the tools of the disAbleD, not toys. Treat the disAbleD Scout with all the respect and consideration that you do with other Scouts. If the game being played requires a blindfold, the blind or visually impaired Scout should be given one as well. If the Scout is in a wheelchair, don't stand over him to talk to him bend down to communicate face to face. If a hearing impaired Scout has a signer, respond to the Scout not the signer.

Some suggestions for disAbility Awareness stations:

- Wear glasses that have been smeared with Vaseline to simulate impaired vision.
- Place cotton in the ear to simulate deafness. (Make sure an adult supervises this so that more problems aren't created!)
- Tie both legs together to simulate walking problems. Use a walker.
- Have different sayings from the Wolf/Bear book were written out in sign language for one scout to do - the rest of the den had to figure out what he was saying. The den did get a copy of the sign language alphabet to help them.
- Make a Braille board with dots of hot glue on a piece of cardboard - again different scout sayings were used - cheat sheet was available.
- Use a balance board, a circular board with a x below also circular, to simulate inner ear problems. (see teeterboard jousting in the How-To Book)
- Wrap 2 fingers together to simulate a broken finger then tie your shoes.
- Use a pair of crutches or a walker to go through an obstacle course.
- Place a strip of printed material in front of a mirror. Have the scout write what he sees in the mirror.
- Write your name with the opposite hand you usually use.
- Try to stack pennies on a table while wearing heavy winter gloves to simulate having difficulties gripping things.
- Play Tug of War except tie the Cubs legs together and play it on the floor.
- Play volleyball with a balloon. The balloon moves slower than a regular ball and gives the opportunity for the disAbleD Scout to reach it.
- Stuffing several giant size marshmallows in Cub's mouth, and then ask him a number of questions about himself, his family, or say the Cub Scout Promise or Motto.
- When the Cub isn't understood, the station leader asks questions to try to understand what he is saying. This simulates having a problem with having your speech understood & how frustrating it can be.
- Tie one arm around the chest and try putting on a button-up shirt...using only one arm. A Boy Scout who only has one arm did this activity at a Cub Day Camp. He had a good time showing others the difficulties that having one arm can create ... although, he functions a lot better than most people whom have both arms!
- At a Cub Day Camp a blind man's maze was set up, using wooden timbers to layout the maze. Each Cub was blindfolded, given a stick to tap out his way, and turned loose in the maze. Wow...was that a site to see! There were usually 3 or 4 Cubs in the maze at a time...bumping into each other, and wandering out of the maze.
- Type out the Cub Scout Promise and the Law of the Pack on computer, then use a font to change the words to symbols such as MT Extra, Mobile, Cairo, Webdings, Symbols, Zap Dingbats. Have the boys' figure out what they say.
- Another obstacle course idea is walking through the rungs of a ladder with crutches. Crutches could be purchased at a local thrift store for under \$2.00 a pair or borrowed from a health care professional or hospital.
- This exercise simulates vision challenges. Fill a bowl with pony beads and add 1 or 2 slightly larger different colored beads. The object is to pick out the larger bead of a specific

color. The boys will always pick up one of the larger beads, but not necessarily the right color.

- Additional exercises are suggested in the Ethics in Action section of the Cub Scout Leader How-to Book.

These activities are designed to give the boys the chance to experience the frustrations faced daily by people with disAbilities. There are not prizes for being first, as being aware of disAbilities is being the real winner.

Add to your experience by sharing the story of Eagle Scout Daniel Collins who has cerebral palsy and is an enAbleD with the use of a 3-wheel, squeeze trigger wheelchair. Daniel, who completed the same advancement requirements as all other Scouts, is definitely a role model for others. To read the entire article, go to <http://www.phillynews.com/inquirer/98/Dec/07/city/CBADG07.htm>

Since its founding in 1910, the Boy Scouts of America has had fully participating members with physical, mental, and emotional disAbilities. The first Chief Scout Executive, James F. West, had a disAbility.

Information and experiences that you obtain from putting on a disAbility Awareness Night can be shared with others by sending it to the WWSWd group <http://boyscouts-marin.org/wswd/wswd.htm>

This article was prepared by:

Judy Polak

Cub Scout Roundtable Commissioner

Mountain Rifle District, Buckskin Council, Charleston, WV

jfpolak@newwave.net

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Thanks to the following Scouters who have contributed information & suggestions through Scouts-L:

Jerry Bowles
Bear Den Leader
AspenDr01@aol.com

Cyndy Tschanz
Webelos Den Leader, Den Leader Coach
Pack 255, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
tschancl@aramco.com.sa

Trudy Freeman
Cubmaster
Pack 205, Anchorage, AK
freemanak@worldnet.att.net

Colin M. McConnell
District Advancement Chair
Northridge District, Detroit Area Council
Detroit, MI
colinmconnell@email.com

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