

Parent or carer conversation framework

This framework is designed to support initial conversations with parents or carers, where a young person with additional needs or disabilities wishes to join local Scouting.

Planning the conversation

Plan an appropriate place for the conversation take place. This should be a neutral and comfortable space, where you will be able to talk without being interrupted. The conversation should involve the Leader and/or the District Commissioner; the parent or carer; and if appropriate, the young person themselves. It may also be helpful to involve someone in a local inclusion role or who has expertise in this area.

Before the meeting, you may want to speak to your line manager (eg. Group Scout Leader, or District Commissioner) and refer to our guidance at scouts.org.uk/diversity, so you feel prepared and confident.

During the conversation

- Ensure that the parent or carer feels like it is an informal conversation and not an interview. It is just the starting point of ongoing partnership.
- Be honest about your level of knowledge and skills. You can explain you are keen to learn from them, as the parent or carer, as the expert on their child's needs.
- Be positive but realistic. Help them understand what to expect from Scouting.
- Take the lead from the parent or carer in the words they use to describe their child's additional needs or disability.
- Remember that each young person will be different, so avoid making any assumptions.
- Explain to the parent or carer how you plan to store and share any information you record, and ensure that they are happy with this.

Starting the conversation

Start the conversation with some simple introductory questions, which will also start to give you an insight into the young person. Example questions: *How are you hoping your child will benefit from joining Scouting? What does your child want to get out of Scouting? Does your child already know anyone attending our Group?*

Give an introduction to Scouting and to your Group or section. Within this, or throughout the conversation, explain:

- Scouting is run by adult volunteers.
- Scouting is all about supporting young people's development, through fun and adventure.
- Scouting is inclusive and we do our best to support the full participation of all young people. There is a lot of flexibility within Scouting to meet individual needs.
- What the Programme and activities are like. (Giving the parent or carer insight into the Programme, and a sense of what a typical section meeting looks like, will help them give you the most relevant information about their child's needs).
- We aim to work closely in partnership with the parent or carer, to plan how to best support the young person.

The conversation

Example topics and questions are provided below, to help identify the young person's individual needs and plan support strategies or adaptations to support their access to Scouting.

Start by explaining that you would like to ask some questions, to help you start to understand their child's needs, and work with them to plan any reasonable adjustments to help them to enjoy and participate in Scouting.

You can also reassure the parent or carer that any information you record will be processed and retained in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. It will be used for Scouting purposes only and will be kept securely.

Additional needs

Example questions: *Does your child have a diagnosed additional need or disability? Does your child attend a mainstream or a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school? Do they receive any extra support or supervision at school? Does [name] have a 'Statement of Special Educational Needs' or 'Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)'?*

Interests and strengths

This is important to keep the conversation positive and focused on the unique needs of the new member. This may also support you in getting to know the young person and helping them settle into the section and make friends.

Example questions: *What does your child particularly enjoy? Do they have any special interests? What are their strengths?*

Difficulties and support strategies

It is important to think ahead, and anticipate any particular difficulties a young person may have in Scouting, to enable you to plan an inclusive Programme and activities, and also consider any potential adaptations needed to the meeting place.

Asking about how the young person communicates and their level of understanding is particularly useful, in terms of planning how instructions are given. It is also important to find out about any challenging behaviours and their usual triggers or causes, along with support strategies.

Giving the parent or carer some information about the meeting place; the types of activities involved in your Programme; and what a typical meeting looks like, will help them anticipate any difficulties and give you the most relevant information.

- **Difficulties** - Example questions: *Is there anything about Scouting that you think they might find difficult? Do they have any particular dislikes or fears?*
- **Communication** - Example questions: *Does your child need any support with communicating or understanding instructions?*
- **Behaviour** – Example questions: *Does your child have any difficulties with their behaviour? Do they need any support in managing their behaviour? Are there any known causes/triggers for the behaviour at home or school?*
- **Support** – Example questions: *What can we do to help manage these difficulties? How do you think we could best support your child in Scouting? What works well at home or school? Does [name] get extra support at school – please can you tell me about it? Is there any paperwork (support plans, etc.) used at school that you might be able to share with us? What would you advise we do if...?*

Safety

This is important to identify any particular activities in the Programme which might be of high risk to the young person, and plan measures to support them, as part of your risk assessments. It may be that you need the parent or carer to attend some activities to provide additional support (eg. Nights Away).

Note: If a young person requires regular one-to-one supervision at all times in Scouting, the Group is not obliged to provide this. The parent, carer or a professional carer may need to attend to support the young person. At all times in Scouting, all adults follow the Young People First Code of Behaviour (Yellow Card).

Example questions: *Do you have any concerns about your child's safety at Scouting? Is [name] likely to wander/run off?*

Nights away

Explain that sleepovers or camps will be part of the Programme, and identify any additional support that is needed.

Example questions: *Does [name] ever spend time away from home overnight? How comfortable are you with the idea of overnight experiences?*

Medical and diet

Example questions: *Does your child have any medical needs, or take any medication? Is your child independent with their personal care / toileting? Is your child on a special diet, or do they have any allergies or intolerances? Are there any foods that should be avoided?*

Note: If a young person requires personal care (eg. support with going to the toilet; support with eating), this must be provided by the parent or carer, or a professional carer.

Anything else?

Ask the parent or carer if there is anything else they feel you need to know.

Closing the conversation

Next steps – You could ask if the parent or carer would like you to arrange a pre-visit to the section or to the meeting place, for themselves and their child. It is also worth asking if they would like to attend the first meeting alongside their child.

Staying in touch – Find out the best contact details to contact the parent or carer during a meeting, and the best time and method to contact them to discuss how their child is getting on at Scouting. Explain who the parent should contact if they have any questions/problems, and how.

Review - Agree when you will discuss how things are going (bimonthly). Be honest and open with the parent or carer. It may be appropriate to explain here that there can be situations where a Group doesn't have the capacity or resources to meet the needs of a young person, and in which case the District Commissioner would seek to find an alternative Group for their child. .

Finish by checking if there are any other questions they want to ask, or any concerns.

After the conversation

Remember, this conversation will just be the start of ongoing partnership with the parent or carer.

Keep in touch with the parent or carer. You may also wish to share a copy of your notes after meeting, to ensure mutual understanding.

As with any young person when they join Scouting, take time to get to know the young person as an individual. Take time to speak to them at an appropriate time about anything they are finding difficult and anything you can do to help.

For further support

Remember you're not alone and you are not expected to be an expert. Your line manager is there to support you, and sometimes just getting a different perspective on a situation can be really valuable.

Information and guidance is available via scouts.org.uk/diversity

For any further support, please contact The Scout Information Centre via phone or email to info.centre@scouts.org.uk