

What are special needs?



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Special needs refer to the individual requirements of a person with a disadvantaged background or a mental, emotional, or physical disability or a high risk of developing one. This may make it difficult for a young person or adult to participate fully in Scouting.

According to Department of Education figures from 2010, approximately 1 in 5 children will have some sort of special educational need. On that basis, most Groups will have one or more young people who need extra support to participate in Scout activities.

Scouting exists to promote the development of individuals, whatever their particular need, by helping them to grow and achieve their full potential. By identifying and providing for an individual's special need, we can include more young people and adults in Scouting.

The types of special need

Many young people will require some special consideration to enable them to be fully involved in the programme. Some disabilities may be short term, such as an arm in plaster or the effects of temporary social or family problems. Others may be more complex or permanent needs, such as a physical or sensory impairments or mental health problems.

Some special needs are not immediately obvious, such as behavioural problems, like ADHD, and learning difficulties and these are referred to as hidden disabilities.

Younger people, particularly at Beaver Scout age, may have special needs that are less pronounced and require only a little support. As the young person grows older however, their particular

needs may become more pronounced. This could lead to difficulties in participating in the programme, requiring greater levels of support.

Common special needs

The special needs that you are probably most likely to encounter are (in alphabetical order):

- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Eczema
- Epilepsy
- Hearing impairments
- Mental health problems
- Speech and language difficulties
- Mobility impairments
- Visual impairments

More in-depth information about all of these special needs is available in factsheets and on the Member Resources pages of The Scout Association website.

Whatever their cause, the particular needs of any young person need to be known and understood. Equipped with the right background knowledge, the leadership team will be able to plan for and support the individual's full participation in the life of the Section.

There will be conditions that you encounter that you may know very little about, but once you have met the young person or adult wanting to join Scouting, 'labels' are only useful in tracking down

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helpful information. The *Contact a Family* Database is a very useful place to start (further details at the end of the factsheet). There is however, no substitute for getting to know the individual and their particular needs.

The Scout Association's policy on special needs

Scouting has always embraced many different cultures, faiths and lifestyles. Our Equal Opportunities Policy states that no person should receive less favourable treatment because of their class, ethnic origin, gender, marital or sexual status; mental or physical ability or their political and religious beliefs. All Members should seek to practise that equality and promote access to Scouting for all young people.

Policy, Organisation and Rules (POR), July 2011, states:

Rule 3.47: Members with Special Needs

- *It is important that young people are seen as individuals and that they are regarded equally whatever their abilities or disabilities.*
- *Some young people have special needs and require extra resources in terms of appropriate programme and equipment to enable them to develop their full potential.*
- *Leaders with members with special needs can request support and guidance from a network of Commissioners and Advisers within the Districts, Counties and at Headquarters.*

Whenever possible this policy is achieved by integrating young people with special needs into mainstream Scouting. The guidance to the Equal Opportunities Policy contains more information about the considerations that need to be made to ensure that all young people can enjoy Scouting.

There is a network of Groups for young people, including those with multiple and severe disabilities, who would otherwise not be able to participate and enjoy Scouting. These include Groups based in special needs schools, hospitals and hospices as well as groups specialising in taking young people with special needs.

There are a range of resources available to help you include young people with particular needs in your section. There are factsheets on many of the most common queries that leaders have, as well as regular articles about special needs in *Scouting* magazine. There is also a range of advice and information on the accessibility pages of the scouts.org.uk website.

Your Assistant Area Commissioner, Assistant County Commissioner or County Adviser for Special Needs will be able to help at a local level and you may even have a Special Needs Adviser in your District. The Information Centre, and Diversity and Inclusion Department at Gilwell Park will also be able to help with any queries that you have.

Scouting and The Disability Discrimination Act

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) introduced new laws aimed at ending the discrimination that many disabled people face. The Act gave disabled people new rights of access to goods, facilities and services, as well as in education, employment and buying or renting property.

The Scout Association falls under the Disability Discrimination Act and is deemed to provide a service to the public or a section of the public.

Scouting at every level needs to make reasonable adjustments to the services it provides to overcome barriers to access.

Some adaptations will involve little or no cost, such as ensuring that walkways are free of obstacles and that written information is clear and easy to read. Other adaptations will cost more, and in these cases the resources of the Scout body are a relevant consideration in deciding what is reasonable. However, it is important to remember that there may be external finance available to make adaptations. There is funding available from Headquarters, through the Development Grants Board, and grants from local authorities might also be available. These should be considered when planning a project.

There is more information about the Disability Discrimination Act and how it affects Scouting on

the Member resources pages of scouts.org.uk. Just search for Disability Discrimination Act. This page includes several examples of Access Surveys that you can download to use. If you need more information about the Disability Discrimination Act contact the Diversity and Inclusion team at Gilwell Park.

Raising awareness of special needs in Scouting

Scouting should be accessible to all. As far as is practical, we must be prepared to do what we can to accommodate all young people who wish to join. Leaders have a responsibility to keep a watch out for young people with particular needs and to take steps to find out how best to include them. We need to ensure that the programmes we offer are not just balanced across the Programme Zones, but are appropriate to the abilities of our Members. This process can be helped significantly if leaders share experiences with others in the Region, District, County or Area.

All new leaders taking up a warrant will need to complete the Adult Training Module, *Valuing Diversity* (Module 7) that provides details of The Scout Association's policies regarding special needs. If they would like to gain more understanding of special needs then they should also be encouraged to complete *Special Needs* (Module 36), which gives guidance on disability awareness. As both these modules cover new areas, leaders who did their training under the old scheme may want complete them as part of their on-going learning.

Further specialist training may be available for adults wishing to gain more knowledge and experience.

Special Needs Groups (those attached to hospitals, or catering for people with particular or severe disabilities) will often be happy to provide service opportunities to those wishing to find out more about special needs. This can lead to ongoing contact between Groups, which will be of benefit to both.

Further Support

The Scout Association Headquarters

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Telephone: 0845 300 1818

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Email: diversity.inclusion@scouts.org.uk

Website: www.scouts.org.uk/

There is more information about all areas of special needs and Scouting on the Scouting for all section of Member Resources, including links to all the relevant factsheets:

www.scouts.org.uk/supportresources

Contact a Family Database

Contact a Family provides advice, information and support about all disabilities and impairments.

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