

# Scouting With Challenges

Taughannock District Cub Roundtable

February 2009

It is very likely you know you have a cub scout in your Pack that you realize needs some extra attention. You probably also have a “behavior problem.” You may even have a scout who has some sort of physical difference ...

Notice I used the word “difference.” I did not say “handicapped.” I have even started to avoid using the word “challenged.” Why? It’s not just being “politically correct.” As the father of a boy with a “differently wired” brain, I realize that the way I think about my son affects two important things: the way I treat him and the way others treat him.

**So why “different” and not “challenged” or “handicapped?”** Ok ... so there are guys with half a leg back from Iraq that can beat me in a foot race – which of us is “handicapped?” There are judges who are completely blind and can memorize entire books ... which of us is “challenged?” Helen Keller inspired millions without being able to hear or see. If we think of people with physical, emotional or learning “differences” as just “different” we realize that we can work with them if we BOTH compensate for the difference instead of thinking that we have to make “allowances” for them or that they have to “deal with the real world.”

**What kinds of differences are allowed in scouts?** One word: Any. As long as the difference does not expose other children to danger, anyone can be a scout. I once worked with a 40 year old man with limited intelligence ... I worked with him for two years as he learned First Aid merit badge.

**What sort of differences should I expect?** Differences fall into three basic categories. Physical differences encompass everything from missing limbs to body systems that don’t work properly: you can put asthma and allergies into this category too. Emotional differences generally involve some sort of emotional trauma. Mental differences is a term used to describe when a scout’s (or a scout’s parent’s) brain works in a way that is markedly different from other people. Notice I didn’t say “normal” ... again, what exactly is “normal?”

**What should I do when I have a scout with a “difference?”** First step: ask the parent. Do your asking in private. Remember, especially with very young children, it is possible that a parent has not considered their child has a difference yet. Approach the parent by asking if there is anything you should know about working with their child. My recommendation is that every den leader should do this of every parent - with obvious differences or not. Why? Because you learn more that way. When you ask “is there something I should know about working with your scout?” parents are far more willing to share than if you say “well, he’s a handful, what are you going to do about it?”

**What do I do if a scout really is a handful and the parents are “clueless”** Here is where your Commissioner and other supporting scouters come in handy. We can get you more practical information on working with challenged scouts and help you work with particular parents so you are not in the middle of a difficult situation.

**Can we adjust badge requirements for challenged cub scouts?** Yes. Unlike Boy Scouts, a pack committee can help you adjust requirements as necessary.