

Scouting has long been a great program for youth who have ADHD. The mission of the Boy Scouts of America—“to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law”—has provided structure, challenges, and an outdoor physical focus that have helped many of these boys succeed. That success occurs not just while they are scouts, but also throughout their lives. Many have earned scouting’s highest rank, Eagle Scout.

Why is scouting a great program for young people who have ADHD?

Scouting is a well-thought-out, highly structured program that provides a step-by-step sequence of skills for scouts to master. It promises fun, friendship, and adventure. Scouting offers frequent *positive* recognition and develops social skills and leadership skills. Scouting employs a leadership and training model, the

EDGE model—Explain, Demonstrate, Guide, and Enable—which, through systematic Explanation, interactive Demonstration, and Guided practice, Enables scouts with ADHD to discover and develop their unique strengths and interests.

A 2007 American Medical Association study showed that the cumulative incidence of definite ADHD based on DSM-IV criteria was 7.4 percent by age nineteen. Virtually every scouting unit will experience having a youth who has ADHD. In a survey conducted in early 2014 by the Three Fires Council, headquartered in St. Charles, Illinois, the percentage of scouts reported as having ADHD turned out, not surprisingly, to be seven percent. It is important for scout

leaders to be aware of this incidence and strategies they can use that will help facilitate a successful scouting experience for these youth (not to mention their contemporaries and the adult leadership).

From any youth’s perspective, the choice of scouting unit will make a difference. The youth and his parents



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should look at several units in their vicinity and select one that best fits his particular strengths and interests. A unit where the volunteers understand disabilities and are comfortable working with individuals who have them is often the best fit for youth with ADHD. To make unit selection easier and further ensure that youth with disabilities are successful, Boy Scouts of America is standardizing its leader training to better prepare unit leaders for working with scouts with various disabilities. ADHD is receiving particular emphasis. The training focuses on applying best practices from successful units.

The current training course for working with scouts who have ADHD is provided to commissioners, who are the go-to volunteers for unit leaders. It is structured to provide practical tips to both parents and leaders. Interestingly, as participants progress through the course, it becomes more and more obvious that the tips are not just beneficial for boys with ADHD, but also for every youth in the program. Commissioners share the information with unit leaders, so they can provide a program that provides youth who have ADHD with opportunities to succeed.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- If your scout has ADHD, let your scout leader know. Tell him what works well AND what does not help.
- If your scout takes medication to help him focus at school, it may help him focus better during scout activities as well. You may want to discuss this issue with your scout's physician.
- Note: Medications are a serious concern for leaders in scouting and the following guidance is routinely provided to them regarding their responsibility: Prescription medication is the responsibility of the scout taking the medication and/or his parent or guardian. A scout leader, after obtaining all necessary information, can agree to accept the responsibility of making sure a scout takes the necessary medication at the appropriate time, but BSA policy does not mandate, nor necessarily encourage, the scout leader to do so. Also, if state laws are more limiting, they must be followed.
- Make sure your scout knows that his medication is meant to help him focus, not to make him behave or "be good."
- Be sure to tell the scout leader what your son's needs are if he is going on a day trip a weekend camping trip, or a week at summer camp. There are many things the leader can do to help your scout be successful and have fun—if he is informed.
- Consider getting trained to be a scout leader yourself.



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AND

By Anthony Mei

ADHD

To ensure that commissioners, and ultimately unit leaders and volunteers, understand just what ADHD is, the AMA's "ADHD Symptoms and Diagnosis" forms an integral part of the course. This monograph shows that the diagnosis is based upon having multiple (at least six of nine) traits strongly demonstrated over a protracted amount of time. Also noted is that these traits are common among all youth, but usually sporadically and usually not persistently. The course stresses that ADHD is a *lifetime* disorder; it doesn't go away, but symptoms can be controlled—sometimes to the extent that they can become *strengths*.

The training identifies the characteristics of ADHD, with an emphasis on positive attributes; for example, affected individuals may be energetic, engaging, dramatic, clever, bright, excited, happy-go-lucky, creative, eager, enthusiastic, easy-going, inquisitive, unique, carefree, exceptional, and spontaneous. These are noted as strengths that will enhance any unit's program. Read the sidebars to learn some of the tips for parents and leaders of youth involved in scouting.

Let me provide you with a real-life example. Scout Johnny, a youth who had ADHD, was often disruptive during training activities. When incidents occurred, leaders would often employ the time-out approach, but with minimal effective-

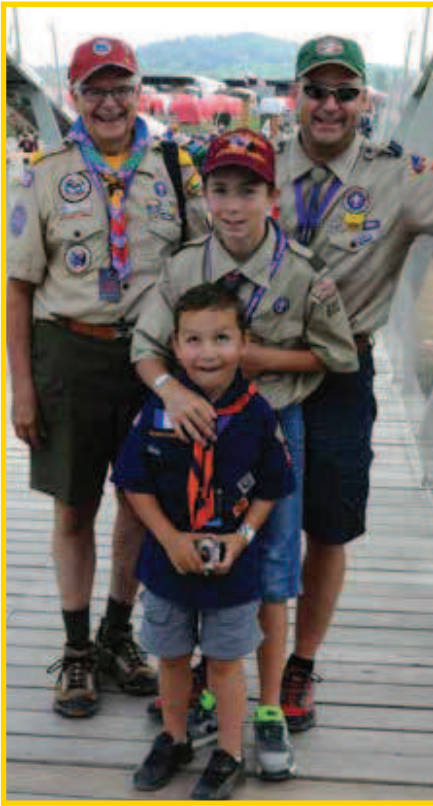


ness in the small meeting room. Once, while the boys were learning about map reading, Johnny disrupted the class. The Scoutmaster casually took Johnny aside and explained that his behavior was making it hard for his fellow scouts to learn the skill. As an alternative, he assigned Johnny to teach the map reading course the following week. The following week, Johnny taught the class with such a degree of preparation and knowledge that everyone was spellbound. The Scoutmaster had accidentally hit on a strategy for success—and had found one of Johnny's strengths!

Johnny went on to earn his Eagle Scout rank two years later. 🐾

Anthony Mei is a longtime volunteer and Scout leader, who currently chairs the National Disabilities Awareness Committee of the Boy Scouts of America. He has staffed the disabilities Awareness Challenge at the National Scout Jamboree three times. In 2013, he chaired the event and added an activity to simulate ADHD multi-tasking abilities. Both he and his older son have been diagnosed with ADD.





RESOURCES

The Scouting program provides the following resources to its volunteers and leaders:

- Official Boy Scouts of America information page for scouts with special needs and disabilities: scouting.org/specialneeds.aspx
- Boy Scouts of America contact email for disabilities (and to subscribe to Abilities Digest newsletter): disabilities.awareness@scouting.org
- Working with Scouts with disAbilities website: wwswd.org/downloads/Training_ADHD_skit.pdf
- Coping With A Hyperactive Boy Scout At Summer Camp: <http://wwswd.org/downloads/coping.pdf>
- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: chadd.org
- World Organization of the Scouting Movement: scout.org/

TIPS FOR SCOUT LEADERS

- Try to let the scout who has ADHD know ahead of time what is expected. When activities are long or complicated, it may help to write down a list of smaller steps.
- Repeat directions one-on-one when necessary, or assign a more mature buddy to help him get organized.
- Compliment the scout whenever you find a genuine opportunity. Ignore minor inappropriate behavior if it is not dangerous or disruptive.
- Provide frequent breaks and opportunities for scouts to move around actively but purposefully. It is not helpful to keep scouts with ADHD so active that they are exhausted, however.
- When you must redirect a scout, do so in private, in a calm voice, unless safety is at risk.
- Avoid yelling.
- Never publicly humiliate a scout.
- Whenever possible, sandwich correction between two positive comments.
- Be aware of early warning signs, such as fidgety behavior, that may indicate the scout is losing impulse control. When this happens, try a private, nonverbal signal or proximity control (move close to the scout) to alert him that he needs to focus.
- During active games and transition times, be aware when a scout is starting to become more impulsive or aggressive.
- Expect the scout with ADHD to follow the same rules as other scouts. ADHD is not an excuse for uncontrolled behavior.
- If it has not been possible to intervene proactively and you must impose consequences for out-of-control behavior, use time-out or "cooling off."
- Offer feedback and redirection in a way that is respectful and that allows the scout to save face. When scouts are treated with respect, they are more likely to respect the authority of the scout leader.
- Keep cool! Don't take challenges personally. Scouts with ADHD want to be successful, but they need support, positive feedback, and clear limits.
- Find out about medical needs. Make sure you have what your council requires to ensure the scout's medical needs can be met, or have the parent come along.
- If you must administer medication, don't tell the scout that it is a "smart pill," or that it will make him "behave."
- Offer opportunities for purposeful movement, such as leading cheers, performing in skits, assisting with demonstrations, or teaching outdoor skills to younger scouts. This may improve focus, increase self-confidence, and benefit the pack/troop as a whole.
- Scouts with ADHD are generally energetic, enthusiastic, and bright. Many have unique talents as well. Help them use their strengths to become leaders in your troop.

