

SCOUTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND PROBLIMATIC PARENTS

This overview is alone being given as a starting point for leaders to understand and work effectively with youth of all ages who have disabilities. For specific medical and professional information, please check out the websites list at the end of this overview or speak with a medical specialist.

It is important to distinguish between a youth who was born with a genetic disability versus someone who has an environmentally caused disability. With most genetic disabilities or syndromes, many of the manifestations such as anger, perseveration, inability to focus or sit still, etc. are something that the individual usually cannot control because they are genetically programmed in such a way that their minds and bodies react differently. For those who have environmentally induced problems, many things can be altered or corrected depending on how a situation is handled, but there are other environmentally induced problems that are every bit as unchangeable as genetically induced ones.

1. Origin of Disabilities

- **Genetically:** Downs Syndrome, Tourettes, Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), etc.
- **Environmentally or Unknown:** Autism (Aspergers), Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Some forms of Depression – All of these may have some genetic markers but it has not been scientifically proven as yet.

2. Two Types: Physical and Mental/Emotional

3. Environmental Triggers for Scout Age Boys

- Broken Home – Pressure, anger & sadness of divorce
- Problem Parent*
- Physical Abuse – sexual or otherwise
- Verbal (Mental) Abuse
- Drugs – Narcotics (including cigarettes) or Alcohol in the home, neighborhood, schools or friends
- Sexual Confusion
- Even the TV, Internet and some Music

***What is a “Problematic Parent?”**

- Does not give their child the time of day or show them any love.
- Smothers them with too much closeness or protection (Moms usually). They cannot learn to be independent and usually become great manipulators.
- Use money in place of spending time together
- Overbearing. Nothing the boy does is ever good enough.

- When a problem comes to light they refuse to acknowledge that their child has a problem or that they had anything to do with it. They also think a “label” such as ADD will ruin their lives.
- Wants to control everything and be the center of attention.
- Ego, Ego, Ego

4. With a problematic Scout, parents can either help or hurt but not stay neutral.

5. Two questions to think about.

- **Have you had to deal with a “Problematic Parent”?**
- **Have you ever had a formal discussion with a parent about their son’s actions?**
 - Meetings should be in a non-threatening place such as their home or a quiet coffee shop.
 - Your Units Committee Chairman should be present and take the lead in the conversation using the Scoutmaster or Assistant Scoutmaster as a reference. The Scoutmaster should never be seen as the bad guy.
 - If your SPL, ASPL, Troop Guide, Junior Assistant SM or Patrol Leader has a good rapport with the Scout in question and has dealt with some of the problems, it is good to have him come along as well if appropriate.
 - Be sure to let the parents know who will be attending.
 - For serious offenses, you may want to have a troop behavior contract that states what is expected of the Scout, that both the parent(s) Scout and Committee Chairman sign. This becomes very important if things get to a point where you have no choice but to remove the boy from your unit. **See sample contract – last page.**
 - Discuss pairing their son up with an older, mature Scout as a mentor.
 - A Boy Scout unit is supposed to be Scout run, and as such it is very important that all Scouts work together. We adult leaders are only there to help the Senior Scouts if they ask for it.
 - If a parent tries to deny that their boy is a problem, you must be firm and explain what your leaders have experienced. Inviting them to visit is great, but it is better to have them come part way through the meeting discreetly so that the boy does not put on an angel act to manipulate the parent.
 - Be sure to express that your concern is not only for the unit, but also for their son. If they are acting up in Scouts, it is a good bet that it is also happening in school as well.
 - If the Scout has a diagnosed disability, please ask the parent if they feel comfortable talking about it and if so, ask questions so that you can understand what the boy has to deal with himself. This will give a great insight as to how to work with him effectively.

Working with “Problematic Scouts”

1) **Scout run, not Adult run**

The Green Bar needs to take the lead in working with all Scouts. Quality youth leadership will usually have greater success with a youth who acts out as long as the older scouts walk the walk and not just talk the talk.

2) **Concern for the Scout**

Kids know when a request or command is for the adult or Senior Scout's personal convenience instead of for the sake of the child. Because of this, they will usually follow suit by putting their own interests first. They are good at learning by example so “Lead by Example”

3) **Respect the Scout**

Adults need to remember that even though these are kids, we need to show them the same respect that we would show to another adult.

4) **Patience for the Scout (can be the toughest one)**

Immaturity can really get under our skin but we need to keep our emotions in check. Resentment can be like a drug, fueling their rebellion.

5) **Yelling at the Scout shows they have won.**

Keeping your emotions in check and not showing anger will normally get a lot more cooperation out of kids. You also are showing them that you are in control. Another point is not to talk down to them. Speak to them as if they are an equal, sort of Scout to Scout.

6) **Direct your Scouts in moderation.**

If a youth is overwhelmed with demands or is expected to do something that is beyond their age or capabilities, resisting is the least of your worries. Correcting a bad behavior is crucial, but you have to remember they are still kids and some behaviors and actions need to slide. The old adage of “Pick your Battles” really applies here.

7) **Follow Through**

When an order or task is given, make sure that they follow through. If there are consequences for not finishing a task, you have to follow through there as well or you show them they can get away with not following through. **This goes for a parent as well. We are never too old for consequences!**

8) **Praising your Scouts**

We all like to get a pat on the back when a job is well done especially kid's. Be just as quick to praise a Scout as you would be to point out something they do wrong.

A Final Note

As a parent of three boys, two with special needs as well as my work on both the Prader-Willi Syndrome Washington State Chapter and the National board, and my current position on the International Prader-Willi Syndrome Organization board, I want to give you what I believe to be the single most important tip I have learned.

Consistency! No matter what the syndrome, mental state, I.Q., etc. being consistent is paramount to helping all youth (with or without special needs) stay focused and feeling in control of themselves. We all feel more at ease if we know what to expect in a specific situation as well as a basic time schedule to follow. This is especially important for those who struggle with a syndrome, depression, or anxiety problems. Let them know as far in advance as possible what is going to be expected of them as far as what task(s) or activities they will be participating in and what the expectations of them are to complete the task(s).

This will make life much easier for all concerned and the results should be satisfying for all.

Resource List

There is so much information available today, especially on the web, that it is important to know where, and from whom, the information is coming. When in doubt, look for the nation foundation sites, almost always list as .org

Below are a few sites I consider to be of great value and most will have practical suggestions on dealing with different situations.

Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)

www.add.org

Autism – Aspergers

www.autism-society.org

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism

www.autismspeaks.org

National Institute on Drug Abuse

www.nida.nih.gov/

www.dare.com

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

www.ocfoundation.org/

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

www.mayoclinic.com/health/oppositional-defiant-disorder/DS00630

Other Great Resource Websites

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

www.aacap.org/

NOAH (New York Online Access to Health

www.noah-health.org

Focus Adolescent Services

www.focusas.com

TROOP 000 DISCIPLINARY CONTRACT

By signing this contract between myself and Troop 000, I agree to the following terms:

1. If I have a problem with any of the other scouts, I will seek the help of a leader, an older scout or an adult to help solve the conflict.
2. Physical violence or verbal harassment will not be tolerated by Troop 000.
3. Any physical violence or verbal abuse deemed excessive by Troop000's Board members will result in expulsion from the Troop.

By signing below I agree to the above terms and understand that I have been given a warning as a result of my actions on _____, and that if I ever react to a situation in a violent manner again, I will be asked to leave Troop 000.

Joe Smith
Committee Chair

Jack Smith
Scoutmaster

Scout

Date Signed

Parent or Guardian

Date Signed