

# Able Scouts

## Articles on Scouting with special needs and disabilities

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### Managing Behavior in an Active Den



You have a den full of very active WEBELOS. You have discovered they are mostly kids who have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and a couple of them are “on the spectrum” too. You don’t really know what all of this labeling means; all you see are the results of whatever it is that they “have.” Kind of reminds you of a tornado at moments, but you have noticed you can keep semi-control if you keep a schedule and keep shifting the activities to suit the interest levels. With planning, observation, and perseverance you can actually help calm the storm!

Let’s have a closer look at this situation. First of all, you mainly need to know that both those Scouts with ADHD and some who are on the spectrum (Autism) have this common thread: they can be very easily distracted. For children with ADHD, their focus shifts at the speed of lightning. They may not be able to focus on what is in front of them, because there are too many other things their brains are thinking about. The thoughts go off on tangents often. For some children with autism, their focus may be elsewhere, based on what they may be feeling, hearing, touching, or smelling. This leads to distraction from the topic at hand. These sensory distractions could also lead to “meltdowns.” When a den leader has to deal with the outcomes of several distracted Scouts, it is not even sort of amusing. Many of us do not have a clue as to where to begin to calm everyone down so that something can be accomplished.

Below are some suggestions for helping create a more structured environment for these Cubs.

1. **Planning is paramount.** Keep in mind age related activities are critical, but some of these Scouts are more immature than others, so the techniques you may use to “hold the fort” may shift with the maturity level. Be aware of your Scouts’ reactions to your plans and techniques. If something is not working, reflect on it and then make a change as necessary.
2. **Know your Scout** This is an especially helpful idea! Suppose you have a Scout on the spectrum who is very clumsy and uncoordinated in physical activities or eye/hand coordinated activities? These issues could leave him/her open to ridicule and avoidance from other Scouts causing emotional discomfort. When you know your Scouts, you can prepare accommodations ahead of time thus preventing any kind of ostracizing. Sometimes having a craft prestarted or color coded is all you need to facilitate the ease and enjoyment of an activity.



3. **Preplan** and share the plan beforehand with parents and Cubs. Knowing what will happen during the meeting will help the Scout know what to expect. Scouts may suggest an activity that could be enjoyed by everyone. When they have the plan ahead of time, the parent can help the youth know what to expect and have supplies ready.
4. **Display a visual schedule** for everyone to refer to. The display board can be made from a foam core tri-fold board with Velcro pieces prepared so that the schedule can be edited each week you hold a meeting. For example, you can print "Opening," "Instruction," "Activity," "Project," "Game," "Closing" on strips of laminated card stock. Attach pieces of Velcro to the paper strips and the board itself. Attach and detach as needed. Make your board specific to the meeting so that it will be utilized at each meeting and will not be a waste of time for you or for the Scouts. It should become a reference tool for all involved. You may or may not want to include timing (some youth with autism will fixate on the time and totally lose all meaning while participating) on the schedule board. Whether you do or not is up to the way the Scouts need help. You can set your phone on silent vibrate to help you remember to change activities every 20 minutes or less. This will give you time to experience in small chunks the theme for the week/month without losing control of the interest factor.
5. **Chunking** or breaking up tasks into smaller more manageable steps may help lift pressure and stress off of your Cubs' shoulders. Even though as leaders we would like everyone to "keep up" with the program, some children simply need time to move around, experience the theme or project, and not be pushed into a corner in order to immediately accomplish an objective. Chunking allows the leader to teach and enables the Scouts to process important information to be learned. An example of chunking would be allowing 20 minutes to learn a part of a concept, 20 minutes to experience/practice it, and 20 minutes to move in a related game. Small steps at a time help the learning process and frees the Scouts up to move and enjoy the learning itself.
6. **Board of Den Rules** can be set up and should have no more than five "rules." Make the rule statements positive. Avoid negatives: Don't, Not Allowed, NO. Positive examples include: *Use the Talking Feather, Raise your hand, A Scout is friendly.* Have the Scouts help you make up the rules. When a rule is broken bring it to the Scout's attention by either a predetermined signal to that Scout, or by discussing on the sidelines. The Scout should take ownership of his/her behavior if made aware of the problem. Point to the rule that is broken and with a gentle, calm voice use these suggested questions: *What are you doing? What should you be doing? Are you doing it? What are you going to do to fix that? Okay, now do it.* Watch your tone of voice as you ask these questions. Be sensitive to the Scout's needs but be firm. Parents can be your best partners at times such as these. If the Scout understands and is aware of his/her gaff, and notably corrects the issue, make sure you pay attention to the effort being made. The Scout should always be recognized for efforts to improve. Sometimes simply providing an "If... then"....solution is all that is needed as long as you are prepared. "If you grab supplies from Kenny again, you will need to go to the cool off area so that you can get yourself settled down. When you're ready you can come back." Remember your Youth Protection training; do not denigrate the Scout. ***The goal is recognition of a behavior and the opportunity to learn how to rectify it.*** Remember, you didn't learn how to fix an issue instantaneously when you were a kid either. Scouts with special needs need extra care and you need to be aware in order to teach appropriate ways to get the Scout back on track. More than likely the school is also working on a behavior plan with the Scout. Sometimes working with the parent and school may be helpful for all.
7. **Yes! Do Reward Them!** Scouting is full of patches, badges, pins, totems, beads, feathers, and the like. Yes, everyone likes to be noticed for a job well done (even you). This DOES include behavior and some youth thrive on this type of recognition. Your perspective should not be that you are bribing anyone to behave. Your perspective should shift to how you are helping a youth, who happens to be in more need of help than their neurotypical friends, develop a sense of right and wrong along with responsible behavior that upholds the common good. Everyone loves stickers, patches, beads, and fun awards. Plan this into every meeting. "Most helpful," "Most kind," "Most Cheerful," "Friendliest" You get the idea. Plan for parties once a month for a specific accomplishment that may have been particularly daunting to the group (examples could be behavior related, relationship related, or skill related). Be creative and have some fun with this. Your enthusiasm can be infectious and the desire to please may become pervasive.

Maybe behavior management is manageable! Try using the above suggestions as a start. Remember you can always contact your council's special needs committee. They may be able to offer more ideas and support resources. You can also contact [specialneedschair@scouting.org](mailto:specialneedschair@scouting.org) (<mailto:specialneedschair@scouting.org>) with questions.

## ADAPTING ACTIVITIES



🏷️ BEHAVIOR

🏷️ CUB SCOUTS

