

# LEARNING DISABILITIES

## INCLUSIVENESS

“ Know me for my abilities, not my disability.”

(Robert M. Hensel)

The Aim of Scouting is to promote the development of individuals, enabling them to grow and take their place in society as active citizens. As we move forward with the Canadian Path we are much more aware of each individual's personal progression, inclusive of their varying abilities. This inclusiveness within Scouting uniquely positions us to play an important role in modifying community attitudes and behaviour towards individuals with identified needs; it starts with Scouts.

Please use this guide for a better understanding of youth with Learning Disabilities; how as Scouters, we can make a difference through simple interventions, program modifications and knowing where to get help when needed.

## DESCRIPTION

Learning disabilities (LDs) are brain-based difficulties that affect one or more ways that a person takes in, stores, recalls or uses verbal and nonverbal information. The disability has no correlation to a person's intelligence. LDs are not caused by environmental factors (although such factors can make it harder to compensate).

## CHARACTERISTICS/BEHAVIOURS

May have:

- Challenges with recognizing and processing letters and the sounds affiliated with them (sometimes called dyslexia)
- May read well, but difficulty with comprehension
- Hard time communicating effectively, understanding complicated language or expressing themselves
- Visual processing challenges (e.g. confusing math signs, and difficulties understanding maps or graphs)
- Challenges with abstract thinking and processing, for example difficulty with understanding the rules for a game
- Difficulty with impulse control and focusing in group and other activities (ADD is an often a co-existing condition)
- Social challenges due to difficulties interpreting social cues, i.e., tone of voice, body language
- Test results that exhibit a poor score in spite of the youth studying extensively for the test, demonstrates a disconnect between time spent studying and test results

## IN A SCOUTING SITUATION

- Get to know the youth
- Make sure the youth has positive role modeling
- Discuss with the youth, any electronic devices that the youth might use to compensate, and incorporate into the program
- Focus and acknowledge on the youth's strengths
- Search for learning strategies that overcome challenges and be cognizant of weaknesses
- Encourage "learning by doing" in small group environments (i.e., Lodges, Packs, Patrols) to engage the youth effectively
- Build up the youth's self-esteem
- Encourage social skills by small group work
- Present things in an interesting way (i.e., stories, play acting, hands-on activities)
- Always explain rules simply, give one instruction at a time; don't overload
- Have the youth member repeat rules so you know they understand
- Provide some games that don't have a winner
- Have another youth member work as their buddy
- Use encouragement and positive re-enforcement
- Formulate emotional coping strategies for stress, anger management, relaxation methods such as exercise, deep breathing, running etc.
- Build in an emotional support system such as an understanding and empathetic counselor/Scouter who listens well and avoids judging the youth
- Have in place a Scouter who is able to advocate for the youth and who the youth can seek assistance from, to formulate basic goals, learn problem solving techniques, and develop a knowledge of what learning methods work best for the youth
- Scouters need to be supportive and understanding in helping the youth feel accepted and appreciated



- The youth will require Scouters encouragement and empathy to experience successes
- Have a Scouter to assist whenever needed to complete tasks
- Allow time to complete tasks
- Plan ahead
- Prepare the youth for any changes
- Assist the youth to refocus after times of loud noise and busy activity
- Always acknowledge the youth's efforts to do their best
- Partner with the parents to discover what works best for the youth with learning disabilities

## PROGRAM MODIFICATION SUGGESTIONS

- **Get Youth "Doing" in Addition to Listening:**  
As a group use both role play activities and individual paper and pencil exercises, such as creating activity plans, to engage youth in a variety of ways with different learning styles, as this allows everyone to access the program.
- **Repetition, Repetition, Repetition:** It often takes repeated exposure to something before we remember it. Taking extra time to reinforce earlier topics in the context of new ideas being discussed will help the youth retain the important lessons and skills needed to be successful. You can be creative in the ways you repeat concepts or emphasize a point; when the concept is considered again, offer it from a different point of view or when the concept is demonstrated again, use a different exercise.
- **Excitement is Contagious:** Demonstrating honesty, authenticity, and excitement for working with youth can often inspire the same qualities within the youth themselves as they engage with the program. Your passion is infectious. As a Scouter, it is important that you find ways to maintain your passion and excitement and recharge when necessary.
- **Presume Competence and Instill Confidence:** Have high expectations for all youth and help them to realize their potential as you support them to become independent decision-makers for their future.

## TIPS FOR YOUTH WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

### For Visual Learners:

- Use books, videos, computers, visual aids, and flashcards
- Make detailed, color-coded or highlighted notes
- Make lists and diagrams
- Use drawings and illustrations (preferably in color)
- If applicable, allow youth to take notes on an electronic device, otherwise suggest youth take detailed notes by hand

### For Auditory Learners:

- Read notes out loud
- Use word associations and verbal repetition to memorize
- Talk things through
- Listen to books on tape or other audio recordings
- Use an electronic device to record and listen to instructional sessions and listen to them again later

### For Kinesthetic Learners:

- Get hands on, do experiments and take field trips
- Use activity-based comprehension tools, like role-playing or model building
- Study in small group setting and take frequent breaks
- Use memory games and flash cards
- Process with music on in the background

## FURTHER ASSISTANCE

This Info Sheet is a resource guide only and is not intended to be therapeutic, diagnostic, medical, or legal advice. Our best source of assistance for youth with identified needs is the youth's parents or caregivers; the information provided is designed to support the relationship that exists between a youth and his/her parents or healthcare providers and the Scouters involved with the youth.

## SOURCES

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario and material adapted and used by permission of The Scout Association (UK), Scouts Australia, and Scouting Ireland

