

# Helping Scouts With Challenging Behaviors

Working with Scouts who have special needs can be challenging for all adults involved. This is particularly true when Scouts exhibit behaviors characteristic of ADHD. You cannot underestimate, however, the importance of establishing adult relationships for these Scouts and the long lasting impact these relationships can have as these boys develop the skills they will need to become resilient, productive adults. Working with Scouts who have special needs can be challenging for all adults involved. This is particularly true when Scouts exhibit behaviors characteristic of ADHD. You cannot underestimate, however, the importance of establishing adult relationships for these Scouts and the long lasting impact these relationships can have as these boys develop the skills they will need to become resilient, productive adults. "

Making positive adult connections helps to build resiliency in young people. Resiliency can be defined as the capacity to spring back or rebound, to successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social and academic competence despite exposure to severe stress...or simply the stress of today's world. A resilient community of adults and young people focuses on the protective factors that foster resiliency for its members. A Scout troop can provide a community through which boys can develop the following attributes of resilient children: problem solving skills, social competence-the ability to elicit a positive response from peers and adults, autonomy-the sense of one's own identity and the ability to exert some control over one's environment, and a sense of purpose and future.

Everything we do that shows caring, high expectations and allows youth to contribute and participate fosters resilience. Making positive connections with boys—especially those who have challenging or inappropriate behaviors that put them at-risk—will help to foster social competence and build resiliency.

That being said, what can Scout leaders do when faced with a Scout's challenging behaviors and/or a lack of social competence? The following are some strategies that may be helpful:

- Work on one behavior or social skill at a time. By focusing the Scout's attention and efforts on a single skill for a period of time, he is less confused and more responsive to change.
- Provide the Scout with choice whenever possible. This approach fosters independence and problem solving skills. It also increases the Scout's ownership of the task or activity.
- Clearly demonstrate acceptance of and affection for the Scout, especially if he is rejected by or isolated from his peers.
- Design an alternative "signal system" with the Scout to use in social situations to halt troubling behaviors without causing him undue embarrassment or conflict. For example, if a boy is continually interrupting others, instead of verbally reminding him, have a pre-arranged hand signal that cues him that he needs to stop talking. Practiced and repeated over time, non-verbal vs. verbal reminders can be very effective.
- Establish a simple reward system to reinforce and recognize appropriate social behaviors. Be willing to recognize and reinforce even the smallest signs of progress and growth.
- Make transitions easier for the Scout. Some boys may have difficulty "changing gears" from one activity to another. This is especially true when going from an enjoyable activity to a less pleasurable one. Allow Scouts to "wind down" an enjoyable activity by providing a warning signal several minutes prior to the end of an activity.
- Assist the Scout in expressing his feelings during emotionally charged social situations. (For example, "I'm sure that you feel angry and jealous when ...") Take time to listen to and reflect his feelings about the situation. Then help him problem solve and verbalize at least one solution to the problem.
- Become a "talent scout." Attempt to determine specific interests and strengths of the Scout. Celebrate strengths in a public manner.
- Make Scouts aware of the traits that are widely accepted and admired by peers: smiling/laughing, greeting others, extending invitations, conversing, sharing, giving compliments.
- Carefully consider the words you use when speaking with these Scouts, instead of telling Scouts "don't" when an inappropriate behavior occurs, try saying:

-*"Next time, you need to ..."* This plants a positive picture and focuses on giving Scouts useful information for later.

-*"Check yourself..."* This is a quick phrase that can be used to remind Scouts about their behaviors. For example, you might say, "You need to finish \_\_\_\_\_ before you go onto the next activity. *Check yourself* to see

if you have done so." *Check yourself* builds self-responsibility by communicating to boys your belief that it is their job to check on themselves."

-*"Please make a decision"* This presents a choice that puts the Scout in control and helps him (over time) to realize that he controls whether or not consequences are implemented.

-*"Please make a different choice"* This language communicates respect and informs Scouts "I see you as responsible for your actions. You control your behavior. You choose your responses to life.

There is no doubt that working with these Scouts is challenging and, at times, frustrating. Nonetheless, your efforts to build relationships with these boys are extremely important. Research shows that for young people to become emotionally healthy, resilient adults, they require multiple on-going relationships with non-parent adults over the course of their childhood and adolescence. It is within your power to become one of those caring adults who can help change a "child-at-risk" into a "child-of-promise."