

# Autistic Spectrum Disorders FAQ for Managers in Scouting

Scouting is an inclusive activity, as a national organisation we aim to be fully inclusive of all people from all backgrounds and of all abilities. We have a desire at Scouts to be welcoming, friendly and supportive, also we have legalities and processes we need to be aware of to support inclusion in scouting.

As a manager in Scouting, your role is to support the leaders in your area. Some of them may need support when young people or adults with an autism spectrum disorder join local Scouting.

## What is autism?

Autism spectrum disorders are lifelong developmental disabilities characterised by marked difficulties in social interaction and social communication, and restricted and repetitive interests and behaviours.

The 'autistic spectrum' is the range and severity of the difficulties people with autism related disabilities experience. This can vary widely.

Autism is often diagnosed alongside other conditions. It's important to support people with more than one condition in a way that meets all their needs, while understanding that the needs arising from autism are distinct. In all cases work alongside the parents, carers and the young person to tailor any discussions or adjustments to Scouting to meet the individual's needs.

## How many young people are affected?

Most research shows that about 1 in 100 young people in the UK have an autistic spectrum disorder and that it is more prevalent in boys than girls. People from all nationalities and cultural, religious and social backgrounds can be autistic.

## Can an adult have autism?

Yes. Leaders can have autism too; they may also require that a reasonable adjustment is made for them. Young People and adults with autism can be some of the most effective and responsible people in a leadership team.

## How do I support my leaders and young people when a young person with autism needs joins my Group/District/County?

When a leader or GSL comes forward to discuss any form of adjustment it is important to handle such information sensitively and respectfully. Keeping in line with GDPR good practice. You should start to ensure the following:

- Leaders in the group have the knowledge and training they need. There are three e-learning modules from National Autistic Society that leaders can [access here](#).
- A conversation between leaders, young person and parent/carer has taken or is about to take place in a respectful manner to agree a way forward. A useful framework for that is [here](#).
- That any adjustment is in line with POR and guidelines.
- The adjustment meets the needs of the young person.
- The adjustment does not impair or put unreasonable difficulty onto the group or section in terms of volunteer time or funding.

- That support for the leadership team is made available.
- A review time is included in every adjustment to check and review its progress.

## What is a reasonable adjustment?

Reasonable adjustments means actions to enable young people with additional needs and cultural needs to access Scouting and Scouting activities, as far as reasonably possible, to the same level as any other young person.

This should involve working in partnership with parents/carers, to identify needs and plan support strategies. Keeping communication active, open and positive.

We should also remember that Scouting when viewed from outside Scouting can be confusing, using acronyms, such as PL, YL, GSL, DC, CC are meaningless and confusing if not familiar with Scouting as a whole. When discussing Scouting and its structures use clear and consistent language to ensure no confusion or misinterpretation.

A reasonable adjustment is an adjustment that is reasonable to the Young Person involved, the parents/carers, the volunteers/leaders and the Scout Group concerned.

## How do we make a reasonable adjustment?

We can use the parent/carer conversation framework to start the discussion on making adjustments in the group. This approach makes everyone involved in all decision making and a part of the larger plan to support the Young Person. The conversation framework is available from the Scouting for All section on the Scouts website at [scouts.org.uk/conversationframework](https://scouts.org.uk/conversationframework).

Reasonable adjustments should respond to the needs of the individual and aim to remove any barriers or support access, by adapting;

- Physical features (eg. the meeting place), Simple changes could be made to its layout, doorways, sound qualities, or colour. Addition of ramps, and accessible toilet facilities would only be a reasonable adjustment if within abilities of the group.
- The way things are done (eg. applying reasonable flexibility to age ranges, the Programme, routines, uniforms or award schemes.)
- Support provided (eg. equipment, adapting communication, level of support) parent/carer frame work agreement
- A parent, carer or externally funded one to one support worker to work directly with the Young Person at Scout meetings & events. All carers or support workers, professional or informal will require a Scout DBS for all events.

## How do we make an adjustment to scouting to be more inclusive of Autism?

Below is a list of a few things you can do to support young people with autism. You should find these straightforward and useful to start to make the adjustments. In most cases it is about being positive, being honest about your experience and knowledge.

Many of the structures and routines we adopt within Scouts support young people with a range of additional needs. Strategies we use such as our structured programme, regular meeting space, consistency in adult volunteers and even our uniform make a significant difference in enabling young people with Autism to enjoy and achieve in Scouts. These strategies support all young people, not just those with Autism, helping us to provide a welcoming environment.

It is sometimes this excellent practice which makes it difficult to appreciate when young people with Autism struggle to engage with specific activities, routines or games. One example would be a young person who can engage in a quiet, whole group, turn-based pack game in cubs who then struggles and becomes distressed in a noisy team game.

Thinking about individual differences and making small adjustments based on strengths can help to fully include those on the autistic spectrum.

- Review how you promote and manage behaviour in the whole section. View challenging behaviour from an autistic Young Person as communication and not as a bad behaviour.
- Work in partnership with parent/carer to make all adjustments and review & monitor them regularly.
- Provide structure and routine.
- Explain what is happening now and next.
- Prepare for changes or new situations.
- Manage the environment you are meeting in, consider how you can adjust the layout, lighting and sound in the space you have.
- Ensure rules and expectations are made clear.
- Be positive, calm and caring.
- Be prepared and plan ahead.
- Undertake the training provided by The Scouts on Scouting for All, Additional Needs and the NAS eLearning on supporting young people and adults with Autism.
- Request additional training on Autism from the UK Specialist Advisors for Inclusion Team.

### **What happens if the reasonable adjustments aren't working?**

It is important to build in a review time into any adjustments, this could be 2 weeks, 3 months or a year, whichever is suitable. Our recommendation is to review each term; this provides a regular opportunity for parents and carers to update on any changes whilst also allowing a space for you to raise any concerns. If at a review or in-between anyone involved on the plan feels it is not working, then return to the framework agreement approach to resolve and move the leaders, the young person and the parents/careers onwards to discuss overcoming any challenges or failures in adjustments. If a concern is raised over the plan, then it can be handled in the same approach.

### **What is the difference between challenging behaviour and autism?**

Many young people exhibit challenging behaviour, but not all challenging behaviour is caused by autism. As with any challenging behaviour, when a young person with autism exhibits challenging behaviour, it is often a way of communicating. Work with leaders and parents/careers to discuss what the causes of this behaviour are and also how it can be overcome.

### **What can I do if leaders in my area are unhappy?**

A reasonable adjustment to Scouting should mean a way forward for all involved to be comfortable in their roles. Sometimes, at a review period of an adjustment or before it may be that a leader or leadership team is unhappy in the nature or impact of this adjustment. It is important to establish the cause of this; is it training related or is it detrimental to the group or section in anyway? Once you have assessed this cause, you can look at the adjustments and either suggest/organise additional training, or discuss the adjustment in accordance with the framework agreement.

### **How can I support leaders and GSLs to encourage more young people with additional needs to join Scouting?**

Encourage your leadership teams to talk about how they are feeling about working



with young people with additional needs, the challenges and successes. Ensure they know about the support mechanisms in place to support them. These could be:

- Additional Training from the UK Specialist Advisors for Inclusion & Diversity
- Working alongside your ADC or ACC Inclusion (or similar titles)
- Working alongside other managers to find out how they have managed similar situations
- Look at local organisations which offer training and support
- Aim to foster a welcoming and supportive Scout Group or District when viewed from outside of Scouting.

## **What should I do if leaders/parents or a young person make a complaint?**

If a complaint is raised with you, it should be treated as all other complaints through the line management structure details of which can be found [here](#). If this complaint uses terminology, language or terms you are not familiar with then contact the info centre on [infocentre@scouts.org.uk](mailto:infocentre@scouts.org.uk) or 0345 3001818 for advice.

## **What training support is available for leaders?**

There is lots of extra information and support available on the members section of the website [here](#). There are two specific modules in the leader training on Scouting for All and additional needs which can be accessed [here](#) and there are three e-learning modules from the National Autistic Society which you can access [here](#).

The UK Specialist Advisors for Inclusion and Diversity Team are available as a free resource to deliver inclusion workshops and seminars nationwide. This team of trainers can be invited to come to any event for specific sections, groups or whole district events to assist in delivery on training of all areas of inclusion for Leaders and Young Leaders.

They can be contacted from the Scouts.org.uk website by completing the request form [here](#) on the Scouting for All pages. You can also contact the Info Centre for further support and advice.

## **What information is there for parents and young people?**

The Scouting for All pages found [here](#) on the Scouts.org.uk website has a great deal of information on autism from ourselves and from the National Autistic Society. This resource offers support, guidance and way finding further support and information and in addition to this we are also working with NAS to produce more resources to support leadership teams, parents and young people.

## **Where can I turn to if I have a problem?**

If you encounter a problem or would like further information please speak to your District team or contact the info centre. They can then put you in touch with either training, policy, safeguarding or inclusion support to assist you.

