

Literacy and Scouting



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More than any other single skill, the ability to read - and read well - allows a child to succeed in school, learn about the world, function in society, and someday have good job options.

Literacy is simply the ability to read and write. There are a number reasons why a young person might be illiterate and this factsheet will highlight some of these, and ways in which you can cope with it as a Scout Leader. Literacy can cause problems for adults too; it is something to be aware of when dealing with new Leaders.

Related Difficulties

Young people who have difficulties in reading and writing may also have difficulties in other activities including:

- Not knowing right from left (directional confusion).
- Judging distances (spatial awareness).
- Following verbal messages.
- Telling the time, number activities.
- Tying shoelaces and knots (co-ordination).
- Finding and saying the right word.
- Copying things down.

They may also use immature speech and have poor concentration, organisational skills and self-control. Leaders should be aware that behavioural problems might be due to such difficulties rather than deliberate 'naughtiness'.

Producing resources

In Scouting communication usually uses written text *e.g. letters, newsletters, magazines and books*. For many people this is not a preferred form of communication. It is therefore very important that when you produce written material the message you are trying to get across is clear. It is also important that it has a clear and simple design.

Below are some simple guidelines, which will help you to produce material that is appropriate and easy to read.

- What is the reading age of the materials?
- Keep sentences short
- Use familiar words
- Avoid unnecessary words
- Are there visual icons or pictures to reinforce the meaning?
- Use terms the reader can picture.
- Write to express yourself, not to impress.
- Is there an option for present the information in different formats – pictures, using bullet points?

Practical Tips

- If you do any activities which require reading, put young people in pairs.
- Try not to rely on written word only, *e.g.* accompany words with pictures where possible.
- Make sure you have made sure young people understand any written information *e.g.* by getting them to repeat information back to you.

Further Information

Discuss with the parents the extent to which help is needed and learn any practical tips they have to offer. They may also be able to arrange a chat with their teacher or others helping them.

Support Organisations

The National Literacy Trust, founded in 1993, is an independent charity dedicated to building a literate nation.

www.literacytrust.org.uk

Afasic is a parent-led organisation that helps children and young people who have a speech and language impairment.

www.afasic.org.uk/

The Scout Information Centre

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