The Promise and Programme – flexibility for those with Special Needs

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Helping Scouts with Special Needs make the Promise

Making the Promise

Every person joining The Scout Association does so by making the Promise. This is the most important ceremony in Scouting and is common to Scouts throughout the world. Many Groups incorporate particular traditions into the ceremony to enhance its meaning, but the simplest can often be the most effective. The ceremony must be meaningful for the Scout making the Promise or reaffirming their own Promise, although this does not necessarily mean it must be a formal occasion.

Helping young people understand the Scout Law and Promise

What activities you decide to use will depend on the nature of the disability and the Section with which you are you are working. Below is a list of some ideas you may like to consider.

- Give Members a disposable camera for several weeks and ask then to take pictures that illustrate the Promise and Law.
- Give Members a newspaper and ask them to look for examples of the Scout Law being valued or being broken.
- Select a number of pictures that seem to reflect the Scout Law and Promise. Show them one at a time and see if the Scouts can connect the picture to part of the Promise or one of the Laws.
- Each member is given the name of a member of the Royal Family (this can include the Royal Corgi and the coachman.) Tell an imaginary story about the Royal Family and as each member is mentioned, the Scout with that name, either runs their leg of the relay race, or leaps to their feet and shouts 'Yes Your Majesty!' This activity could be run, either as a relay race, or sitting in a circle, possibly at a campfire.

Activities to help understanding

As with all Scouting activities an understanding of the Promise can be demonstrated and achieved through participation. Here are some examples:

1 Duty to God

- Take part in a Scouts' Own.
- Treat others as you would like them to treat you.
- Join in with Scout Prayers at the beginning or end of the meeting.
- Contribute a simple prayer to the Group's prayer collection.
- Choose a prayer, for another to read. Take part in a visit to a different place of worship.
- Take part in an activity related to a Saint's Day or religious festival.

2 To The Queen

- Be part of the Flag Ceremony at Troop night or at camp.
- Know why the Queen is the Patron of Scouting in the UK and find out about the Queen's Scout Award.
- Colour-in and recognise the Union Flag, and those of each country in the UK.

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- Understand why we need laws in our Country, and why we need to obey them.
- Recognise pictures of the Royal Family. Listen to a story about The Queen or other members of the Royal Family.
- Learn to sing the National Anthem.

3 Help other people

- Help another Member in your Group.
- Help clear away after a meeting.
- Take part in some voluntary service.
- Help stage a fund-raising event.
- Help around the home.
- Get to know other members of the Group.
- Do a good turn for someone not in Scouting.

How long should it be before the young person can take the Promise?

You are probably the best judge of that, but it is recommended that Scouts attend at least four meetings before becoming Invested. In some cases, it may take longer.

Alternative ways of making the Promise

There are many ways a young person may express their understanding of the Promise. Which method is chosen will depend on the abilities of the individual Member. You may like to consider some of the following:

- Read or recite the Promise.
- Repeat the Promise line by line.
- Have a Patrol Leader, older Scout, friend or whole Group say it on the Scout's behalf.
- Sign the Promise, using Makaton, British Sign Language, Sign Along, for example.
- Use symbols, e.g. Bliss, Compic.
- Respond to questions, e.g. 'Do you promise to do your best?' answered by a headshake, sound expression or eye movement.

The Programme

When the Balanced Programme is used to its full potential it should provide opportunities for young people regardless of their needs and abilities.

Is there a special programme for Scouts with Special Needs?

Although there is just one Programme for all, it contains a great deal of flexibility. Designed primarily for participation and involvement, it is also much more about young people having a go rather than passing tests or achieving a particular standard. It can therefore be an enjoyable and rewarding experience for any young person whatever their ability.

Identifying Members' needs

The starting point must be to identify the needs of the individuals and then plan the programme and standards to meet those needs. As for all Scouts attainable and not impossible goals, should be set, appropriate to the individual young person's abilities. The only exception to this is where there are safety requirements or when a specific level of knowledge could be assumed from holding an award (such as the Emergency Aid Badge). In these instances, best effort may not be appropriate.

If a particular activity within a Scout Group cannot be offered to a young person with Special Needs, it might be possible for the activity to be done at home with the support of parents or carers. If this is not possible, then perhaps the young person's school could offer support. Alternatively another Group or the District may be able to make provision within their programme.

The Gateway Award

For many years, The Gateway Award has been an alternative for young people unable to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme. The Award can be undertaken from age 13 onwards and there is no upper age limit. The Award provides participants with the opportunity to complete all three Awards (Bronze, Silver and Gold) at their own pace and at a level appropriate to each person's ability. A Junior Award is available as a separate section for those aged 8-13. To find out more, contact the Scout Information Centre.

Delivering the Programme

When considering how to deliver the Programme think of the young person and their particular disability. For example:

- Plenty of short items may be helpful.
- Use pictures or other visual aids, which are easier to understand than words for young people with learning difficulties. It may also make things clearer for everyone else!
- Where an individual has difficulty reading or writing, provide an opportunity to use alternative means of communication such as a tape recorder, an audio programme on a laptop computer, or even someone else acting as a scribe.
- If a young person is in a wheelchair, never use them as a referee or 'goalpost' during games or activities. Help them to participate as fully as they are able.
- Take account of the differences that occur in size, strength and physical ability within a peer group.
- Don't worry if the young person cannot fully take part in all activities, they will still enjoy being part of the group.

Above all else, it is important to provide activities that the young people want to do, rather than those, which adults believe 'are good for them'.

As part of your Section's Self-Review, do keep track of how well your programme is supporting your 'special Scout'. Don't be afraid to ask for help and support from Special Needs Commissioners or Advisers at District, County/Area or Headquarters.

Flexibility within the age ranges

Can a young person with Special Needs remain in a Section beyond the normal age range?

There is already considerable flexibility in the age ranges for moving from one Section to the next. However there may be occasions when it will be appropriate to further extend this flexibility. Leaders in a Group may, following a discussion with the parents or carers, request that a young person remains within a Section outside of the usual age flexibility. Every young person should also have a say as to when they move on.

The District Commissioner, on the recommendation of the ACC/ AAC Special Needs (or the County/ Area Adviser) may permit a young person to be in a Section outside the normal age range. This should be in consultation with either an Adviser or an Assistant County /Area Commissioner (Special Needs) may agree to the request if they consider it to be appropriate. This decision is then logged on a simple form and should be reviewed at least annually. In all cases, the decision should be based on the intellectual or physical needs of the young person in question, along with the requirements of the other members of the Section.

How do these procedures operate?

Full details are given in the factsheet FS250045 DC Guidelines – Age Ranges Flexibility (Special Needs).

Are the age ranges in Special Groups different from those in other Sections?

In Scout Groups where all Members have specific Special Needs or in Hospital Groups, the District Commissioner may, on the recommendation of the ACC/AAC Special Needs (or the County/Area Adviser) authorise operation outside of the standard age ranges. It is good practice to ensure that any one grouping does not span more than six years in the 6 – 14 age range, and ten years in the 14 – 25 age range. Once this decision is taken, and recorded on a simple form, it is not subject to an annual review. It may need to be reconsidered however if there is a substantive change in circumstances.

Further Information

Scouting magazine regularly contains articles about including disabled people in Scouting activities, as well as articles and advice about the Promise and delivering a balanced Programme for all. Back issues can be downloaded from the web page:

http://www.scouts.org.uk/magazine/

More information about special needs and Scouting, as well as all the relevant factsheets and magazine articles, are available from the Special Needs pages on ScoutBase:

http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/ps/sneeds/

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