

# Learning Difficulties



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This factsheet replaces FS250008 The Scout With General Learning Difficulties and FS250050 Learning Difficulties – An Overview.

Imagine having important needs and ideas to communicate, but being unable to express them. Perhaps feeling bombarded by sights and sounds, unable to focus your attention. Or trying to read or add but not being able to make sense of the letters and numbers.

You may not need to imagine. You may have a young person in your Scout Group who is experiencing academic problems, or have someone diagnosed as having learning disabilities.

## What are Learning Difficulties?

Learning difficulties can be used to describe a range of problems, which arise from a number of causes. Obviously anyone who has a problem with learning will need extra help and patience from everybody whilst undertaking any activities.

Difficulties encountered can range from gaps in learning to severe conditions where even the simplest tasks or activities present an impossible mission.

## What are Learning Disabilities?

A learning disability is a permanent condition, which cannot be cured. It affects an individual's level of intelligence and this often means they need support to operate within society.

Individuals with learning disabilities are generally slow to acquire knowledge and skills and in some cases quite basic life skills may elude them. However, with special education, help and support, they can achieve a great deal and many young people participate in local community activities such as Scouting. The most commonly known severe Learning Disability is Down's Syndrome (FS 250030).

A learning disability is sometimes confused with a learning difficulty such as dyslexia, which affects reading and writing. It isn't a disease that can be caught or cured, nor is it a mental illness.

Like other people, those with learning disabilities display a wide variety of abilities and limitations and there is no substitute for getting to know each individual well.

## Living with learning difficulties

Everyone has to cope with learning challenges on occasions, but it is the point at which such challenges become a problem in everyday life that they can be termed as presenting learning difficulties and special help is needed.

Problems can be encountered within the areas of literacy, understanding, communication and concentration. This can unfortunately lead to a number of other problems e.g. lowered educational performance, teasing by others and related behavioural traits.

Some young people who experience learning difficulties may need to attend a special school either for those with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) or severe learning difficulties (SLD). Others may have extra provision within their own mainstream school. There will be a further, larger group that has no special provision other than the patience and understanding of others around them and perseverance on their own part.

Special schools usually have a wide catchment area and individuals often travel away from their own neighbourhood in order to attend. Scouting offers the opportunity to make friends close to home, which might otherwise not exist.

## The Scout Information Centre

Gilwell Park Chingford London E4 7QW Tel + 44 (0)20 8433 7100 Fax + 44 (0)20 8433 7103 email [info.centre@scout.org.uk](mailto:info.centre@scout.org.uk) [www.scoutbase.org.uk](http://www.scoutbase.org.uk)

## Practical Tips

Obviously, knowing the capabilities and skills of the individual concerned is essential. Opportunities will need to be provided for using such skills.

You will have to consider a range of different ways of explaining activities or giving instructions, for example, using simple verbal or pictorial aids.

Everyone responds to positive attitudes and encouragement and this is especially so of those with learning difficulties. Scouting offers opportunities to experience companionship and success both as an individual and as a member of a team. You may have to work hard to make this happen even when this appears to present a challenge!

For some activities, working in pairs rather than individually, or in larger groups, will overcome many potential difficulties.

Hopefully this can take place in the local Scout group but could also be in a specialized Group that caters for Members with more severe/complex special needs. Specialist Groups are often, though not always, based in schools and colleges catering for young people with disabilities.

### What else do I need to know?

You will need to be particularly aware of what is 'going on' at all times, as there is no guarantee that something once learnt, such as crossing a road, will be correctly repeated.

Your programme planning will need to take account of the concentration span required and additional shorter activities may be necessary.

You must adapt your expectations of the individual by using your knowledge of them, rather than relying on your experience of others of the same age, which may differ.

## Further Information

1. Discuss with the parents and/or the individual the extent to which help is needed and learn any practical tips they have to offer.
2. If special educational provision has been made for the individual, ask for permission to

approach the school or college involved, for any further tips they may have.

It will also be helpful to consult:

- Local/national Special Needs Commissioners or Advisers.
- Factsheets published by the Scout Association and available from The Information Centre or on the Web site: [www.scoutbase.org.uk](http://www.scoutbase.org.uk)
- Support Organisations

Mencap (England)  
123 Golden Lane  
London EC1Y 0Rt  
Tel. 020 7454 0454  
Web Site; [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

Mencap (N. Ireland)  
Segal House  
4 Annadale Avenue  
Belfast  
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Tel. 02890 691351

Mencap Cymru (Wales)  
31 Lambourne Crescent Cardiff Business  
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