The Spectrum of Special Needs (Scouting for All)

Presenter: Donna Spak

Learning Disabilities

- Neurobiological disorders that impact the ability to effectively process information.
- **Average to above average intelligence.**
- May have difficulty understanding or using language (spoken or written), listening, and reasoning.
- At a higher risk for ADHD.

Strategies

- **Break down multi-step directions** into smaller, more manageable parts.
- **Incorporate all senses** when instructing (multi-modal).
- **Read written instructions.**
- Allow scouts to **demonstrate knowledge in alternative ways**.
- **Provide "wait time"** when expecting a response from scout.

ADHD- Three Types

❖ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, **Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type**

- Fidgets or squirms
- Leave seat when remaining seated is expected
- Run or climb excessively in situations where it's inappropriate
- Have difficulty playing quietly
- "On the go" or acts as if "driven by a motor"
- Talk excessively
- Blurts out answers before questions have been completed (or before raising hand).
- Has difficulty taking turns
- Interrupts others

❖ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, **Predominantly Inattentive Type**

- Make careless errors
- Difficulty sustaining attention in tasks
- Poor listening skills even when spoken to directly
- No follow through on instructions
- Organizational difficulties
- Loses things necessary for tasks and activities
- Easily distracted
- Forgetful

❖ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, **Combined Type**

- Most common type of ADHD
- Difficulties with impulsivity, hyperactivity, and inattention

- An impulse control disorder
- Difficult to resist behaving in ways that feel good at the moment
- May show no signs of ADHD when do activities that they enjoy (e.g., watching TV or playing video games)
- Difficulty beginning tasks, planning and organizing information, and remembering what has been learned

THE IDEAL SCOUT LEADER FOR AN ADHD CHILD

- Knowledgeable about ADHD and **accepts the legitimacy of the disorder**.
- Tough as nails about rules but **always calm and positive**.
- Creates activities that require as much activity on the scout's part as possible (e.g., **hands on learning opportunities!)**
- **Mixes high and low interest tasks**
- Know to **back off** during times of **frustration** (scout's and/or leaders!)
- **Allows scout to work with a partner or in groups especially when reading and writing is a part of the task.**
- **Speaks clearly** in brief, understandable sentences.
- Looks the scout **straight in the eye** when communicating.
- Runs an absolutely **predictable and organized** meeting.
- Controls the meeting **without being controlling**.
- Provides immediate and consistent **feedback** (consequences) regarding behavior.
- Develops a **private signal system** with scout to gently notify him when he's off task or acting inappropriately.
- Maintains **close physical proximity**.
- Ignores minor disruptions-knows how to **choose battles**.
- Acts as an **Organizer** when needed.
- **Maintains interest in the child** as a person with interests, fears, and joys-even after a trying day.
- Allow scout to **move in ways that do not distract others**. Let scout stretch or play with an object (e.g., stress ball) when they have the urge to move.
- Allow scout to be your **assistant** or run errands for you.
- Closely **monitor behavior** during **transitions** and **unstructured activities**.
- Address **misbehavior with a minimum of attention** (e.g., eye contact, a light touch on the shoulder).
- **Write directions** on board and/or **provide visual input.**
- Has a **sense of humor**!

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- A "spectrum disorder"-no all people with autism are affected the same way.
- Many people with autism have the tendency to do things the same way, in the same order, or like to organize things the same way all the time. **This helps them stay calm.**

Common difficulties a person with autism may have:

- Expressing their needs or wants
- Understanding what other people say or want
- Ignoring things or people that are moving, lights, or sounds
- Being touched
- Understanding social rules
- Showing affection
- Controlling their feelings
- Knowing how to play with other kids
- Dealing with changes

Asperger's Syndrome=high functioning autism

- Tend to be highly verbal and have more social awareness than someone with autism
- Poor social skills
- Repetitive or ritualistic behaviors
- Often stand out as "odd"
- Struggle taking turns in conversation
- Frequently interrupt or talk exclusively about themselves or their own interests
- Difficulty understanding facial expressions, body language, and other nonverbal communication
- Frequently show obsessive patterns of behavior and interests

Strategies

- Use precise and literal language. **Be clear and direct**!
- **Establish structure. Minimize surprises!**
- Prepare for any anticipated **changes in routine and inform scout**. Offer a contingency plan (e.g., After we say our pledge, we will watch a video. If the DVR player doesn't work, we'll make s'mores).
- Provide clear, **well explained rules**.
- Monitor and **minimize noise, light, touch**, for those who are hypersensitive.
- Explicitly **teach social skills** (turn-taking, sharing, manners, rules of conversation, etc.)
- **Assign a buddy**. Looks for scouts who are naturally empathetic and helpful.
- Gently **discourage inappropriate or one-sided talk that alienates others**. Tell the scout that he can ***talk to you*** after the meeting.
- Realize that inappropriate comments aren't said to intentionally upset you or others.
- **Provide visual input during meetings (pictures, written information)!!!!**

Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD)

- ❖ May be very shy and resist playing and working with others.
- ❖ May fear situations in which they are expected to perform.

Strategies

- Provide a warm and encouraging environment
- Work to improve scout's social skills
- **Avoid** referring to the scout by using a label, such as **"shy".** Instead, use phrases like, **"Sometimes Sam doesn't feel like talking"** or **"Sam just feels quiet today."**

Caution!!! Some people believe forcing socially anxious kids to interact with others will help them overcome anxiety. This doesn't respect the enormous fear children have and may lead them to believe their experience isn't being taken seriously. Instead of being helpful, this can make a student's symptoms worse.

Building Social Skills in Students

- ❖ Kids with **mental health** and **learning differences** often have **poor social skills**.

Suggestions:

- Teach **listening skills**. Encourage scouts to ***focus on the speaker***.
- Build **conversational skills** (e.g., **taking turns speaking**).
- Encourage understanding of **non-verbal communication skills** (e.g., notice what a face looks like when sad or angry).
- Help students **show kindness**. (kind words, actions, compliments, etc.)
- Help students **empathize** with others. Some students speak or behave insensitively, often without understanding the effect their actions have on others. Do your best to make scouts aware of how inappropriate words or actions make others feel.
- Teach **anger management skills**. Show scouts that there are respectful, positive ways to deal with anger and other strong feelings. Teach basic calming techniques like deep breathing and counting down from 10. Also talk about the importance of expressing feelings, and **volunteer yourself as someone the scout can talk with when feeling upset or overwhelmed.**
- Help the scout **develop conflict resolution skills**. Show scouts that there are **constructive ways to end disagreements** (sharing, compromise). Affirm the benefits of peacefully resolving differences and provide scouts with specific language (such as I-messages) they can use to get along with others.
- Build self-esteem. Build self-concept by **offering consistent praise of their strengths**.

Works Cited

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