

Introduction

In Scouts, we celebrate diversity and all neurodiverse adults and youth members are welcome in our Scout Groups. This factsheet provides some practical strategies for supporting inclusion and participation of neurodiverse adult volunteers.

Remember that every neurodiverse person is different, so it is critical to get to know the individual and tailor inclusion strategies to what works for the individual – this factsheet is designed as a starting point.

For a general introduction to neurodiversity, see the Factsheet: Understanding Neurodiversity.

Practical strategies¹

1. Be positive, calm and caring

- You don't have to be an expert to support a neurodiverse person, but you do need to be willing to see things from a different perspective and to care.
- Remember that everyone's different; neurodiverse people bring many positive skills and attributes to Scouts.
- Take a positive approach to reducing any challenging behaviours - do some detective work using your knowledge of neurodiversity, to figure out what may have caused the behaviour and how you can prevent this next time.
- Be patient.

2. Work in partnership with the adult volunteer

- Remember that neurodiverse people are the experts in their own experience of neurodiversity and their support requirements. If you aren't sure how to approach something, it's best to sensitively ask the person rather than trying to guess.
- Check whether the neurodiverse person is comfortable to talk about diagnosis and how they feel about other people in the Unit knowing about their diagnosis. They may not want anyone else to know, or they may want to tell others about it. This all depends on the individual, and their wishes must be respected.

¹ These strategies are adapted with permission from resources developed by Scouts UK.



3. Be prepared and plan ahead

- Discuss with the adult volunteer how to support them in their Scouting role.
- Work with the adult volunteer to make Scouting accessible to them. This may involve making some adaptations, such as adapting the way instructions are given, being aware of the level of noise, and knowing when additional support will be required, such as activities in group settings.

4. Use clear and simple communication

- Be clear and literal, so say what you actually mean and avoid sarcasm or sayings. Try to avoid metaphors and colloquialisms, such as 'it's raining cats and dogs', as these can be confusing.
- Avoid raised voices. The neurodiverse person may not understand why you're shouting and could find this distressing, particularly if they're hypersensitive to noise.

5. Provide clear expectations

- Be specific about any tasks you ask a neurodiverse person to complete and be realistic about how much they can complete in the time available. It can be very difficult for some neurodiverse people to move on if they don't feel they've managed to finish a task.

6. Support relationships and group dynamics

- Remember that a neurodiverse person might need more support to interact with other members of the Unit or Group. Consider gently helping them to start a conversation or activity with other members of the group.
- Acknowledge the strengths and skills of the neurodiverse person. Provide opportunities for them to utilise their strengths.
- A neurodiverse person may communicate differently and may unintentionally appear to be rude or inappropriate. They need understanding from supportive adults and peers.

7. Managing the environment and having a quiet space

- Consider the decor, lighting and sound in your meeting place. Are there features that might be distracting, or make the space uncomfortable for individuals with sensory differences?

- Have a calm and quiet space for neurodiverse volunteer to go to if they become anxious, frustrated or overwhelmed. This could be a separate room if one is available and safe or could be a corridor or cordoned off area in the hall.
- Have strategies in place to manage youth supervision if a neurodiverse volunteer needs to take a break.

8. Provide structure, routine and predictability

- Your planning and program meetings should already have some sort of routine. Try to make sure you stick to the same format as much as practically possible.
- Communicate clearly with the entire team who will be responsible for each part of the program at each meeting. Provide details of what you expect from each person in advance.
- Share a timetable or calendar for planning in advance.
- Give as much notice as possible if there's a change to routine or planned activities.

9. Prepare in advance for outings and overnight camps

- Ensure the Unit has plans to manage fatigue and/or break times at activities away from the hall or for longer in length.

10. Help other people understand neurodiversity

- Be prepared to sensitively answer questions from other members about the neurodiverse person's behaviours or communication style. In doing so, check whether the adult volunteer is comfortable with sharing their diagnosis or whether they would prefer you should speak more generally about their behaviour.

Further information and support

Scouts Australia Resources

Scouts Australia has developed a range of resources to support inclusion of neurodiverse youth and adults in Scouting. These resources are available

<https://scouts.com.au/members/key-resources/>

Feedback and further support

To provide feedback on this resource, please email d&i@scouts.org.au

If you need further support, contact your Group Leader or District Commissioner (or equivalent). They can also help link you with your Branch Diversity and Inclusion lead.