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LEADING GIRLS WITH ADHD

Benefits of Scouting for Girls with ADHD

Scouting is perhaps one of the best activities available for girls with ADHD. Girl Scouting includes many of the elements that can help girls focus, providing physical stimulation, highly structured activities that make use of various learning styles, consistent peer interaction, close adult supervision, opportunities for leadership and self-discovery, and of course, fun. Scouting offers girls with ADHD the opportunity for positive social interactions with peers, as well as to build their confidence and competence in areas that are not specifically academic.

What is ADHD

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by inappropriate degrees of inattention, overactivity and impulsivity. ADHD is the most common problem seen in outpatient child and adolescent mental health settings. It is estimated that ADHD affects between 4 % and 12 % of school-aged children, more often boys than girls. Although it is called ADHD, there are three types: predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive-impulsive, combined type. Many girls have the predominantly inattentive type of the disorder and are likely not to be identified and diagnosed. The degrees range from mild to severe. There is no cure or quick fix for ADHD.

What do we know about children with ADHD

- They are often creative, intelligent, and gifted in certain areas (e.g., artistically, musically, athletically, verbally)
- They do much better when they are provided with activities that are interesting, novel, and motivating.
- They do better when they can work toward rewards that are more immediate. Due to their impulsivity, long term goals are more difficult to maintain effort to achieve.
- They have problems with performance and work production.
- They have difficulty sitting for long periods of time and focusing on one thing.
- They need to move around and focus better when they have access to something else to do (e.g., fidgets, ball to sit on, move freely about a room while listening)
- They do better when they understand expectations and have clear structure.
- They often forget what they were corrected on yesterday, even when they received a consequence

Helping Girls with ADHD Improve Social Skills

The most common complaints of girls with ADHD, center around friendships, either the lack of them or continued conflict with them. ADHD children in general encounter difficulties with peers because their intrusive, sometimes obnoxious behavior and poorly developed social skills make them less appealing to choose as a partner or spend time with. Sometimes other girls might react negatively towards the girl with ADHD, and tease, harass or bother her. As a result of such negative feedback from others, she may go on to identify herself as the “troublemaker” or “brat” in the group, and behave accordingly.

These are the most common areas of difficulty in social skills for girls with ADHD:

- **Reciprocity with others:** entering an ongoing conversation, interrupting courteously when interruption is necessary, joining in to group activities, waiting for one's turn in line or in a game, self-disclosing without bragging, doing favors, giving thoughtful gifts, lending and sharing, being a participant without dominating.
- **Handling negatives:** accepting criticism, accepting an answer of "no" to a request, responding to teasing, losing gracefully in a game--being a "good sport," disagreeing without criticizing.
- **Self-control:** handling peer pressure, making decisions without assistance, resisting temptations, restraining first impulses.
- **Using language skills:** clarifying for the meaning in what others say, avoiding offensive language, understanding and following instructions, answering questions, using good conversation tactics, being an alert listener, using eye contact, showing empathy.
- **Socially engaging behaviors:** giving compliments, showing gratitude, encouraging others, using good hello and good-by skills, apologizing, smiling appropriately, honoring others' "boundaries" such as privacy and personal space, being courteous, inviting others to join in, noticing and commenting on the "good news" in others' lives, showing hospitality, showing interest in others.

Girls with ADHD often have difficulty understanding their own contributions to their social difficulties, that is, how their behavior affects others and it's influence on the responses they receive. They sometimes think that others are out to get them, dislike them personally, and are picking on them. They often learn to assume a victim stance toward the world. Even though your Girl Scout might seem bossy, impatient, or critical and drive other girls away, she might not accurately perceive the relationship between her behavior and others' rejections. If she has difficulty understanding why others act negatively toward her, she will perceive their behavior as unfair and may retaliate in a similar fashion, feeling justified.

How can you help?

- As much as you can, describe the direct effects of the girl's actions on others. Help her see the relatedness of the other girl's negative responses to her own actions.
- Discuss/teach/model for her what she might alternatively do in a similar situation in the future.
- Partner the girls for activities if she tends to be the last one chosen, and help her when in a pair or group to listen to her peers and read social cues. This can be done by commenting on what you observe ("I heard Patti asking you to try her dance" or "I see Lizzie moving over to have more space to paint her box").
- Work on a related try-it/badge, where all the girls get to role-play responses to everyday situations. Create some that include conflict and misinterpretations that are likely to occur in your troop or at school.
- Help her get attention in positive ways, by capitalizing on her strengths, such as having her lead in activities that she will be successful doing.
- Work with her parents to encourage a broadening of social contacts with girls in the troop.
- Consider a guest speaker to talk with the girls about tolerance, differences and communication..

Some Specific Things to Consider for Meetings

- Begin meetings with a physical activity/free play to allow girls to let out energy, as many come directly from a full school day.
- Provide a healthy snack, avoiding unnecessary sugar (juices, candy, cakes).
- Let the girls know the plans/schedule for the meeting. A good time to go over this is during snack.
- Give the girls recognition for their positive participation throughout the meeting.
- Make one or more of each craft in advance so the girls have a model they can see and touch.
- When the group is working, walk around and ask questions about what they are doing. This helps to keep them focused.
- Plan reasonable length activities, and account for variability in attention span of the girls.

- Bring some “fidgets” to meetings (e.g., squishy balls, manipulatives, “tangles”) in a box to pass around for the girls to play with while you have discussions or group activities that require them to sit and listen to others.
- Have flexibility for girls to leave the larger group and move about as necessary, while they listen.
- Utilize older girls (Seniors/Ambassadors) at meetings and outings to provide more supervision and attention to girls without becoming too parent heavy. Older girls are great role models and can provide much help for leaders to focus on the overall group while they can focus on individual girls.

Effective Behavioral Strategies

- Establish a clear routine.
- Establish a few specific, important rules/expectations. Post them and review frequently.
- Catch girls behaving appropriately and reinforce the behaviors.
- Rewards need to be varied, immediate and frequent.
- Always pay attention to and reinforce positive behaviors you want to see more of.
- Ignoring, particularly attention-getting behaviors, is an effective way to reduce negative behavior.
- Prioritize and focus on what is important. Choose issues carefully.
- Use “do” statements rather than “don’t” statements. (“Walk with the scissors” rather than “Don’t run with the scissors”).
- When delivering consequences, do so in a calm but firm voice. State the consequence without lecturing. Be direct and to the point.
- Limit your words. All kids tune out after 2 sentences. Be clear and concise.
- Try lowering your voice, rather than raising it.
- Talk about, acknowledge, and label feelings—the girl’s and your own.

When things aren’t working.

Sometimes we can do all the “right” things, and want to make a situation work, but it clearly is not. First off, never hesitate to reach out to council staff, share your concerns, and ask for input. Knowledge is power, and there are numerous resources available to you, which will be most beneficial if you access them *before* you are out of patience. As an organization, Girl Scouts prides itself on recognizing what each girl has to contribute and celebrating their strengths and differences. While there is much flexibility built into the program, as well as a commitment to inclusion, there *are* situations where accommodations cannot be made to keep a girl in a troop without severely impacting the experience of the other girls. When girls behave in a way to compromise the safety of others, when they require a high degree of attention so that there is not enough supervision for the remaining girls, or when they are not able to participate in the troop in a way that is meaningful for them, or prevents the rest of the girls from reaching their goals and getting the most out of troop experiences, it may not be possible for a girl to remain in a troop. Fortunately, you do not have to be the one to make this decision—you just need to contact council if you find yourself in such a situation, or wondering whether you might be experiencing one.

Websites

www.chadd.org
www.sandiegoADHDcenter.com
www.additudemag.com

Recommended Books on ADHD

Driven to Distraction by Edward Hallowell and John Ratey.

Teenagers with ADD and ADHD by Chris Zeigler Dendy

The ADD/ADHD Checklist by Sandra Rief

A bird’s eye view of life with ADD and ADHD: Advice from young survivors by Chris Zeigler

Taking Charge of ADHD by Russell Barclay

Dr. Lori Rappaport is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist with 30 years’ experience in child, adolescent and family issues. Dr. Rappaport is the Director and Co-Founder of the San Diego ADHD Center for Success. She is an active member of the community, serving 17 years as the Child Bereavement Specialist and Board Member for the Jenna Druck Center, and past/current Board Member for Girl Scouts San Diego, Chelsea’s Light Foundation and The Elizabeth Hospice. She has lectured at numerous professional conferences, and is a regular guest speaker for Scripps Hospital, Rady Children’s, and a variety of local private and public schools. In addition, Dr. Rappaport has a private practice in Del Mar, CA.