

# ABILITIES DIGEST

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BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

## Adapting Activities

### Tranquility Base: A Safe Space

"Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed." said Neil Armstrong as he landed on the moon, July 20, 1969. Tranquility Base, named by Armstrong, became a very famous area in the Sea of Tranquility during those exciting space travel years. You can just imagine it: how peaceful, quiet, and beautiful in its desolation.

Fast forward 50 years and we have a different idea of Tranquility Base in Scouts BSA. This may just be the game changer for you and your outdoor camping experience with those individuals with sensory issues. The Tranquility Base Scouts now know is a very different place this side of the moon!



"This base is for those who need the time to recharge, allowing them to become more able to reengage in activities, during events. Tranquility Base is a preventive opportunity, rather than a reactive opportunity. It's a sensory-friendly place to be," says Scott Hellen, who coordinated special needs support at the 2017 and 2019 Jamborees at the Summit.

So, what exactly is a Tranquility Base? Britt Flather, an RN and camp nurse, says Tranquility Base is a necessity at any Scout camp. Those who experience sensory overload can stop at the Base and spend time discharging and recharging. Flather notes that leaders will bring a camp participant suffering a melt down or other behavioral diffi-

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culty to the camp medical headquarters to be “treated.” Flather emphasizes, “When a leader brings us a Scout who is having these types of issues, it takes the medical personnel away from the real medical emergencies.” Those who experience hypersensitive reactions to noise levels, temperature, or other distractions, need intervention but not medical attention. This is where Tranquility Base becomes a lifesaver in a different sense of the word. In years past, Flather said, when she worked as a medical officer at Scout camps, she used to provide what she called a “retreat” area for those with sensory needs. She always brought a kit with her and set it up apart from the medical area. Here a Scout could rest and relax, play cards, squish play dough, build Lego towers, cool off with a



portable fan, possibly with hearing protectors or listening to soothing music. When the Scout had regained composure, he went back to his Scout unit and was able to participate fully in activities. The retreat area was monitored, just like the medical tent, but no band aids or antiseptics were needed.

Eventually, Flather moved to Hawaii and set up her retreat area at camps. Rick Shema, the founder and past committee chair of Gifted and Physically Disabled Scouts (GAPS) for Aloha Council, asked Flather if they could call the retreat “Tranquility Base” and the name stuck.

Shema points out that both leaders and parents of sensitive participants should be tuned in to their behaviors and direct them to Tranquility Base before uncontrolled behavior develops. “If we know our Scouts well enough, we should be able to sense impending meltdowns,” Shema said.

It’s important for all of us to understand that this area is NOT a punishment of any sort. A Scout should be able to rejoin the group with NO repercussions. “This is not a punishment, nor is it a time out. No one needs to be embarrassed.” He also emphasized that there should always be adults monitoring Tranquility Base. There will be times when the Base doesn’t work, and adults will need to be watchful.

Tranquility Base is an easy thing to set up and take down, and it could all fit into a large 27 gallon plastic tote. The “base” itself can be set up inside a beach shade tent or a camping tent. Set the tent up according to the needs of your Scouts, but here are ideas for equipment to include:

- Laminated Handouts with explanation of area use and guidelines
- Laminated DisAbilities Awareness flyers from your district/council
- Paper/pen activities for drawing/coloring
- Paper airplane activities

- Lego buckets
- Play Doh or similar
- Noise cancellation ear protectors
- Visual Music on a laptop or tablet
- Weighted blankets/vests
- Rotating wall lights/mirror balls
- Scent diffuser (essential oils)
- Sorting items and containers (beads, small parts)
- Puzzles
- Sensory texture items (rough, smooth, soft)
- Rice/sand box/bean bag plush toys
- Stress balls/ squishy calming tools
- Repetitive action activities (Newton's cradle ball balance, lava flow hourglass, puzzle cubes)
- Camp sized table and chairs



## Managing Subscriptions to *Abilities Digest*

***Abilities Digest*** is designed for council and district disabilities awareness committees, related staff advisors, and any leader who would offer a Scouting program to youth who have special needs. Any Scouting volunteer or professional may subscribe.

**Subscribing.** Send a message to [disabilities.awareness@scouting.org](mailto:disabilities.awareness@scouting.org), with "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line. Indicate your name, email address, and council in the message text.

**Unsubscribing.** To decline future issues please reply and enter "REMOVE" in the subject line. We will remove the subscription within the next two weeks.

**Receiving Multiple Copies.** If you receive *Abilities Digest* at more than one email address, choose the one to be removed and reply with "REMOVE" in the subject line. Include a message requesting that we remove only that email address.

**Duplicate Copies.** If you receive more than one copy of *Abilities Digest* at the same email address, please reply to all but one of them with "DUPLICATE" in the subject line.

**Address Change.** If you want *Abilities Digest* sent to a different address, reply and enter "ADDRESS CHANGE" in the subject line. In your message, enter your council name and the email address you prefer.

Watch these videos to take a look at Flather's Tranquility Base:

[facebook.com/OcconeecheeGAPS/videos/2396524807093784/](https://facebook.com/OcconeecheeGAPS/videos/2396524807093784/)

[facebook.com/OcconeecheeGAPS/videos/397635944426778/](https://facebook.com/OcconeecheeGAPS/videos/397635944426778/)

Shema emphasizes that Tranquility Base can be as simple or as complex as needed. His own son was quite comfortable in a cocoon hammock away from the group for about 15 or 20 minutes. Once he restored his composure, he could attend to the activities taking place.

At Jamboree, Hellen found that not only Scouts with sensory needs used it, but also staffers used it to vent some steam and regroup. This was an added, unforeseen benefit of what can essentially become an area of great relief for many. After all, sensory issues do not go away. They remain with us for a lifetime. It's the manner in which we react to these issues that can make or break someone's day. Hellen suggests the area be staffed with leaders from your DisAbilities Awareness committees, youth and adults who are interested in helping others, those with different abilities themselves, and parents who understand sensory needs. Have a sign up sheet at the event for staffing shifts.

Hellen's ultimate goal for Tranquility Base is to consistently label the area as "Tranquility Base" in all camps and councils. "If we all have Tranquility Bases within our councils, then we can become consistent across the nation. Scouts can go anywhere and find a Tranquility Base set up, knowing its purpose." Hellen notes.

Set up a Tranquility Base at your unit, district and council events. Advertise it at events such as Scout Fair or District Camp-o-rees. Get people familiar with setting one up and let them create a Tranquility Base to meet the needs of their Scouts and leaders. The calming items, sensory soothers, and comforting enclosure of the base will help Scouts deal with their own distinctive traits. Experience in managing one's conflicts successfully can help a Scout mature and grow, developing character and confidence.



## **Philmont Zia Experience for Youth with Special Needs**

*Philmont Training Center, July 26-August 1*

To parents and caregivers of Scouts with special needs...don't overlook this opportunity! The Zia Experience is a customized, highly supported, personalized experience for your Scout, you, and your family! Philmont staff and highly trained volunteers will work with a wide range of functioning and abilities, from low-functioning to high-



functioning. The range includes Scouts who have physical, intellectual, emotional, and/or hidden disabilities. Scouts who are verbal and nonverbal, as well as toilet-trained and untrained will be welcomed.

The Zia team intends to communicate with parents and caregivers before the experience



begins to understand the type of experience your Scout wants to have. The team will find out about his or her abilities, special needs, special health care challenges, medications, allergies, diet restrictions, housing and personal care needs, transportation and mobility issues, advancement goals, and other associated risk management issues. The goal is to design experiences for Scouts ranging from a backcountry trek to modified backcountry day adventures, to a basic residential camp experience in base camp.

We're prepared to meet your Scout's and family's needs!

Families, siblings, and others are all welcome to make this experience work for your Scout and you! Communication and logistics before and during the experience will be critical to ensuring your Scout and you have the Philmont experience of your dreams! The goal, as always, is physical and emotional safety, comfort, fun, and satisfying experiences, and achieving the objectives of Scouting!

An initial application is available online: [reservations.scouting.org/profile/129163](https://reservations.scouting.org/profile/129163)

## Enhancing Awareness

### Adaptive Special Needs Conference at Philmont

*Philmont Training Center, July 26-August 1*



This national training teaches best practices in outdoor and camping programs for Scouts with special needs. Volunteers and professionals alike will learn how to integrate Scouts with special needs into everyday outdoor/camping programs. Adults will also learn about the latest adaptive programs including field sports, Project COPE and fishing. The conference includes discussion on risk management, program and facilities management, health and safety and program development for serving Scouts with special needs. Finally, this course will also share how you can use your camp properties for outside special needs groups, including schools and special needs agencies.

## Supporting Adult Leaders with Cognitive Limitations

A scoutmaster recently asked the National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee about training for “Bob,” an assistant scoutmaster with cognitive limitations. “Bob” assists with simple tasks during daytime events and camp activities, but does not participate in overnights. “Bob” has completed Youth Protection Training (YPT), but not Outdoor Leadership Skills (OLS), which traditionally involves an overnight training event. The Committee identified three strategies:



1. If “Bob” can complete YPT, he should be able to complete other leader training activities. If he is taking online training, you may provide a helper to ensure that he has absorbed the material and that his replies are properly transmitted. Scouts are allowed similar adjustments to advancement requirements to accommodate problems with communication.
2. Talk to the district training team about “Bob’s” limitations. Some teams present OLS as a daytime course. It might take multiple sessions for “Bob” to complete the requirements.
3. Instead of being an assistant scoutmaster, “Bob” could be a troop committee member. This qualifies him as an adult leader to help with troop activities, but does not require OLS training. Troop committees often take the training as a group.

Adult leaders are eligible for training recognitions as long as they complete the requirements.

### About *Abilities Digest*

*Abilities Digest* is the official e-letter of the Boy Scouts of America National Disabilities Awareness Committee. Its mission is to expand membership through helping parents and Scouting volunteers to improve their understanding, knowledge, and skills related to including and serving the special needs population. Therefore, districts and councils may reprint articles from this publication. Our plan is to distribute four issues of *Abilities Digest* annually, but special editions may go out whenever there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at [disabilities.awareness@scouting.org](mailto:disabilities.awareness@scouting.org).

# Adapting Advancement

## New Rules to Register Beyond Age 18



There have been national changes to the policy for everyone age 18 or older who participate as members of a Scouting or Venturing unit. All participants age 18 or older must fill out the adult application and agree to a criminal background check. They must also take Youth Protection Training unless they receive a special exemption (we discuss this in a separate article).

When an adult leader fills out an application, we enter a specific “position code” to match the leader’s role. There are position codes for youth or other unit participants who register beyond age 18.

For adults with cognitive impairments, the *Guide to Advancement* spells it out clearly: “An adult of any age who is developmentally disabled or cognitively impaired may be considered for *youth* program participation and join Scouting if a qualified medical professional is able to correlate cognitive abilities to less than the upper limit of an eligibility age.” This is called *registration beyond the age of eligibility*, abbreviated RBAE.

When a participant age 18 or older with disabilities has been approved for RBAE, an adult application must be filled out. Enter an RBAE-specific position code on the adult application, depending on the participant’s program:

UP – RBAE Cub Scouts or Scouts BSA

VP – RBAE Venturing or Sea Scouts

Participants registered with these codes may take part in youth programs, earn youth awards, merit badges, rank, or just plain have fun Scouting. A participant’s youth status does not change as long as registration continues. The status only changes if he or she re-registers in an adult leadership role.

If you would like to read more about Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility, you can access the information in the Guide to Advancement, section 10 ([scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/](https://scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/)). Your Council Champion or your council Disabilities Awareness Committee may also be able to assist, if you have questions.

## Youth Protection Training Exemption for Mental Disabilities

So, you have adult Scouts 18 years old or older who are registered beyond the age of eligibility (RBAE). Their registrations are based on severely limited mental abilities. Their adult applications have been filled out and now they must take Youth Protection Training (YPT). “Really??” you ask. “No way!”

Scouts who cognitively function below their chronological age may not be in it for rank advancement or to earn 110 merit badges. They just may want to go camping at a park and hang out with their friends. The Scouting program naturally provides these opportunities for those with limited cognitive capabilities.

Youth protection and two deep leadership may be far beyond their comprehension. Their parents, teachers, and medical partners can usually vouch for this lack of understanding.

Participants who can’t comprehend YPT may be exempted from the requirement.

The *Registration Guidebook of the Boy Scouts of America* has a section that explains what to do. “Adults without the Mental Capacity to Take Youth Protection Training” states: *“There are some exceptional situations when an adult applicant does not have the mental capacity to take and/or to comprehend the concepts being delivered in Youth Protection Training (YPT). In those situations, the Scout executive can request a YPT exemption for the individual.”* Most Scout executives will understand how much it is needed to request this type of exemption for some of our Scouts and in some cases, whole units.

Be aware that individuals who do not have the mental capacity to understand the YPT information are the only individuals who can be exempted from taking the training. Determine this action on a case by case basis.

You can find the Youth Protection Training Exemption Request among the forms in the back of the BSA’s latest *Registration Guidebook* ([scouting.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Registration-Guidebook.pdf](https://scouting.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Registration-Guidebook.pdf)).

If you run into issues filling out this form or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your Council Disabilities Committee, Council Champion, or council registrar, who can help get your questions answered and problems resolved.

## Recognizing Abilities

### Presenting the Torch of Gold Award

The Torch of Gold Award is a council award recognizing adult volunteers for service to Scouting with special needs and abilities. Each council may present one Torch of Gold Award every year.

**Nomination:** Publicize the award in council newsletters and online venues. Volunteers in the council’s special needs and disabilities programs should also nominate people active in those programs. Use the posted nomination form: [filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf](https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf)



**Selection:** Establish a committee to select new recipients. The committee may be part of the council's Advancement Committee or its Special Needs and Disabilities Committee. Ideally, the committee should consist of previous recipients. Candidates should have at least three years of active service in Scouting with special needs or disabilities. The committee is not obliged to present the award if there is no appropriate candidate.

**Presentation:** Present the award at a council event, like the annual awards banquet. The council may present the Award Medal, item 645077, the Award Pin, item 645078, and/or the Award Certificate, item 33733.

Following the presentation, the council's recipient should be nominated for the Woods Services Award, a national award recognizing service to Scouting with special needs and disabilities. Every council may nominate one of their volunteers for the Woods Services Award. The nomination must be approved by the council's Scout Executive.

The annual deadline is December 31. The Woods Services Award nomination form is posted online: [filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf](https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf).

## Helpful Links

Here are links to materials to aid volunteers and Scouts with special needs and disabilities:

### Official Materials Posted on Scouting.org

Scouting with Disabilities landing page: [scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/](https://scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/)

### Resources from Articles

*Guide to Advancement*, section 10: [scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/](https://scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/)

*Guide to Scouting with Special Needs*: [filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/510-071.pdf](https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/510-071.pdf)

Philmont Training Center: [www.philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/](https://www.philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/)

*Registration Guidebook*: [scouting.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Registration-Guidebook.pdf](https://scouting.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Registration-Guidebook.pdf)

*Torch of Gold* nomination form: [filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf](https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf)

Tranquility Base: <https://www.facebook.com/OcconeecheeGAPS/videos/2396524807093784/>

*Woods Services Award* nomination form: [filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf](https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-258.pdf)

AbleScouts: *Abilities Digest* articles posted online – [ablescouts.org](https://ablescouts.org)

### Social Media



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Email your comments and questions to: [disabilities.awareness@scouting.org](mailto:disabilities.awareness@scouting.org)