

# Should I Ask?

## A GUIDE FOR TALKING ABOUT DISABILITY

This educational resource is to help you understand when and how to talk about disabilities with Girl Scouts and caregivers.

This tool is designed to help guide your conversation with an individual or their caregiver and the information provided applies to that individual alone. While a diagnosis can look similar, lived experiences and support needs are unique to each person.



## What You Need To Know

There is no one way to define or describe disability. Disability is a spectrum and manifests in different ways from person to person. The ways in which disability impacts a person can also be very fluid; it is important, therefore, to understand that support needs may change at times.

## Starting The Conversation

If you observe or suspect that someone is having difficulty, this may or may not be related to a disability. The best way to approach this is to ask the scout if they would like help AND in what way you can be helpful.

While the youth may have a disability, it is more important to understand how you can help them in that moment.

## Is It Okay To Ask?

Before asking someone about their disability (or disability status), consider these three things:

1. What is your motivation for knowing/asking?
2. Is it relevant or necessary to provide support or for their participation in troop meetings/activities?
3. How will knowing this information help?

If you determine that asking is appropriate, be direct, ask clear, concise, and pointed questions.

## What Can I Ask?

To learn more about a person and about their disability, it is appropriate to first ask them if it is okay for you to inquire about their disability. While some people are comfortable with or open to talking about their disabilities, others may not be. You want to make sure you have their permission before asking about this sensitive topic, even if it is a visible disability.



## As A Matter Of Fact

Once you have learned the person's disability or how they identify, ask questions that are specific and direct. For example, if someone identifies as having Asperger syndrome, you may ask, "can you tell me more about Asperger's?"

## I Declare

Disclosure is a personal choice and not required for membership or participation in any girl scout program. With that, the "Meet My Girl Scout" form is a good way to capture information to support a successful scouting experience for each individual member. If someone chooses to self-identify, keep these tips in mind;

1. How someone classifies their disability is how we must identify their disability; even if it is incongruent with what we think or observe.
2. Don't insist! Strong encouragement can be interpreted as an invasion of privacy. Be okay not knowing everything or having all the answers.
3. Support, don't control. Provide the help requested and. Your role is to support, not to do.

## When Asking...

When asking about someone's disability and how it affects them be sure to:

1. Use a neutral tone; beware of projecting sympathy, pity, judgement, etc.
2. Ask short questions requiring short answers.
3. Don't push, Girl Scouts will share what they are comfortable sharing.

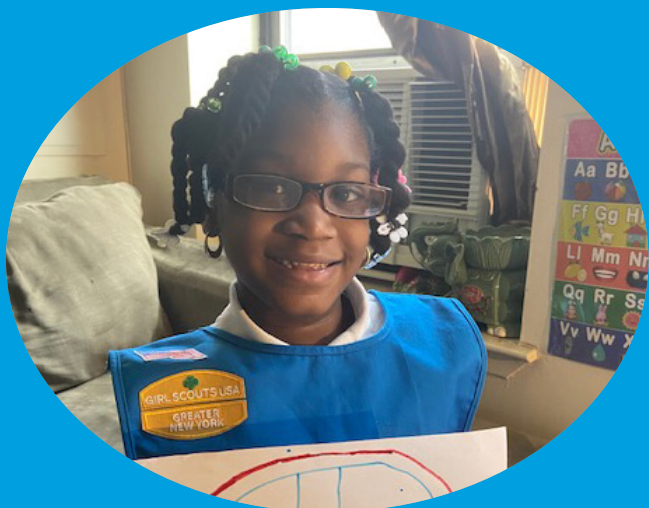
## Why Ask When You Can Offer?

Instead of asking what limitations, challenges, or struggles the Girl Scout is having, ask how you can assist them instead.

Reframing the question in this way takes the emphasis off of the disability or impairment and emphasizes the availability of support instead.



For more information or inquiries, contact [customercare@girlscoutsnyc.org](mailto:customercare@girlscoutsnyc.org) with the subject, "Inclusion and Accessibility inquiry".



“Disability  
Is What I Have,  
Not Who  
I Am.”