



## **OUR OWN COUNCIL'S "WHAT IF I COULDN'T?" Girl Scout Junior Badge**

Life can be extra-challenging for a girl with special needs. Meeting people and making friends can be tough. But girls who use a wheelchair or have lots of health problems want friends just like you do – and you can be a big help! How? By being a friend. Try to be helpful if you know someone has special needs. You might carry the person's books or do something as simple as asking her or him to join you and your friends at lunch. You can tell a teacher if you see her being bullied or teased. At the same time, don't be "overly helpful" when no help is needed. Why? Because just like you, kids with special needs like to be as independent as they can be. As you get to know them, they may help you understand what it's like to be in their shoes. And you'll be helping fill a very special need, one that everybody has — the need for good friends.

**Choose and complete any 6 activities, including #1, which is required.**

### **1. "If I...Could I Still?"**

To play this game:

- Put the phrases below on individual cards or strips of paper.
- Put the "If I..." cards into one paper bag and the "Could I Still" cards into another paper bag. (Or put them in two piles, face down.)
- Take turns picking one card from each bag and answering the question the best you can. If you answer "No" to a question, talk it over and see if you can think of a way to change your answer to

“yes.” Sometimes, *nothing* can be done. The answer will still be “No.”

- At the end of the game, decide, “If a girl has a disability, could she still be a Girl Scout? Could she be a good friend?” [Yes!]

### **IF I...**

couldn't hear	used a wheelchair
couldn't see	used crutches
had only one leg	had only one arm
couldn't speak clearly	couldn't use my legs
had seizures sometimes	couldn't use my hands
had trouble reading	stuttered
couldn't see or hear	had trouble making friends
used an asthma inhaler	had trouble sitting still
used a feeding tube	learned new things very slowly

### **COULD I STILL...?**

watch TV	celebrate my birthday
talk to my friends	be in a school play
fly a kite	play games with my friends
go to school	cry when my feelings are hurt
day dream	fly in an airplane
go to parties	play a musical instrument
ride a bike	spend the night at a friend's
play with my pet	eat my favorite ice cream
feel sad	hate doing a lot of homework
go swimming	help bake cookies
write a letter	read a book

## **2. That's Hard to Do!**

*Simulations* offer non-disabled Girl Scouts a way to experience a little of what it feels like to have a disability. It helps you better understand why a person with a disability might act a certain way, or why they may feel frustrated when there are *barriers* in their way. To understand what it might be like to have a physical challenge, try these simulation activities. Afterwards, talk about how you felt and what you learned.

- color a picture or write your name without using your hands.
- eat a meal or play a game while wearing a blindfold
- tie your shoe (or make a square knot) using only one hand.
- Put on a shirt with buttons while your fingers are taped to craft sticks or while you are wearing mittens.
- use a borrowed wheel chair (or an office chair with wheels) to move around your meeting space and take part in troop activities.

### **3. Talk To Me**

Everyone wants to be able to talk to their friends, but some kids can't speak clearly and some kids can't speak at all. It may be because they can't hear (are deaf) or for other reasons. Practice communicating without using words: learn some basic sign language or the manual alphabet; try to lip read; use a symbol or picture board; use facial expressions and body language. Get with a partner and without using spoken or written words, "tell" her:

- Call your mother.
- What do you want to eat?
- I have to go now.
- May I borrow your pencil?
- I really like your t-shirt

Or you can make up your own messages! Afterwards, talk about which messages were hardest to communicate. If you were to try again, what would you do differently? If a girl who could not hear joined your troop, how do you think you would communicate with her?

### **4 . I Don't Get It!**

Some kids with learning disabilities have trouble learning or understanding what they read, or following written directions. Even when they try very hard, they may not be able to complete things as quickly as other kids. To understand how a message can get mixed up between your eyes and your brain, try this activity: Divide your group into teams of about five girls each. Each team lines up with everyone facing the same way (like you would for a relay.) The troop leader writes a short message which she gives to the girls at the *end* of the line. The girl at the end of the line uses her finger to carefully write the message on the back of the girl in front of her. That girl writes the message on the back of the girl in front of *her*, and so on, until the message is written on the back of the first girl in line. She writes the message on a piece of paper and compares it to the leader's original message. How close is it? Compare the messages sent by each team. Talk about how it felt to try and recognize and remember the letters written on you back. Did you ever feel confused or frustrated? Did you give up trying to understand the message? This is how girls with learning disabilities may feel at school or troop meetings where they have to read or write something! What could you do to make things easier for them?

### **5. Animals Who Help**

*Service animals* are animals that are trained to help people with disabilities. Most people know about guide, or leader, dogs for the blind, but there are many other kinds of service animals. Find out:

- At least three other jobs besides guiding a blind person that service animals may do.
- How to recognize a service animal (when it's working.)
- What to do (or not do) when you see a working service animal.
- The places a service animal may not go.
- If there is a service animal training center near you and if you may visit or help in some way.

## 6. Be Barrier-Free!

The "What If I Couldn't?" badge symbol includes the wheelchair-accessible symbol. What does *accessible* mean? If you see that symbol, what should it mean? People who use walkers or wheelchairs want to shop, use the library, and go to the bathroom just like anyone else – but they may face a big problem: wheelchairs and walkers are usually 33 inches wide, but most doorways are only 30 inches wide! With a partner or as a team, take an accessibility survey in your school, meeting place, and community (the library, for example, or a restaurant or health center.) Decide who will survey which site. You will need a tape measure, a pen or pencil, and a chart or notebook. Measure each item listed below and record the measurement. Your chart or notebook should include the name of the facility, what you measured, the inches required, the actual inches (what you measured) and the difference between them. *How accessible is your home, school, Girl Scout meeting place, and community? Who can you work with to make things more accessible?*

FACILITY/LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

ITEM	INCHES REQUIRED	ACTUAL INCHES	DIFFERENCE
walkways	44 inches wide		
halls, corridors	44 in. wide		
aisles	44 in. wide		
rest room stalls	60 in. turning space		
doorknobs	36 inches high		
doorways	36 inches wide		
towel dispensers	40 inches high		
water fountains	33 inches high		
light switches	48 inches high		
phones	54 in. high (hand set)		
sinks	29-34 in. high		
fire alarms	48 inches high		

## **7. Disability Safety Checklist**

With a buddy, or in teams, check your school, your Girl Scout meeting place, and shopping environments such as the grocery store, drug store, or discount store for safe accessibility for: people who have low vision or can't see; people who can't hear; people who use a wheelchair, walker, or crutches or have trouble walking. Make a chart for each location you evaluate, checking to see if the location is safe or un-safe. Some of the things you might include on your checklist are:

- cracked or uneven sidewalks
- steep, hilly, or sloping walkways
- steps that are small or uneven
- clutter or debris at entrances, on sidewalks or paths
- overhead hazards (low branches, wires, light fixtures, decorations)
- doors too heavy to push open without help
- door handles too high or too low
- fire extinguishers missing or hard to reach
- exits not marked in Braille

Make a poster or booklet to share what you've found with a business owners' association, your city or county government, or a local organization that supports people with disabilities. Offer to help correct any hazards that you can safely help with.

## **8. Computer Connections**

Many kids with disabilities enjoy using computers. They chat with other kids or go to Web sites especially for children with disabilities. Best of all, new computer hardware and software support people with disabilities in all kinds of ways. With an adult's permission, discover for yourself what computers can provide when people are unable to:


1. type with steady fingers
2. talk
3. speak clearly
4. move their arms
5. move their bodies
6. see well or at all
7. spell
8. write
9. compute
10. hear
11. use both hands

## 9. Girl Scouts Is For All Girls!

Did you know that Juliette (Daisy) Gordon Low, the woman who brought Girl Scouting to the USA was deaf? She lost the hearing in one ear as a teenager, and the hearing in her other ear as a young woman. Daisy didn't let deafness keep her from carrying out her dream to bring Girl Scouting not only to the girls of Savannah and America, but to girls around the world. Find ways to let girls with disabilities know they can be Girl Scouts, too. Invite a girl your age who has a disability to visit one of your troop meetings or go on a field trip with your troop. Help her see that she can be a Girl Scout too. Design posters and event fliers that show Girl Scouting is open to girls with disabilities as well as non-disabled girls.

### ONLINE RESOURCES:

- [http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/friend/special\\_needs.html](http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/friend/special_needs.html) (written FOR kids!)
- <http://www.childrenwithspecialneeds.com/> (run by parents, for parents)
- <http://www.nichcy.org/Disabilities/Specific/Pages/Default.aspx> (information about specific disabilities)
- <http://www.nichcy.org/Pages/StateSpecificInfo.aspx?State=GA> (state and community resources)

 If you would like either a print or electronic copy of the "Focus On Ability" module from Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta, please contact Margaret Paschal at 770-702-910 (toll-free at 1-800-771-4046) or [mpaschal@gsgatl.org](mailto:mpaschal@gsgatl.org).



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