

There are two main categories of visual impairments: Low Vision and Blind. Low Vision individuals are print users, but may require special equipment and materials. The definition of legal blindness covers a broad spectrum of visual impairments. There is no “typical” vision impaired child due to many factors and influences on their specific experience. The major challenge facing visually impaired children in the troop meeting environment is the overwhelming mass of visual material to which they are constantly exposed to.

Some suggestions and strategies for preparing for and including blind and visually impaired girls in your troop:

1. Verbally address the group upon entering and leaving the meeting location.
2. Call the girl by name if you're addressing her specifically.
3. Use descriptive words in relation to the girl's body orientation such as “straight, forwards, left, etc.” vs. vague terminology such as “over there, here, this, etc.”
4. Describe in detail, pertinent visual occurrences of activities.
5. Give verbal notice of location changes.
6. Offer to read written information out loud when appropriate.
7. Identify yourself by name, don't assume someone who is visually impaired or blind will recognize you by voice.
8. Offer to guide the girl if you're travelling or moving to unfamiliar locations during the meeting-offer your arm and be sure to warn them if they need to step up or down, if the door is on the left or right, and any possible hazards.
9. Coach your troop to not pet or touch a guide dog if present-guide dogs are working animals and it can be hazardous for the visually impaired or blind girl if the dog is distracted.
10. Show the girl where things are placed before each activity and allow them to pick up and feel objects where appropriate.
11. Don't move objects or locations without first telling the troop verbally.
12. Do not leave doors ajar; close or open them fully.
13. Ask if the girl needs help rather than assuming – respect her independence.
14. Unless the girl and her parent/guardian prefer confidentiality within the troop, have the girl share about her differing abilities and special needs with the troop safely and allow the other girls to ask questions in a sensitive and caring manner to better understand and allow everyone to work together as a troop to help everyone's needs be met.
15. Always consult with the parent/ guardian beforehand to be sure you're providing for the girl's needs to the best of your ability-they will know the best methods and strategies to help their child.

If you have other questions or concerns you may contact the Girl Scouts of Maine at 888-922-4763 or email us at customercare@gsmaine.org

This document is not intended to replace or supersede any doctor's instructions nor should it in any way be taken as medical advice or directions. This resource is a suggestion for GSME volunteers to use while welcoming girls to their troops with special needs and is for informational and educational purposes only. Please follow a parent/guardian's instructions in the medical care of their child and make sure you always have the appropriate medical and troop permission forms completed and available for emergency medical services (EMS) personnel.