

# National Executive Director



PO Box 70735 SW Station  
Washington, DC 20024-0735

## Policy Memoranda 2005-03

**Date:** 8/04/2005

**Subject:** Young Marines with Disabilities and Special Needs

1. Background. The Young Marines Program has fully participating members with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities. Although most of our efforts have been directed at keeping such youth in the mainstream of the Young Marines program, we recognized the special needs of those with severe disabilities.
2. Definitions.
  - a. The American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) provides the following definition of an individual with a disability:
    - (1) "An individual is considered to have a 'disability' if s/he has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g...seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, learning, caring for oneself, and working) has a record of such impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment."
    - (2) "An individual with epilepsy, paralysis, HIV infection, AIDS, a substantial hearing or visual impairment, mental retardation, or a specific learning disability, is covered, but an individual with a minor, non-chronic condition of short duration, such as sprain, broken limb, or the flu would not be covered by the ADA."
    - (3) "The ADA definition protects individuals with a record of a disability and would cover, for example, a person who has recovered from cancer or mental illness."
    - (4) "The ADA protects individuals who are regarded as having a substantially limiting impairment, even though they may not have such an impairment. For example...a qualified individual with a severe facial disfigurement is protected from being denied employment because a employer feared the 'negative reaction' of customers or coworkers."
  - b. The Department of Education identifies a severely handicapped child as one who, because of the intensity of their physical, mental, or emotional problems, or a combination of such problems, needs education, social, psychological, and medical services beyond those that have been offered by traditional regular and special educational programs in order to maximize his full potential for useful and meaningful participation in society and for self-fulfillment. Such children include those classified as seriously emotionally disturbed or profoundly and severely mentally retarded, and those with two or more serious handicapping conditions, such as the mentally retarded blind, and the cerebral-palsied deaf.
3. Recognition of Needs.
  - a. The basic premise of participation is the youth with disabilities and special needs must want to participate like other youth—and the Young Marines give them that opportunity. Thus, much of the program for Young Marines with disabilities and special needs is directed at:
    - (1) Helping unit commanders develop an awareness of disabled people among youth without disabilities, and
    - (2) Encouraging the inclusion of youth with disabilities and special needs in all aspects of the Young Marine experience where possible.
  - b. There are units composed of members with similar disabilities or special needs—such as an all-blind Young Marine unit or all-deaf Young Marine units. Members of these units are encouraged to participate in Young Marine activities at the battalion, regiment, division, and/or national levels along with other youth. Many of these special Young Marine units are located in special schools or centers that make the Young Marine program a part of their curriculum.

**Subject:** Young Marines with Disabilities and Special Needs

- c. Young Marine units shall establish written policies regarding youth with disabilities and special needs, based on local laws and resources available to their unit. Unit policies shall develop and coordinate effective programs for youth with disabilities and special needs, using available resources in the unit and from the community. All units are encouraged to provide accessibility in their encampments by removing physical barriers so that youth with disabilities and special needs can participate in weekend and summer resident encampments.
  - d. When the unit does not have a professional staff member exclusively responsible for youth with disabilities or special needs, the caregiver must be a registered adult and be present at all activities involving their charge as a condition of enrollment. The caregiver's exclusive responsibility is to provide the specialized care needed for the welfare of their charge.
4. Membership. The unit determines, with approval from appropriate medical authorities, whether a youth members is qualified to enroll, based on the definitions in paragraph 2, beyond the normal membership qualification described in the Registered Adult Manual (RAM), Chapter 2.
- a. A physician licensed to practice medicine must certify any medical conditions, or an educational administrator on an evaluation statement must certify any learning disabilities of all prospective Young Marines beyond the normal registration requirements, respectively. The unit shall use the Health History and Physician's Report (YM Form 14) to document any corrective measures, restrictions, limitations, or abnormalities. This form with support documentation shall be filed in the Young Marines Record Book.
  - b. In the case of mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed candidates for membership, a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist must certify their condition. The unit shall use the Health History and Physician's Report (YM Form 14) to document any corrective measures, restrictions, limitations, or abnormalities. This form with support documentation shall be filed in the Young Marines Record Book.
5. Promotions. Young Marines with disabilities and special needs participate in the same program as their non-disabled peers.
- a. There may come a time when the unit may need to make some accommodations in the promotion requirements to ensure a positive experience for the Young Marine with disabilities or special needs. A Young Marine with a permanent physical or mental disability may select an alternate activity or skill, if the disabling condition prohibits the Young Marine from completing the necessary requirement needed to advance. The alternate activity should be discussed in advance and agreed upon by the unit commander, the disabled Young Marine, and their caregiver. The unit promotion board must be included in the process to assure fairness in the advancement of all Young Marines in the unit.
  - b. The unit commander should consider all practical suggestions on how best to accommodate Young Marines with disabilities or special needs. The ultimate limitations to accommodation are the limited resources available to the unit or community; however, approaches and methods for accommodation are limited by the imagination of the unit commander and staff. A youth in a wheelchair can meet requirements for hiking by making a trip to places of interest in his community. Giving more time and permitting the use of special aids are other ways leaders can help youth with disabilities and special needs in their efforts to advance. The open-mindedness of the unit commander plays a crucial role in that effort.
6. This policy is effective as of this date and supersedes all policies pertaining to this matter.

/s/

Michael B. Kessler