

FRIENDSHIPS

Friends are people who like us for who we are, enjoy things that we enjoy, interact with us, laugh with us, listen, don't tell our secrets, share a balance of power. Friends feel a sense of belonging, caring and equality.



Research says:

- ↪ Friendships between students with and without significant disabilities are not only possible but also benefit both groups of students.
- ↪ Adolescents should try to make friends with peers who have disabilities.
- ↪ Relationships are more likely to develop if students with disabilities are in general education settings.
- ↪ The most effective strategies that teachers and schools might use to facilitate friendships are:
 1. Use teaching approaches in the classroom that allows and encourage students to work together.
 2. Present information to students, teachers, and parents about disabilities.
 3. Arrange social activities for students to spend non-school time together.
 4. Teach students without disabilities to be tutors.
 5. Organize a circle of friends around individual students who have disabilities.



The only disability is having no relationships

Judith Snow



Peer Suggestions

- Give information to students about disabilities and how they might affect our classmates.
- Don't let students make fun of students with disabilities. Take every opportunity to stop bullying or ridicule.
- If a student with a disability doesn't know how to fit in, show them!
- Give us reasons to be nice to each other – especially to kids who are not likely to fit in.
- Praise students with disabilities so we know that you think they are doing a good job.
- Create programs or other opportunities for us to hang out with each other that are fun! Don't always put us in the role of being a teacher or helper.
- Include students with disabilities in groups with popular kids; don't just pair them up with one person.
- Have students with disabilities tell us about their disability.
- Clubs or after-school activities should be arranged so that kids with disabilities can join in more easily.

THE RULES OF LIFE ACCORDING TO KIDS

Compiled by J.S. Salt, 2000

Never insult someone for being different.
they could be your future best friend.

Suzie I'm 11

always
have a close
relationship

Jason, 10



always
Have friends or you'll be lonely
Norbert 10

Always have at least 3 friends
Elizabeth Age 11½

**THESE QUOTES CAN BE USED AS
DISCUSSION ITEMS!**

STARTING A FRIENDSHIP CLUB

FIRST: Identify students who will be the “steering committee” to create the club.

Target students who are popular, students who have some self-assurance, and who are seen as school leaders. Invite them to a “meeting” to discuss the creation of a club that will offer students with and without disabilities to get to know each other and have some fun. Be clear that you are not requesting them to be in the club at this time; you are only asking them to help give you, the faculty member, good ideas.

SECOND: With at least 5 and up to 8 students, gather them for an **hour’s discussion**. Ask some leading questions to gather their perceptions. Give them some information about the students with disabilities who would be invited to participate. Ask them for specific ideas on how to go about forming the club.

A. Questions about Belonging:

1. What makes you feel like you belong at your school?
2. How would you feel if you were coming to this school for the first time?
3. What are some good qualities that popular kids have?
4. What’s the same about everyone in your school?
5. How are kids different from each other?

B. Questions about Friendship

6. What did you notice about your first friendships?
7. Are your friends different or similar to you?
8. Where or how did you meet them?
9. Did you choose your friends?
10. How would you feel if someone assigned someone to you to be a friend?

C. Information about Students with Disabilities

Discuss the characteristics of students with disabilities and why a friendship/activity club might be important. Share information about the communication or other differences that the students may have and what kind of supports they might need for participation. Make sure to incorporate information about things like “person-first” language and why that’s important; how to have respectful interactions, and how this is about creating opportunities for experiencing positive peer interactions, not to create a “helper” relationship. Consider demonstrating what a “Circle of Friends” is like.

D. Gather Ideas

Get input from the students on specific logistics:

- Who might be interested in joining this club?
- How could the purpose of the club be explained?
- What kind of name should the club have?
- When could the club meet?
- What kinds of activities would be good to start with?
- Any other ideas?

E. Ask for Volunteers

Solicit additional help from at least 3 to 5 of the students. Perhaps one or two would be willing to get a couple of their other friends to join a second planning meeting.

THIRD: Gather **another group to plan** the next steps. Summarize the information from the first meeting and put it into something visually creative, possibly a PowerPoint. Show it to the group to review the previous planning input. Some steps that this group can take:

A. Review Summary

Discuss any way that the students' opinions might be the same or different from the previous group. Provide additional information as needed. Clarify the purpose of the group and come up with some ideas for the initial formal meeting of the club.

B. Discuss Recruiting Student Participants

How should students with disabilities be invited to join?
How should students without disabilities be invited to join?
What information should a "flyer" include in it?

C. Create a knowledge/sensitivity survey

Ask the students to help create this. It could be given to the students who are interested in joining. This will give the faculty member an idea of where the students' attitudes and experiences are so that the activity for the first meeting can be planned. We are interested in knowing what you think and what your experiences are with peers who have disabilities.

1. Do you know what a disability is?
2. Do you know anyone with a disability? Who? What kind of disability do they have?
3. What would make you comfortable sharing an activity with someone who has a disability?
4. What would make you uncomfortable sharing an activity with someone who has a disability?
5. Have you ever had a friend with a disability?
6. If a student in your school had a disability and started talking to you, what would you do?

A sixth grade boy is a creature who runs everywhere and when he gets there he hits someone.

A sixth grade girl is a creature who skips everywhere and when she gets there she giggles.

A seventh grade girl is a creature who walks everywhere slowly (and usually backwards because she is talking to her friend) and when she finally arrives she forgets why she went there.

A seventh grade boy is a creature who saunters everywhere and when he gets there he calls someone a name (usually a girl).

An eighth grade boy is a creature who struts everywhere and never seems to get to where he wants to go.

An eighth grade girl is a creature who slinks everywhere and when she gets there she gives someone a not.

Barbara Canavan, Principal
Southampton Middle School

“Some people have no friends because they were never taught the skills to be a friend”

CREATING A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

PURPOSE: To facilitate the development of social relationships and friendships between students who have a disability and typically developing peers who live in their community. The "circle exercise" can be used to generally heighten students' awareness of the importance of friendships, or can be used to begin establishing a support circle for a particular student.

FIRST: Identify and invite students to participate who may already know the focus student and/or who may have an interest in providing some positive social experiences for a peer. Students may have a general interest in others with disabilities, or may just want to join with their friends.

SECOND: Hold a meeting with the interested peers. The group facilitator is usually a faculty member (interested teacher or guidance counselor). Record student responses in an organized way so they are up and available for everyone to see their thoughts, feelings, and decisions.

1. Distribute "circle" worksheets
2. Explain how to complete the circles as the group goes through the process
 - first circle: own name and those of significant others
 - second circle: good friends
 - third circle: acquaintances, classmates, neighbors (these may move into the second circle at some time)
 - fourth circle: individuals who are paid to be in your life (doctor, dentist, babysitter, teacher, etc.)
3. Have the students complete their own circle; answer questions
4. Ask if anyone feels comfortable sharing their circle with the group. (Use a chart paper or overhead transparency to demonstrate the student's circles). Facilitate a group discussion – some questions:
 - How is a "good" friend formed?
 - What do "good" friends do together?
 - How do you keep your friendships going?
 - What holds the relationship together?

5. Share a circle of a student who may have limited peer relationships and also needs support for non-paid relationships (the first two circles may be empty except for immediate family)

Questions to ask:

- How would it feel to have that "good" friend circle empty?
- Think about all the things you have done and shared with your "good" friends -- Notice how that would feel.
- How would you act if you didn't have any friends?

WHEN USING TO ESTABLISH A SUPPORT CIRCLE FOR A PARTICULAR PERSON:

6. Clarify that participants are meeting for a specific reason: helping _____ to have more positive experiences with peers and possibly develop friendships. Students need to understand that they are making a commitment to be friendly and "include" the focus student in some of their social activities. They are not making a commitment to develop a relationship: relationships can't be forced!
7. Discuss how friends are formed and what friends do in this particular school/community. Some possible questions to ask:
 - How do kids make friends here?
 - Where do you make friends; where do friends go together?
 - What other kinds of things do friends do together?
 - What would _____ do if he/she had friends?
8. Students may generate specific ideas for how to involve the focus student in social activities, but they also need to plan to base these decisions on the interests of the focus student. The next step is to plan a gathering that involves the focus student in the discussion.

Some questions to ask: IF they decide to have a "meeting" with the focus student:

- How can you plan to invite the focus student? And what do you want to tell their parents?
- Who is going to be the contact? Is anyone else going to do anything?
- What will they say when they have an initial planning "meeting" with the focus student?
- How will ongoing support be provided to the peers to answer questions, prevent problems, etc.
- Who will oversee this process?

PROCEED TO ACTION!

SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER:

1. It may be a good idea to have the "circle" get together formally once a month to talk about how its going and to reorganize if necessary. **The group should meet regularly** to discuss:
 - how things are going
 - answer any questions
 - generate solutions to any problems arising
 - generate ways to better include the student in activities in and out of school
2. Remember that the focus of the circle is the student for whom the circle was formed and not for the larger group. **This student should be included in all decision-making**, regardless of the significance of the disability.
3. While an adult may be the initial facilitator and may participate in overseeing the circle; **students should take an active role in the process.**
4. Be patient! **Friendships take time to develop.** The only way to know whether a friendship will develop is to go for it. This is an ongoing process.
5. This process may seem artificial in the beginning. However, without taking active steps to provide this opportunity, the only choice may be no friends at all. Based on experience, this **artificiality fades** as true relationships develop.
6. **Friendships involve sharing** on the part of both persons and assume an **equality** in the social relationship. It should be considered that everyone (both the student with the disability and the typical peers) has something to give and something to learn.
7. Involvement in the circle should be strictly **voluntary.**
8. For younger students, the original "circle" may take the form of a party where phone numbers and photographs are exchanged and plans are made for another party (perhaps at someone's house or at a playground).
9. **Every "circle" is different.** Each one will have its own unique characteristics and qualities.
10. Be prepared to assist the peers in systematic ways to support the focus student in the development of age-appropriate and positive social interactions.

For more information:

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