

The Power of Connection: Peers

Presented by Andrea Beachnau



The Dance



Today's Agenda



Define Friendship: Who, What, Where

Benefits of Friendship & Impacts of Isolation

Barriers to Friendship & Interventions to Address Barriers

Finding Peer Connections to Build Lasting Friendship

Defining Friendship

What It Means, What It Looks Like
& Where To Find It



Defining Terms

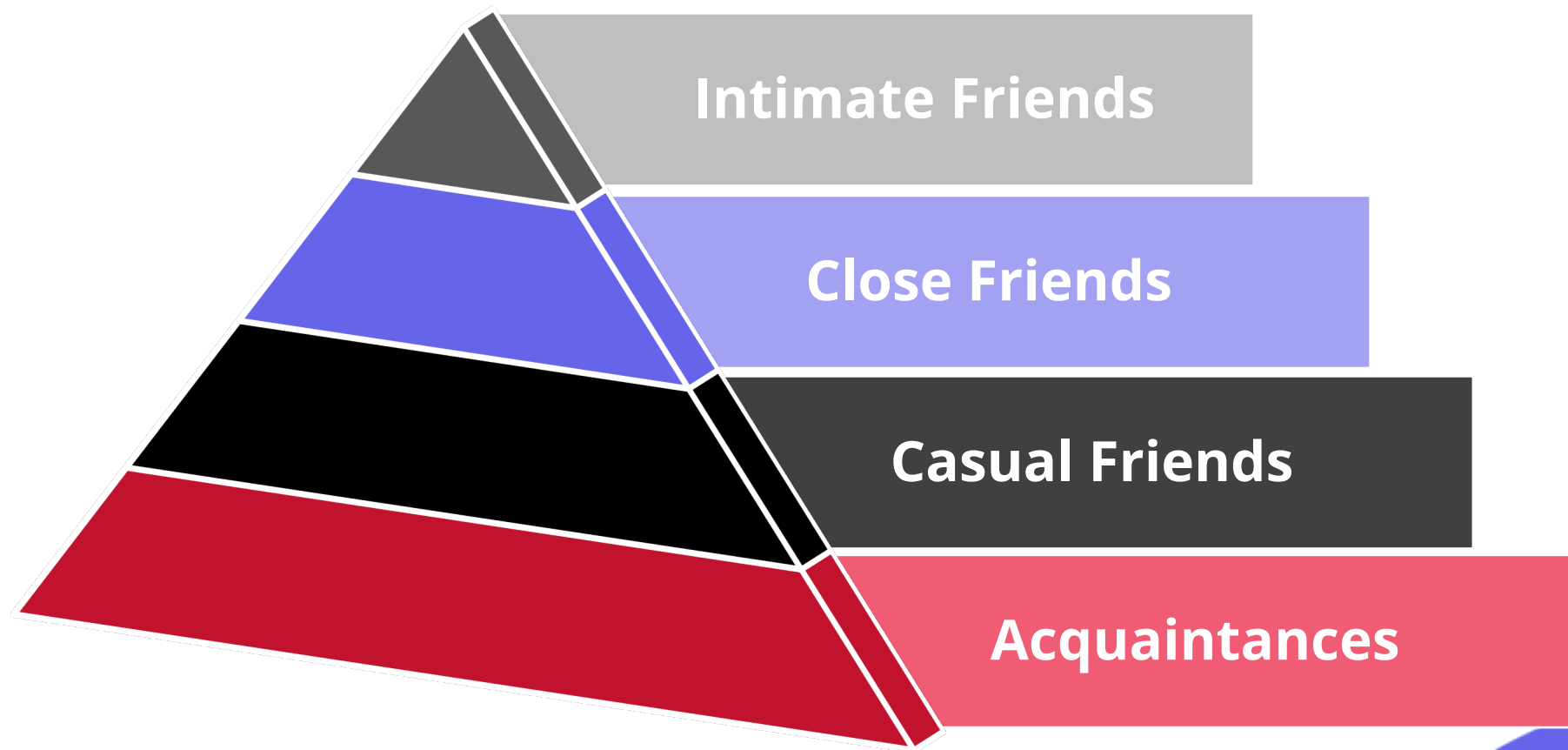
Peer /pir/ noun

- a person who is equal to another in abilities, qualifications, age, background, and social status *dictionary.com*
- one that is of equal standing with another, especially one belonging to the same societal group based on age, grade, or status *merriam-webster.com*

Friend /frend/ noun

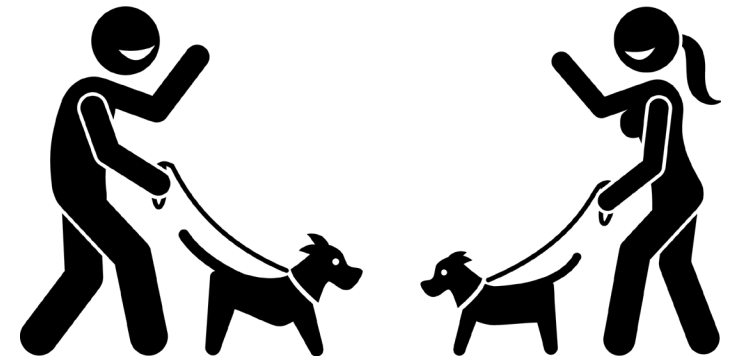
- a person attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard *dictionary.com*
- one attached to another by affection or esteem *merriam-webster.com*

Friendship Progression



Acquaintances

- Networking Potential
- Low-Expectation Conversation
- Reduced Social Anxiety
- Feeds Our Need to Belong
- Exposes You to New Perspectives/Ideas



Casual or Social Friends



- Widening Your Circle of Friends
- Easy, Low-Pressure Dialogue
- Communicate on Shared Interests
- Being a Part of a Community
- Expand Outside of Normal Daily Interactions

Close Friends

- Deeper Connections
- Encouragement & Advice
- Help When Need
- Dependable Fun
- Shared History



Intimate or Best Friends



- Freedom to Truly Be Yourself
- Stable, Judgment-Free Support
- Mutual Love & Loyalty
- There For the Good & the Bad

Where To Find Friendship



- Current Network
- Community Events
- Join Local Club, Group, Class
- Online Groups & Gaming
- Go For a Walk

Importance of Friendship

Benefits of Friendship &
Impacts of Lack of Friendship



Benefits of Friendship

Peers with and Peers without Disabilities

- Improve Mental & Physical Health
- Improve Cognitive, Language, & Social Development
- Provide Shared Experiences
- Increase Sense of Belonging/Community Connection



Benefits of Friendship

Peers without Disabilities



- Increased Understanding of Differences
- Increased Awareness, Acceptance, and Compassion
- Learn New Skills

Impacts of Lack of Friendship

- Social Isolationism & Loneliness
- Health Risks
- Increased Bullying
- Decreased Confidence & Motivation
- Decreased Cognitive, Language, & Social Development



Barriers to Friendship

Environmental, Personal Level for
Peers with Disabilities & Peers
without Disabilities



Environmental Barriers

Segregation

- Isolated Seating
- Separate Classroom
- Separate Program
- Separate Employment

Lack of Understanding

- Disability Awareness
- Stereotypes
- Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) or American Sign Language (ASL)
- Other Assistive Technology (AT)

Lack of Access

- Inaccessible Community Events
- Physical Barriers
- Alternative Curriculum
- Inaccessible Transportation

Personal Barriers for a Peer with a Disability



Limitations in Interpersonal Skills



Misunderstandings in Communication



Limitations in Ability to Disclose Unique Needs



Limitations in Finding Empathetic, Flexible, Supportive Peers

Personal Barriers for a Peer without a Disability



Lack of Understanding of Disability



Lack of Patience in Communicating



Lack of Understanding Unique Needs



Fearful of Bullying

Breaking Down Barriers

Environmental, Personal Level for
Peers with Disabilities & Peers
without Disabilities



Breaking Down Environmental Barriers



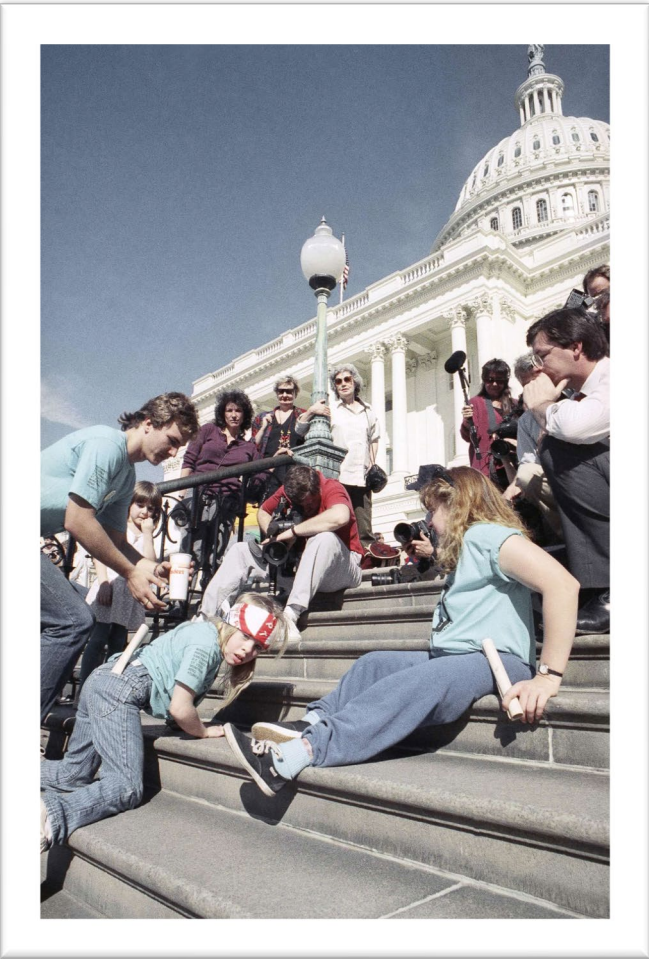
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Promote Disability History/Awareness
- Advocate for Accessibility for All

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Educational placement is the setting where your child receives his or her education and services. Schools must place students in the least restrictive environment (LRE). **That means students must be placed in the general education setting to the greatest extent appropriate to receive supports and services as determined by the individualized education program team.**



Disability History/Awareness



- Educate on Disability History
- Educate on All Disabilities
- Promote the Teaching of Disability Rights Movements
- Promote Disability Awareness in Home, School Community

Advocate for Accessibility for All

- Programs/Activities
- Scheduling
- Buildings/Sidewalks
- Items/Equipment
- Transportation



Breaking Down Barriers: Peers with Disabilities



- Target Skills Through Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Teach Self-Advocacy Skills & Create Spaces for Sharing

Teach Skills Through the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

- Interpersonal Skills Goals
- Behavior Goals
- Communication Goals
- Teach Alternative Communication Methods
- Assistive Technology
- Accommodations/Modifications

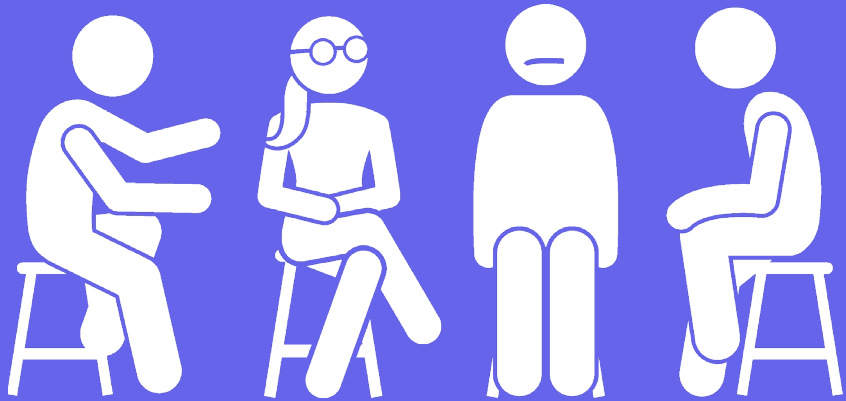


Self-Advocacy Skills & Sharing Spaces

- Speaking Up for Yourself
- Communication Strengths, Preferences, Interests, Needs (SPIN)
- Being Able to Listen to the Opinions of Others
- Owning Responsibility
- Understanding Your Rights
- Knowing to Ask for Help/Accommodation



Breaking Down Barriers: Peers without Disabilities



- Seek to Understand Disability
- Practice Communication Skills

Seek to Understand Disability/Neurodiversity

- See Benefits to Differences
- Avoid Stereotypes
- Participate in Accessible Activities
- Accommodate Needs
- Be Ally Against Ableism



Practice Communication Skills



- Understand There Are Different Ways to Communicate
- Educate on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices or Assistive Technology
- Use People First Language

Breaking Down Barriers: Peers with & without Disabilities



- Provide Opportunities for Social Connection Outside of School/Work
- Utilize Peer to Peer Support Models

Make Relationships a Priority



- Intentional Connections
- Provide Opportunities for Social Connection Outside of School/Work
- Model Being a Good Friend

Utilize Peer to Peer Support Models

- Evidence-Based Practice
- Formal Pathway to Connection
- Promotes Consistent Participation in Shared Activities
- Use Peers with Different Skillsets



Peer Model: Helping vs. Participating

What It Looks Like for Peers

Helping



- Peers put in an adult role
- Peers telling peers what to do and what not to do
- Peers watching peers do schoolwork or eat lunch
- Peers leading peers to classroom

Participation

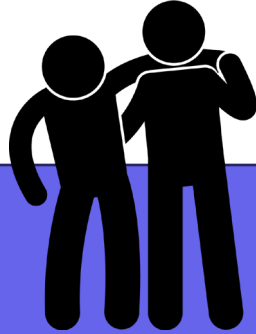


- Peers being peers
- Peers playing with peers
- Peers working together on the same schoolwork
- Peers walking with each other
- Peers learning about neurodiversity

Peer Model: Helping vs. Participating

Why It's Important

Helping



- Not Mutually Beneficial
- Peers Viewed Differently
- Lowers Expectations
- Power Over Another
- Perpetuates Ableism

Participation



- Mutually Beneficial
- Peers Viewed Equally
- Raises Expectations
- Power Neutralized
- Promotes Inclusion
- Creates Allies

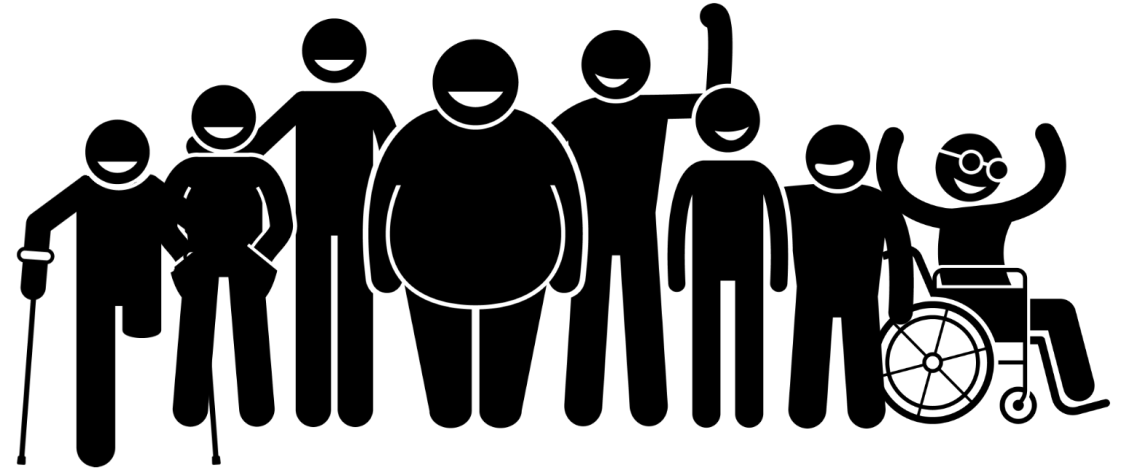
Finding Friends

Peers with Disabilities and Peers
without Disabilities



All of Us

- Be Authentic
- Accept Yourself First
- Join a Group or Class
- Explore Social Media Outlets
- Find Your People
- Make Yourself Available



Peers with Disabilities



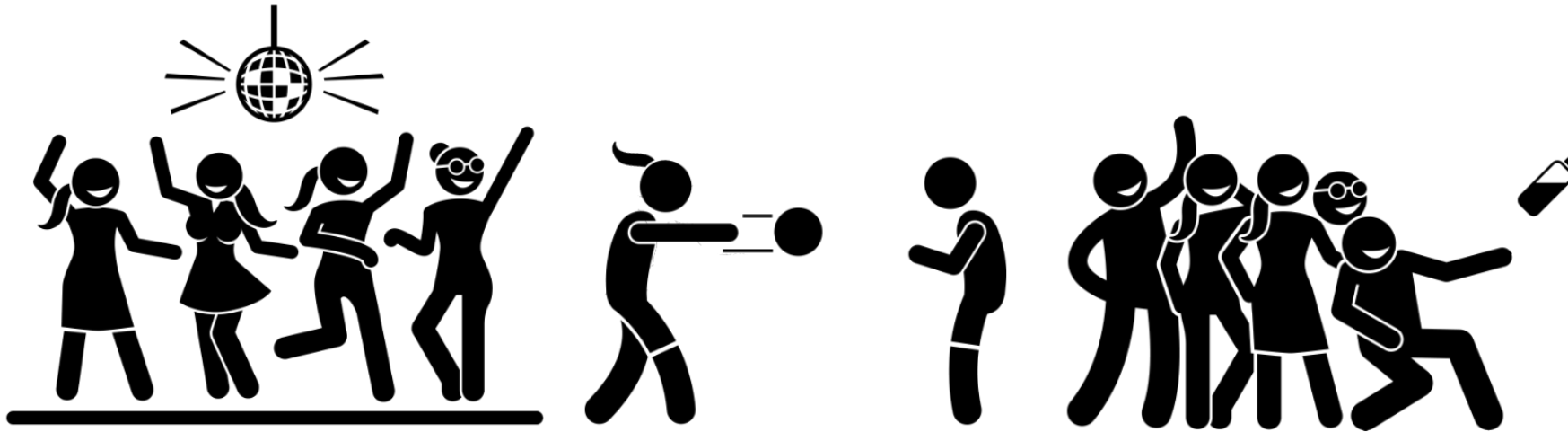
- Be a Self-Advocate
- Build Up Communication Skills
- Seek Anti-Ableist Friendships

Peers without Disabilities

- Make an Effort to Understand Disability/Neurodiversity
- Make Plans – Include Them/Invite Them
- Communicate Clearly
- Respect Sensory and Social Differences
- No Charity Friendships



Back to The Dance





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لغة العربية 248-963-0607

info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org



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