


The Power of Connection: Peers

Presented by Andrea Beachnau



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The Dance




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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



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Defining Friendship

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





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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*

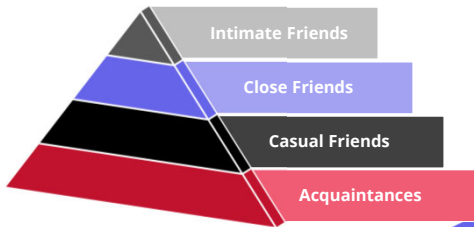
Friend /frend/ noun


- 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*



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Friendship Progression





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Acquaintances

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



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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



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Close Friends

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



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Intimate or Best Friends




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




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Where To Find Friendship



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



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Importance of Friendship

Benefits of Friendship & Impacts of Lack of Friendship




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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




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Benefits of Friendship

Peers without Disabilities



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



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Impacts of Lack of Friendship

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




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Barriers to Friendship

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

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Environmental Barriers

Segregation	Lack of Understanding	Lack of Access
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isolated Seating Separate Classroom Separate Program Separate Employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability Awareness Stereotypes Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) or American Sign Language (ASL) Other Assistive Technology (AT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inaccessible Community Events Physical Barriers Alternative Curriculum Inaccessible Transportation


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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


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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



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Breaking Down Barriers

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

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Breaking Down Environmental Barriers



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



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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.**



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Disability History/Awareness

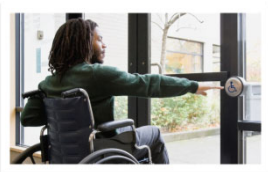


- Educate on Disability History
- Educate on All Disabilities
- Promote the Teaching of Disability Rights Movements
- Promote Disability Awareness in Home, School Community

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Advocate for Accessibility for All



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

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Breaking Down Barriers: Peers with Disabilities



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



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Teach Skills Through the Individualized Education Program (IEP)



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




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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

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Breaking Down Barriers: Peers without Disabilities



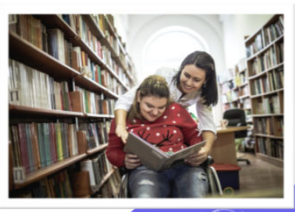

- Seek to Understand Disability
- Practice Communication Skills



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Seek to Understand Disability/Neurodiversity

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

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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



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Breaking Down Barriers: Peers with & without Disabilities




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



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Make Relationships a Priority





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



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Utilize Peer to Peer Support Models

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





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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

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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

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Finding Friends



Peers with Disabilities and Peers without Disabilities




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All of Us

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

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Peers with Disabilities



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



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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




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Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education (MDE-OSE); the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MILEAP); and Michigan's Federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs(OSEP).

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