

tips for parents



Friendships: Building a Good Life



Friendship development is important to PARENTS!

Parents want to see their child valued within their community like they are within the safety and love of the family. Parents are concerned about the emotional well-being of their children and work each day to improve their ability to function and succeed in the real world. The presence of friends and relationships in their child's life validates the parent's innate belief that their son or daughter is a valued member of society.

Parents want to know their child will be supported and included by their community when they are adults. They want them to be respected, valued and supported in their adult lives. If parents want that to happen, they must begin to build that early. They can't wait until their children are young adults or for society to be "ready" for them.



Parents want others in schools and communities to also see and value their son or daughter.

Families can be a model of inclusion and adaptations for the world. Parents see their children as whole, just the way they are. Without any formal training, they naturally adapt their actions, communications, routines and more to ensure the success of their children. They actively work each day to make sure their children are active participants in daily life. Parents want others in schools and communities to also see and value their son or daughter and to actively work with them on these same outcomes.

The following 6 Elements of Friendship Development are based on a PATTAN Webinar Series (2013) by Erik Carter, Vanderbilt University, archived on the PATTAN website at <http://bit.ly/2Ij1bb>.



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What Parents Can Do

ELEMENT 1: **Shared Activities** (same activities, same time, same place)

- Provide information and support to identify needed adaptations and modifications to ensure the maximum participation of all the children within an activity.
- Provide needed transportation to and from activities outside of the school activities. This is especially important if the child is not in their local school.
- Invite others to join in activities such as movies, sporting activities, parties, community parades, the library or classes.
- Make sure your home and yard are welcoming to all kids. Make sure there are a variety of activities available that would attract other children to want to come to your home or yard to play.



- Ask parents of the kids you invite to identify their child's favorite or preferred activity and arrange the play date around that activity, applying any adaptations or modifications that your child might need.
- Explore community activities where other children might gather. Some examples include museums, playgrounds, children's theater, and scheduled community parades, among others. Check websites and resources in the appendix.

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if other students have
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What Parents Can Do

ELEMENT 2: **Shared Interests**



- Ask school staff if other students have similar interests as their son or daughter. They can share information on what they have observed as an interest or skill in their child.
- Clearly articulate their vision regarding their son's or daughter's participation in activities or clubs.
- Review their son's or daughter's IEP with the team to ensure they are being given the same opportunities as all to participate in clubs, classes and activities as others who share their specific interests and skills.
- Allow staff to share contact information with other families whose children may be interested in joining your son or daughter in an activity.
- Attend kid-friendly activities your child likes and you will find other children with similar interests.
- Strike up conversations with other parents in attendance and "invite" others into your circle.
- "Include" yourself in the life of the school so that you are part of the school and familiar with the activities and people involved.
- Use an "about me" sheet at IEP meetings to help others get to know your child, as a person first, with the same basic needs and goals as others. An "about me" sheet offers others a brief personalized glimpse of your child.
- Understand that children separated from their peers in special classes may have fewer opportunities to interact with their typically developing peers.

What Parents Can Do

ELEMENT 3: Valued Roles for All

- Share the strengths and primary interests of your child. Parents are the closest to their child and hold the vision of what makes their child's life meaningful now and in the future. Activities and experiences of today are building that future.
- Parents are important models of how to interact with the child with a disability. Siblings will look toward this model of interaction. Do you encourage your children to play together or just to help their sibling?



- Share the thoughts of Rosemary Crossley, Australian educator and developer of Facilitated Communication, who is often quoted as saying, "Not being able to speak is not the same as not having anything to say." All children communicate but that communication is not always in the form of verbal speech. Observations of the child's movements, facial expressions, eye movements, and vocalizations can provide valuable information about the child's likes, dislikes or interests.



What Parents Can Do

ELEMENT 4: Share Information about each Other

- Share with other parents that you are working to find friends and activities for your child. They might be looking for friendships as well.
- Share information with the people in your child's life regarding their disability, their preferred means of communication, their interests, their family, their hopes and dreams and what makes them comfortable in a new situation.
- Model the behavior and communication you use to ensure your child is included in family activities. Understanding communication preferences increases the comfort level of all.
- Maintain the focus on strengths and likenesses.
- Provide positive feedback by smiling and welcoming those who approach you and your child.
- Share information on how your family routinely adapts to situations, conversations and events to maximize the participation of all family members.
- Develop a clearly defined vision of your child's future. This dream should be a reflection of your child's hopes and goals in life. Articulate that vision to all that come into contact with you and your child so that they can join you in achieving those goals.
- Visit Supporting Families at <http://supportstofamilies.org/> for tools and other supports that can help parents create good lives for their children with disabilities. Share those tools with those on the team that supports your child.

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What Parents Can Do

ELEMENT 5: Just Enough Support from Adults

- Allow your child to participate in community activities of all kinds. There can be a certain amount of risk and anxiety about participation in activities that are not designed specifically for students with disabilities. It is worth the risk. Your child will learn something and so will his/her peers!



- Be ready to share information on adaptations and accommodations that would maximize your son or daughter's participation.
- Actively advocate for your son's or daughter's participation in a class, group, club or event. Be aware of other advocates who can help.
- Your child may be on a developmental level and presents with "skills" that are on a "younger" level on the developmental scale but you should not lower your expectations for the life outcomes for your child. Higher support needs does not mean lowered expectations for the quality of life for your child. Have high expectations for yourself and your child.
- Teach your child self-advocacy skills so they can help others understand their needs and wants. This is a critical skill at all stages of life.

FRIENDS

What Parents Can Do

ELEMENT 6: Reflection

- Use the IEP meeting to review with the team (including your child, same-age peers, siblings and teachers) the importance of friendships and your child's place within the school community.
- Share successes and challenges and ask for the team's collaboration in strategizing for success.
- Honestly assess your own beliefs or practices regarding friendship facilitation and make changes to meet the needs and goals of your child.

Teach your child self-advocacy skills so they can help others understand their needs and wants.

NOTES: