

tips for peers



Friendships: Building a Good Life



Friendship development is important to PEERS!

A recent study by Princeton University (2015) looked at the long-term outcomes for a group of more than 800 young people in their 20s. Twenty years ago, when this group was attending Kindergarten, they were tested and rated by their teachers. The students who were most successful and respected as adults were not necessarily students who scored high on academic predictors during Kindergarten testing. The students who were successful adults 20 years later had demonstrated a high degree of empathy and acceptance of differences during their early school years. This study illustrates how it is essential that all children learn empathy, understanding and the value of diversity. Teaching social skills to children at an early age is beneficial to all.



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/2lj11bb>.



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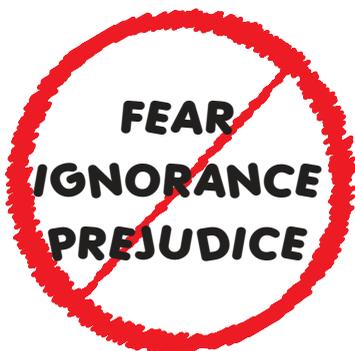
What Peers Can Do

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

- Identify where the “action” is within the school. Ask peers to identify the common activities, locations, times and where all students hang out.



- Participate in IEP meetings or planning meetings to provide input regarding the best places for students to get together.
- Be brave! If there is a fellow student you observe who may appear isolated within the school setting, in a social situation or in your neighborhood take the first step and approach them. Be the person who opens the door for them to participate in the same activities, at the same time, in the same place. You can be a role model for your friends and you can make a big difference in the life of another person.
- Share creative solutions that can be made to have the individuals with a disability attend the event in a meaningful way. For example, everyone is going skateboarding and the child with the disability has not mastered the art of skateboarding. Siblings or peers can brainstorm ways to ensure meaningful participation. Can the child be the “judge” and score the different jumps or moves? This way the child develops the same vocabulary and can interact with his/her peers around this activity.



What Peers Can Do

ELEMENT 2: **Shared Interests**



- Invite their classmates to participate in groups or clubs of shared interests. They can act as the liaison with their peers who may feel uncomfortable in the presence of a person with a disability.
- Help to identify what accommodations might be needed for maximum participation.
- Provide introductions to fellow club members.
- Provide “positive interpretation” by way of an introduction. Example: Introduce their peer and add details about what she/he has in common with the others in the group. “Hey, this is Bill. He’s in biology class with me and he loves to play the drums.”



What Peers Can Do

ELEMENT 3: Valued Roles for All

- Presume competence and advocate for others to do the same.
- Ask respected adults and family members about the best ways to provide natural support to highlight and show off the skills of the child.
- Attend meetings and trainings for school-established groups, such as peer mentoring and peer-support groups.
- Be a peer leader and act as a role model within the school setting by engaging in positive interactions with all students. You can create systemic change within the school culture by your actions. Peers often look to each other for guidance and can impact positively on the school culture (Flanagan, 2016).

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What Peers Can Do

ELEMENT 4: Share Information about each Other

- It can feel uncomfortable approaching a person who is different from you. Start by just saying “Hi!”
- Ask trusted adults or siblings of the child, respectful questions about the child’s preferred means of communication and interaction style or about information on a specific disability. Each child is an individual. Each person is unique regardless of a shared “diagnosis”.
- Talk to your peers about your interests, activities, classes and your family. Reflect on the commonalities shared among same-age peers.
- Be aware that your need for companionship, fellowship and belonging is shared by ALL of your peers regardless of communication styles, physical differences or support needs.



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What Peers Can Do

ELEMENT 5: *Just Enough Support from Adults*

- Work in groups for cooperative learning and project-based learning.
- Provide feedback for peers on appropriate social and behavioral norms for a wide variety of settings.
- Feedback and modeling from peers can be more effective than information from adults.
- Talk directly to your peer. Do not talk to the support person as a way to have a conversation with your peer. Make eye contact with your peer and direct your conversation to your peer. The adult is there to support, but not be the primary person in the conversation.

What Peers Can Do

ELEMENT 6: *Reflection*

- Observe your peers for signs that they value the importance of friendship for all.
- Check your own thoughts and actions when it comes to friendship development with your peers. Are there peers who are always left out? Is there anyone who steps in to intervene?
- Observe how your school environment reflects or does not reflect a positive welcome culture for all.

FRIENDS

NOTES: