

tips for teachers & support personnel



Friendships: Building a Good Life



Friendship development is important to **TEACHERS AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL**

The creation of a strong and positive school culture is critical to learning. A school culture where all are welcomed, valued and protected is an environment where children can learn.

“What is essential is invisible to the eye” is a quote from *The Little Prince*, a favorite book of Fred Rogers. Mr. Rogers firmly believed that “It’s through relationships that we grow best and learn best” (Li, 2016). By addressing friendship development for all children, schools can create environments where all are safe and welcome regardless of differences. By creating environments where all are emotionally safe, teachers can create spaces where true learning can happen.



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/2ljJ1bb>.



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What Teachers & Support Personnel Can Do

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

- Examine, as a staff, their current school practices regarding opportunities for students to genuinely share activities. Do some students change classes at times before or after other students? Is there a “special” lunch table for students receiving special education services? Are these “special” circumstances hindering friendship development?



- Ensure that all students have a chance to answer and ask questions within classes and activities.
- Think about group activities and how to create universal instruction that allows all to participate in a meaningful way.
- Ensure that students needing/using assistive devices have them available at all times to guarantee their maximum participation. Ask support staff to provide training and information on devices to increase ease of use.



What Teachers & Support Personnel Can Do

ELEMENT 2: **Shared Interests**



- Survey students about their interests in school activities, hobbies, music, technology, exercise, favorite classes and sports.
- If there are other students with similar interests, offer information on how the students could explore those shared interests. Are there clubs or community events? Explore the possibility of the parents sharing contact information.
- Help to develop relationships by modeling “positive interpretation.”
- Be aware of environmental arrangements that might send the wrong message. Example: teacher between student with a disability and a peer. Peers should be seated next to one another.
- Be aware of students who naturally interact with one another. Ensure they have adequate opportunities to spend time together on assignments, projects, cooperative learning groups or clubs. Children cannot be “assigned” to become friends, but friendships may develop around a shared interest or a comfort with one another.

Think about group activities and how to create universal instruction.

What Teachers & Support Personnel Can Do

ELEMENT 3: *Valued Roles for All*

- Teachers create the culture in a classroom. Students look to them to determine how to treat one another. Teachers can model respectful interactions with all students.
- Model that one should never assume that a student is waiting to be “helped”, but rather ask each student if assistance is needed prior to rushing in to provide support.
- Presume competence in all students and model that as common practice in the classroom.
- Look for ways in which all students can assume a leadership role in the classroom. Example: Students can teach each other sign language or learn about electronic communication devices. In younger classes, rotate classroom jobs to ensure that all students are given a chance to assume the more desirable tasks, adapting the tasks to address the needs of individual.
- During cooperative learning groups, rotate the roles within the groups when working on projects. Provide needed adaptations or supports for all students to assume leadership roles.



What Teachers & Support Personnel Can Do

ELEMENT 4: *Share Information about each Other*

- Schools must create a culture where all are welcome.
- Staff must be given training regarding different disabilities and the educational and emotional needs of all students. Training and administrative leadership in creating a positive school environment provide benefits for all learners in the schools.
- Seek information from families regarding the specific needs of students, both academically and socially.
- Equip peers with the knowledge, information, training and skills to provide natural supports to others in both academic and social settings.
- Include information and books on disabilities in required reading lists.
- Include books in the school library about children living with disabilities.
- Ask disability organizations to provide informational sessions on specific disabilities.

Include information and books on disabilities in required reading lists.



What Teachers & Support
Personnel Can Do

ELEMENT 5:
*Just Enough Support
from Adults*

- Allow students to provide support and assistance to one another prior to adults intervening.
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to support one another. There are classrooms where the students are told to ask for the assistance of two peers prior to asking the adults in the room.
- Provide information and teaching on social skills that are usable for all in the adult world.
- Teach students how to communicate effectively and respectfully with peers and how to resolve differences.
- Observe more than act. Observe what is needed. Offer thoughts to facilitate the meaning of communication attempts and interpret actions.
- Make sure the adults do not stand in the way between the child and their peers. Students who are supported by an adult should not become a separate unit within the classroom.

FRIENDS

What Teachers & Support
Personnel Can Do

ELEMENT 6:
Reflection

- Talk with other staff to fully examine beliefs and practices of friendship facilitation within the school culture.
- Is there an organized effort to ensure that all are welcome and valued in the school?
- Are there policies, practices or demands that create barriers to friendship development?

NOTES: