


The Power of Connection: Peers

Presented by Andrea Beachnau



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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*

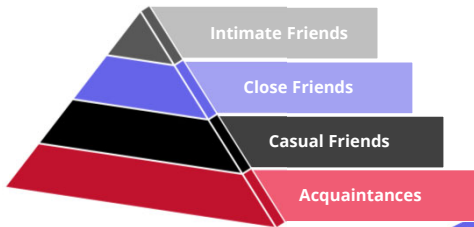

Friend /frend/ noun

- 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 & Diversity
- 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



- Inclusion From the Start
- Promote Disability History/Awareness
- Advocate for Accessibility for All



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Inclusion From the Start

- Universal Design
- National Policy & Legislation
- Inclusive Employment
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Independent Living



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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



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



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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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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	Participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	Participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Mutually Beneficial • Peers Viewed Differently • Lowers Expectations • Power Over Another • Perpetuates Ableism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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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Back to The Dance






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Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Michigan's federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

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