

# 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/2ljj1bb>.



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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.

*Ask school staff  
if other students have  
similar interests  
as their son or daughter.*

## 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.

*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.*

## 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:

# 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/2lj1bb>.



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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:

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# tips for siblings



## Friendships: Building a Good Life



### Friendship development is important to SIBLINGS!



Siblings are the first peers to spend extended time together, and they see their sibling as a valued person.

Like their parents, they want others to see their sib in the same way. They are often on guard for people who do not know their sib as they do. They are affected by negative comments or interactions with their brother or sister. They fear that their sibling will be dismissed, mistreated or seen as inferior. Like their parents, they see their brother or sister as “typical,” and they want the world to see them the same way.

In their day-to-day life, they participate in common activities and naturally make the needed adaptations in communication and activity levels. They act as untrained “facilitators” daily.

#### What Siblings Can Do

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

- Sibs can observe their sibling with a disability in the community and identify areas where there are opportunities for shared activities. Is there a community event – like a football game, pep rally or school groups that regularly meet – that will be attended by other students in the same age range as their sibling?
- Teach your sibling the latest game or computer app so that they have the same understanding and language for what is popular among their peers.
- Invite your friends to your home and share activities with your sibling so that others can come to know your sibling.

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## What Siblings Can Do

### ELEMENT 2: Shared Interests

- Sibs often know their brother or sister well and can identify the activities and clubs that may be of interest to their sibling. They also can identify where in school or the community those interests might be explored and how to sign up or join.



- Introduce, teach and practice skills with their sibling that may be of interest to same-age peers. Examples include video games, use of mobile apps, age-appropriate TV shows or movies, sports, sports figures, musical instruments, current music and performers.
- Provide support and “positive interpretation” of their sib. They know what their sibling enjoys, dislikes, and how they express themselves. They can offer information and assist in communication when others are unsure of the messages being conveyed.

Provide support  
and “positive  
interpretation” of  
your sib.

## What Siblings Can Do

### ELEMENT 3: Valued Roles for All



- Are you always in a helping role? How can you set up ways for your sibling to help you or play in a way that establishes common ground?
- Look for outside resources like sibling groups, which can help you find ways to interact with your sibling in different ways. Exposure to how other family models work can help you to best determine the type of relationship you will have.
- It also is helpful to gain skills about how to provide guidance to others on how to interact with your sibling. It is better to provide information rather than shutting out people who may not have much knowledge.
- Model ways of interacting with your sibling that demonstrate respect for their communication style, age, and value as a person. Show people that your sibling is not a “baby” in a grownup body.



## What Siblings Can Do

### **ELEMENT 4:** *Share Information about each Other*

- Make sure your friends and classmates see how to effectively communicate respectfully with your sibling.
- Model the behavior you hope to see in others when interacting with your sibling.
- Provide examples of how your sibling expresses interest in something or how effective adaptations and accommodations can be in maximizing their participation and enjoyment.
- Offer thoughts to facilitate the meaning of communication attempts and interpret actions of your sibling.
- Don't be put off by inquiring stares from others. Smile and offer to start a conversation.

*Model the  
behavior you hope to  
see in others when  
interacting with your  
sibling.*



## What Siblings Can Do

### **ELEMENT 5:** *Just Enough Support from Adults*

- Provide parents with feedback on their worries about the value of taking risks.
- Role play with his or her sibling at home to practice rules, roles and routines needed within particular settings.
- Encourage others to rely on peers or siblings to provide support for their sibling, instead of paid adults.
- Model how best to support their sibling in the least intrusive ways.



## What Siblings Can Do

### **ELEMENT 6:** *Reflection*

- Talk with or observe your sibling and get feedback on how they feel their relationships with peers are going.
- Think carefully about what may or may not be working to ensure that your sibling is able to have maximum opportunities to develop friendships.
- Be part of the team that examines how things are going and provide honest and open input into the process.

**FRIENDS**

## NOTES:



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# 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.



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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).

*You can create systemic change within the school culture by your actions.*



## 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.



*Companionship, fellowship and belonging is shared by ALL of your peers regardless of communication styles, physical differences or support needs.*

## 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:



# tips for communities & society



## Friendships: Building a Good Life



### Friendship development is important to COMMUNITIES & SOCIETY

Friendship development helps to build the communities we want all of our children to experience. We want a world where all are accepted and, by virtue of their birth, are seen as part of the whole. We want a place where differences are embraced and understood—not just tolerated and accepted.

Friendship development for children with disabilities creates a future world where, as adults, their peers become their employers, support personnel, doctors, neighbors and friends. Children with disabilities become adults who are seen as equal participants in recreation and leisure activities and active community members with the support needed to navigate in their adult world.



People who grow up together and share experiences together become adults who are comfortable and welcoming when encountering diversity in their communities and work places. We all need to work to create a community and society that is welcoming for all. We want to live in a world that values the individual gifts of all.

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## What Community & Society Can Do

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

- Provide a range of activities across a variety of interests, skills and ages.
- Ensure that staff is aware of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the protections it provides for the participation of all community members in activities open to the general public.



- Seek input from representatives within the disability community when designing areas and activities for community participation.
- Members of community groups—and society in general—should examine their belief systems regarding the place of people with disabilities in society.

*Seek input from representatives within the disability community when designing areas and activities for community participation.*

## What Community & Society Can Do

### **ELEMENT 2:** **Shared Interests**



- Be aware that the interests of children with disabilities most likely mirror that of the general population.
- When planning activities, adhere to the principles of universal design, which ensures many ways to access the same activity.
- Understand that beliefs about people with disabilities should be examined. As a society we must presume that all people are capable of developing friendships (O'Brien & O'Brien, 1993).



## What Community & Society Can Do

### ELEMENT 3: Valued Roles for All

- Make sure the composition of boards, committees and panels is representative of the population as a whole, including those with disabilities.
- When questions arise about issues related to disability within the community, seek out answers from the “experts” — those living with disabilities themselves.
- Review the *10 Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities*, which were originally developed by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. The 10 Commandments can be found on a variety of disability-related websites, including [ucp.org](http://ucp.org) under Explore Resources > Disability Etiquette.
- Ensure that all employees, including those with disabilities, have opportunities to interact with all children in your community activities.
- Highlight the valued roles people with disabilities have in their communities.



## What Community & Society Can Do

### ELEMENT 4: Share Information about each Other



- Consult with adults with disabilities regarding recommended films that show disabilities in a positive light. Offer these films as part of the schedule of films for community nights.
- Ask families and disability advocates for recommendations of children’s books to be included in your local library. These books should represent children and people with disabilities as members of schools, communities and families.

*Ask families and disability advocates for recommendations for children’s books to be included in your local library.*

What Community & Society  
Can Do

**ELEMENT 5:**  
*Just Enough Support  
from Adults*

- Be open to the participation of all children in the activities offered in your neighborhood or community.
- Brainstorm solutions to issues or questions of access or participation. Consult with organizations or parents of children with disabilities to find the answers.
- Change the dialogue! The question should never begin with “Why. . .” but instead “How can we. . .?”
- Resist the temptation to create “special activities” for “special people.” Rather, create opportunities for all people within the community to come together.

What Community & Society  
Can Do

**ELEMENT 6:**  
*Reflection*

- Ask your group or organization if you are adapting to the needs of all the children in your community. Are you asking children with disabilities to conform to your set policies or practices?
- Ask yourself if your policies and practices value all your citizens and create an atmosphere and culture of welcome

**FRIENDS**

NOTES:

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