

**Friends Matter!
Promoting Authentic Social
Opportunities for All**

**13th Annual “Focus” on Vision Impairment
and Blindness Conference
Norwood, MA**

Why is Friendship Important?

Benefits of Friendship

- **Results in personal benefit**
- **Facilitates developmental gains**
- **Leads to positive school outcomes**
- **Protects against bullying experiences**
- **Enriches individual lives**
- **Creates community**

Rossetti, Ross, & Brennen, 2017

Consequences of Social Isolation

- **Individuals with IDD tend to be:**
 - **Socially isolated**
 - **On the social periphery of inclusive settings**
 - **Less likely to interact with peers outside of school**
- **Social isolation is a risk factor for death.**

Ingram & London, 2015; Orsmond, Krauss, & Seltzer, 2004; Tipton, Christensen, & Blacher, 2013

TRUE FRIENDS ARE
HARD TO COME BY.



The First Strategy...

Develop a friendship mindset.



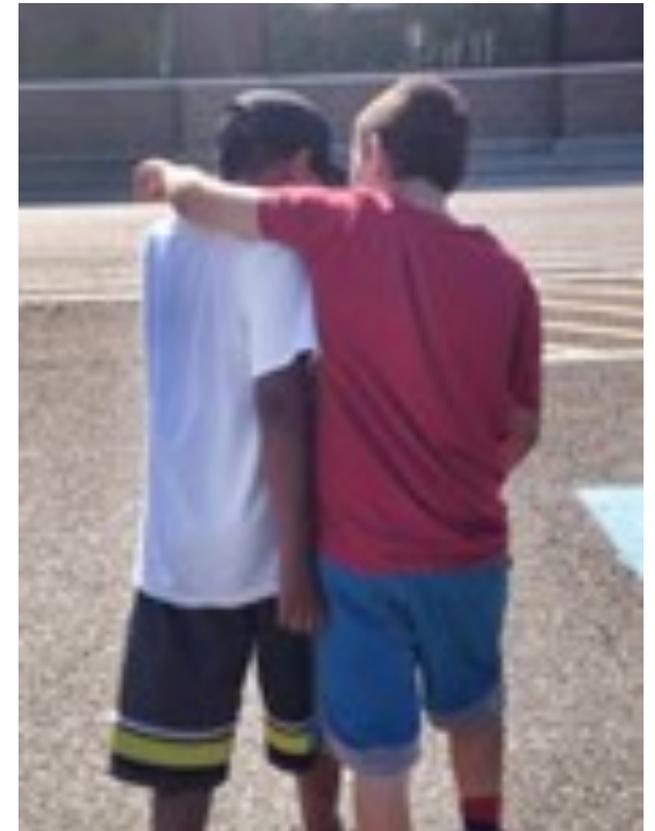
Friendship Mindset

- **Recognize the importance of friendship.**
- **Believe he/she would make a wonderful friend.**
- **Think constantly about social interaction opportunities.**
- **Consider the social implications of decisions.**

Strategies for Students of All Ages

Increase the QUANTITY of Social Opportunities by:

- Maximizing inclusion.
- Writing social goals into the IEP.
- Building bridges.
- Decreasing adult proximity.
- Being a facilitator.



What would you do differently?



One afternoon in history class, Megan's teacher handed out large manila envelopes containing all of the students' homework to date and a cumulative grade.

The students looked immediately to find their grades.

Megan's one-to-one para put Megan's envelope in Megan's bag even though she had not yet looked at it.

Students asked each other about their grades and chatted until the teacher began to review for the exam 90 seconds later.

Strategies for Students of All Ages

Improve the QUALITY of Social Opportunities by:

- Highlighting students' similarities.
- Interpreting student behaviors.
- Teaching students how to interact.
- Preparing students for social interactions.
- Conveying student strengths.



What can you do to help?



Sam is an 11-year-old with autism who has enjoyed being in elementary school and is now going to middle school. His classmates have known him since kindergarten and have included him in their activities both in and out of school. He loves sports (especially basketball) but can be overbearing and even “pushy” in wanting to do sports over other things. There is great concern by his parents as to how their son will keep connected or will make new friends especially in these critical years. They fear he will be known more by his autism (preoccupation with sports) rather than by who he is.

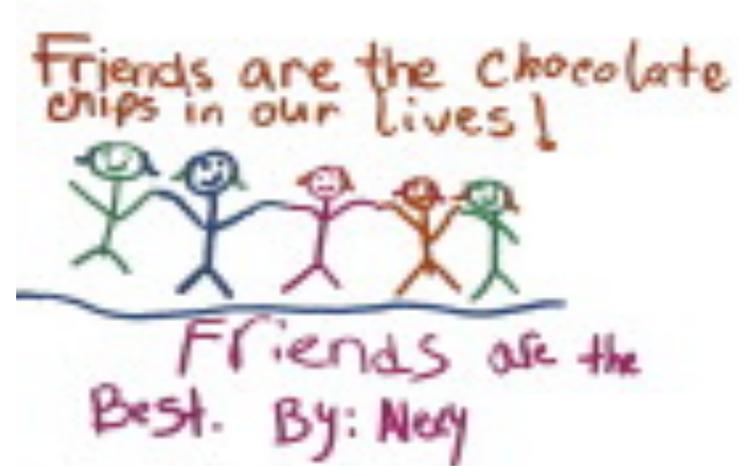
Provide direct support.

- Connection - performing actions that help to connect students who are not doing so on their own
- Interpretation - presenting the student to classmates in a positive and enhancing way
- Preparation - providing environmental accommodations and individual skill development

Adapted from Schaffner & Buswell, 1992

Friendship in Elementary School

“I am a friend when... I help people. Also when I play games with my friends. Then I be nice to people. I can also be honest. Friends are amazing.” – 1st grader



Strategies in Elementary School

- **Minimize the times that students are pulled out of the classroom.**
- **Monitor interactions to address classmates acting as adults.**
- **Proactively support inclusive play (for all students) at recess.**



What would you do?



Sarah, a third grader with Down syndrome and a vision impairment, wanted to jump rope with her classmates at recess.

She asked to be next but they ignored her.

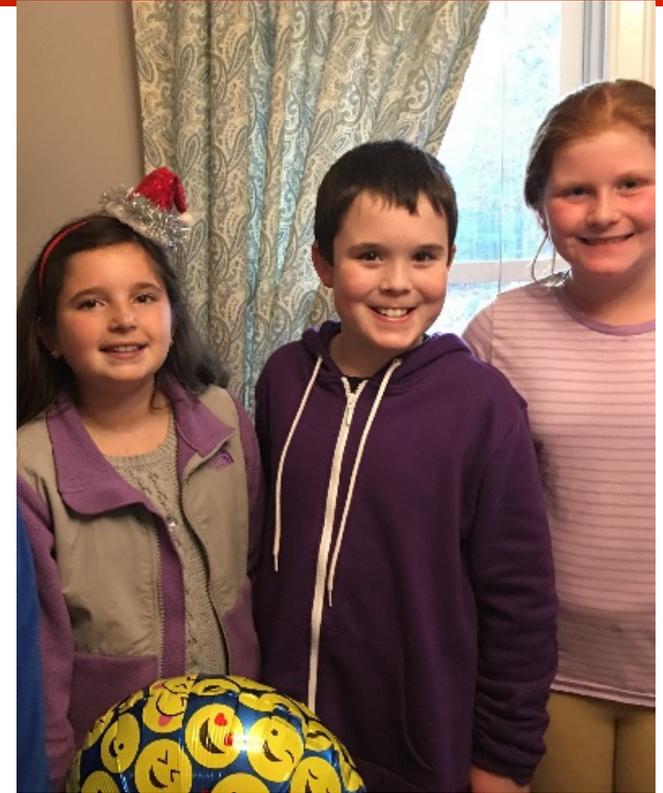
Several classmates took turns ahead of her.

Then Sarah walked in the way and grabbed the rope. She said it was her turn and wanted to play.

Her classmates yelled for the recess monitor.

Friendship in Middle School

“A friend to me is someone who will stick by you. Someone who will like you for being you. Someone who will want to play soccer, basketball, and maybe catch with me. A friend is someone that will pick you up when you are down. They don’t gossip or talk bad about you. Also, when you are with a friend you feel free.” – 6th grader



Strategies in Middle School

- **Schedule students with and without disabilities “who seem interested” in the same homeroom.**
- **Plan ahead for lunch in middle school.**
- **Consider supports to be as age- and culturally-appropriate as possible.**



What would you do next?



During last block, students are talking about the club they are going to after school.

Lisa, a 7th grade student with autism and intellectual disability who is non-verbal and uses an iPad to communicate, is also going to this club.

She looks up when the students are talking about the club but does not initiate interaction.

Friendship in High School

“I wanted to be friends with Sara (a classmate with Down syndrome) because she was always so fun and energetic in the mornings. She was always dancing in hallways. When I told my parents, they thought it was nice, but then they realized it wasn’t just me being nice. Sara was really fun and we were really friends.” – 9th grader



Strategies in High School

- **Support students with disabilities to travel to and from school as their peers do.**
- **Support students with disabilities to join interest-based clubs/activities and attend them without adults.**
- **Teach classmates/peers how to engage in “friendship work.”**



What would you do next?



During a pumpkin carving party in Mrs. Smith's room, Shane, a young man with autism and vision loss, stood quietly on his own.

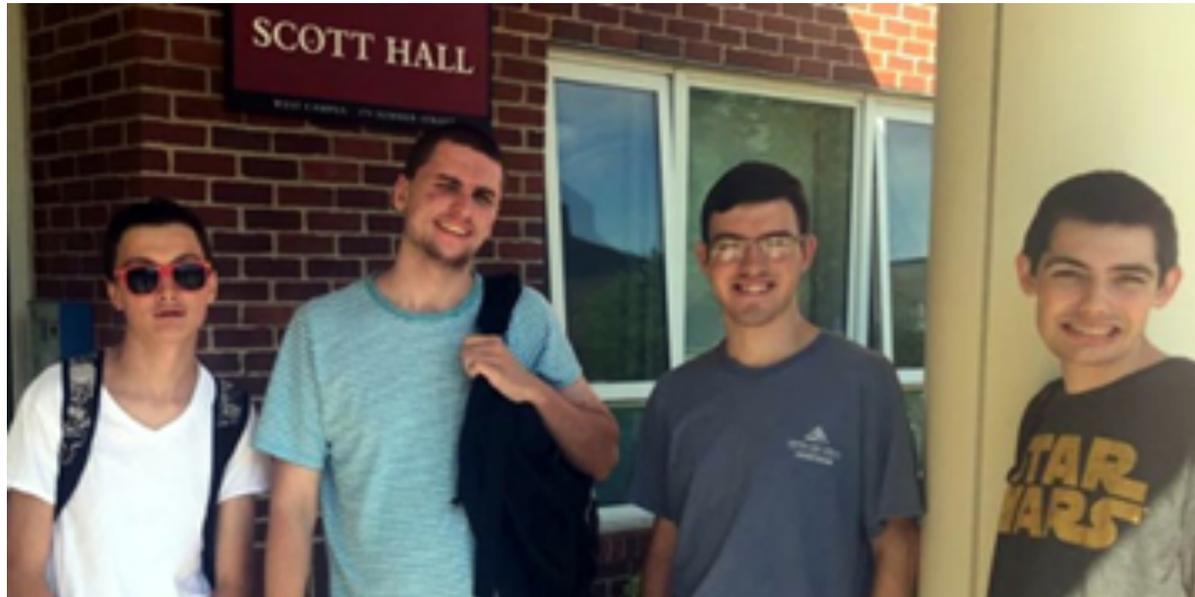
The other students were talking to each other and getting started on their pumpkins.

Shane started talking to himself a little louder and twirling his hands a bit.

He then started rocking back and forth.

Making Friends in College

"I feel I've grown a lot as a person since I've been living on the BSU campus. Not only have I gotten to know many new people, this has also been a great opportunity to further my independence." –College student



**think III
COLLEGE!**

**College Options for People
with Intellectual Disabilities**

Facilitating Social Opportunities Activity

- **Identify one social goal for the individual you support.**
- **What strategies will you implement?**
- **What strengths and interests can you incorporate?**

Category	Strategies	Strengths/Interests?
Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building bridges • Fading adult support • Modeling how to interact • Encouraging peers 	
Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conveying strengths and interests • Noting similarities • “Translating” behaviors • Providing real-time prompts 	
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social skills instruction • Pre-teaching, prepping • Providing visual supports or scripts 	

Resources

“MAKING FRIENDS With and Without Disabilities in School”

<http://thearcofmass.org/toolkit/>

Zachary Rossetti, Ph.D.

Boston University School of Education

zsr@bu.edu