

Pathways to Friendship

Supporting Friendships



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PATHWAYS TO FRIENDSHIP

Pathways to Friendship, is a collaborative initiative on social inclusion between the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and The Arc of Massachusetts.

Our goal is to address the isolation and loneliness of people with disabilities through:

- Exploring the benefits of relationships between people with and without disabilities
- Providing information and resources to help individuals, families and organizations engage in and sustain those relationships



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AGENDA

- Large Group Activity: Thinking about Friendship
- Benefits of Friendship
- Two Key Elements of Genuine Friendship
- Who is in Your Life?
- Hurdles to Friendship
- Friendship-Building Strategies
- Independent Activity: Relationship Circle
- Tools
- Independent Activity: Shared Interests Planning Tool
- Q & A
- Survey



Feel free to get up and move around as needed!

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THINKING ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

Think about a good friend in your own life

- How long have you been friends?
- Where/how did you meet?
- What is a quality or characteristic that you enjoy about your friend?



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TWO KEY ELEMENTS OF GENUINE FRIENDSHIP

- Freely Given
- Reciprocal



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FRIENDSHIPS BENEFIT EVERYONE

People with friends
are...

- **HAPPIER!**
- **HEALTHIER!**
- **SAFER!**



**"GOOD RELATIONSHIPS KEEP US HAPPIER AND
HEALTHIER. PERIOD."**

– Robert Walinger, Director of Harvard Study of Adult Development

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FRIENDSHIPS BENEFIT OUR FAMILIES

- Natural opportunities for respite
- Opportunities for other family members to connect
- Peace of mind knowing that your family member truly BELONGS
- Natural opportunities for your child to increase their social skills



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FRIENDSHIP IS FOR EVERYONE

Everyone Can Have and Be a Friend!



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ALL KINDS OF **GOOD RELATIONSHIPS**
ARE PART OF **THE GOOD LIFE**

Enduring, Good,
Loving, Supportive
Families Are
Wonderful

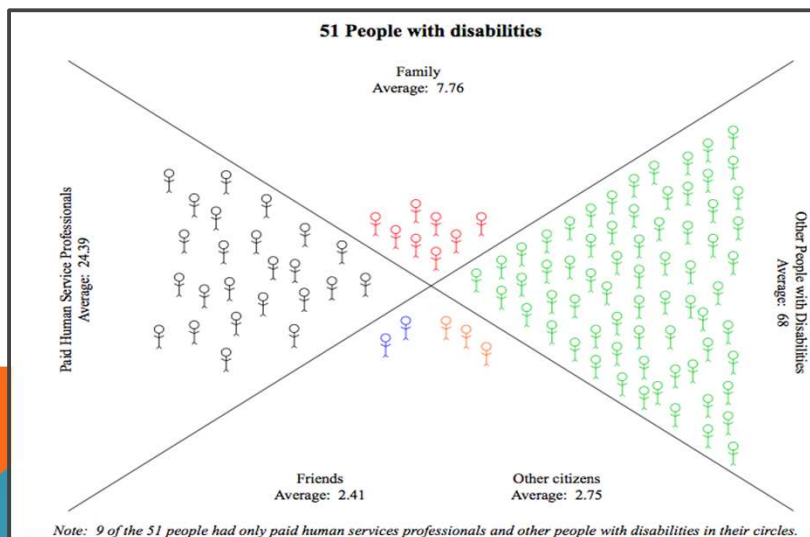
Enduring, Good,
Loving, Supportive
Staff Are
Wonderful

Enduring, Good,
Loving, Supportive
Disabled Friends
are Wonderful

ALL ARE IMPORTANT, BUT EVEN IF ALL
ARE PRESENT, THEY ARE NOT
ENOUGH

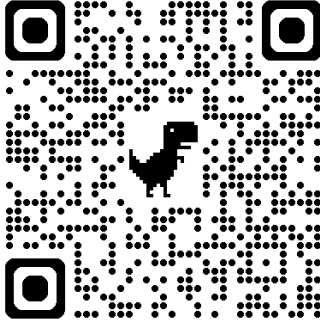
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WHO IS IN THEIR SOCIAL NETWORK?



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WHO'S IN YOUR LIFE?

Who's In Your Life? (51 people study - Starfire video)


 Starfire Cincy
 332 subscribers
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FRIENDSHIP




Beyond staff...
 Beyond family...
 Beyond only other people who experience disabilities...

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FRIENDSHIPS MATTER

A Story of Lemonade and Friendship

JONATHAN, PAUL AND BRITTANY

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I am very happy Paul and Brittany are great friends of mine. They make me smile. They both have hearts of gold.

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WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF FRIENDSHIP?



ATTITUDES:

- Believing it takes specialized knowledge or skills to interact with people with disabilities
- General feelings of fear, misunderstanding and pity towards people with disabilities

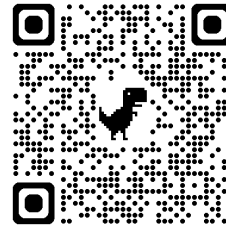
ENVIRONMENT:

- Fewer social opportunities than typical peers
- Inaccessible places
- Lack of transportation
- Non-Inclusive Schools, Classrooms, Programs
- Separation from peers due to paraprofessionals or other support staff

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A LIGHTBULB MOMENT

The Family Leadership Series:
A Lightbulb Moment



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7 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR FAMILY MEMBER MAKE FRIENDS

1. Identify Existing Relationships

- Relationships that can be deepened, for instance with acquaintances, co-workers or neighbors
- Reconnect with people from the past
- Find "Bridgebuilders"
 - People who can connect your family member to new people and activities. It could be a neighborhood child who is already part of the baseball league or a family friend that belongs to a music group

2. Identify and Share Gifts and Interests

- Figure out your family member's interests and their gifts
 - Not all gifts are apparent. Sometimes they are a happy disposition or a good sense of humor, other times they may be an ability to sit for a long time or being very talkative
- Figure out who would appreciate these gifts and share them with others
- Believe your family member has a lot to offer and would make a great friend

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3. Identify and Get Involved with the Right Places for Your Family Member

- Where do people with similar interests regularly gather. Where do the music lovers gather? What activities do sports fans regularly do?
- What environments and supports allow your family member to shine. What brings out the best in them? Do they like a lively noisy setting or a quiet one? Do they like being around young children? Animals?
- Once you have identified these places of common interest and positive environments, help them get involved, join and participate

4. Emphasize Similarities

- Use fashion and pop culture. Consider asking peers what is popular so your family member invites comments on their clothing, phone, etc
- Highlight roles that are valued by others. Such as brother, volunteer, girl scout, team member
- Empower your family member with the same language their peers are using (even if you have to program it into their AAC device)

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5. Do "The Ask"

- Even if there is a situation where friendships should occur organically, sometimes they still don't happen. You or another third party might need to initiate in order to grow the friendship
 - Help set up a time for the two potential friends to get together. We do this a lot when kids are young and call them "play dates" but this type of assistance still might be needed even as your family member gets older

6. Invite People Into your Life and Home

- Make your home the place people want to be; make it a fun place to get together! Invite others to do fun activities with your family
- Sign your family member up for community groups and activities that involve people from your neighborhood, community, or school
- Get to know other families to strengthen your kids' connections -- carpool, volunteer, host family dinners
- If you are too exhausted to do all of this, find someone else to step in. Use home support staff, adult friends, family

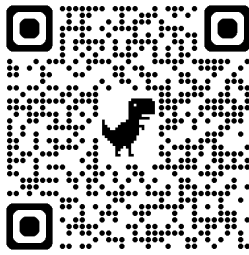
7. Use Your IEP and ISP to Support Friendship: These plans can focus on supporting social goals as well

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Facilitating Friendship: A Parent's Story

("Soft Acoustic Music")



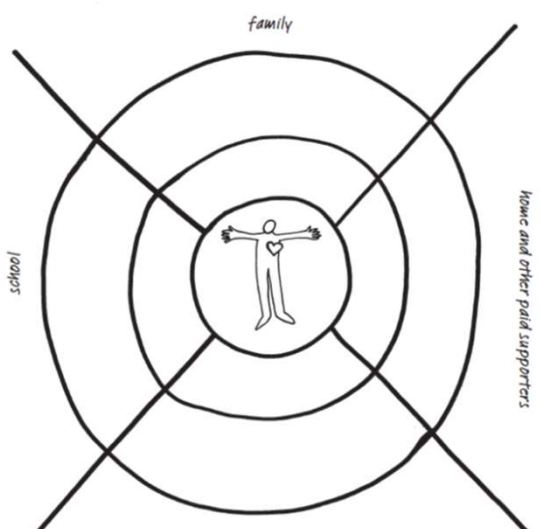
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IDENTIFYING SOCIAL NETWORKS

- Who is closest to your child?
- Who is in the outer circle that might move inward?
- Are there people from the past who can be brought back in? (Former friends, neighbors, or staff)
- Who might be a bridgebuilder? (Siblings' friends, family friends, work colleagues)

Relationship circle



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INTEREST INVENTORY

Flower shows		☐ No Interest	☐ Somewhat interested	☐ Very interested
Football		☐ No Interest	☐ Somewhat interested	☐ Very interested
Fruit picking-fall foliage		☐ No Interest	☐ Somewhat interested	☐ Very interested
Gardening		☐ No Interest	☐ Somewhat interested	☐ Very interested

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IDENTIFY WHERE PEOPLE GO REGULARLY WHO SHARE INTERESTS

- **Friendship Formula:** People are most likely to make friends when they see each other often and have shared interests
 - Choose activities with the **same people, same place, over time**

E.g: an afterschool activity, place of worship, recreational sport or club, job or volunteer work
 - Sufficient Support
- **Taking on Valued Roles**



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COMMUNITY MAPPING

Involves gathering information about the:

- Physical features (eg: parks, coffee shops, stores, pottery studio, yoga studio)
- Organizations (eg: clubs, faith communities, civic organizations)
- People (eg: Sarah, the barista)
- Opportunities for which people would travel further

Where could this person become a regular?

- Are there valued social roles there?
- Who could they connect with there?
- Who would appreciate them there?



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MAXIMIZING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

**WHAT COULD BE DONE TO IMPROVE
THE CHANCES OF DEVELOPING FRIENDSHIPS?**

**VOLUNTEERING TO WALK
DOGS AT YOUR LOCAL
SHELTER**

**Volunteering regularly on the same
days/times**

Team up with other volunteers

- Walk together
- Carpool

**Walk dogs in the community (e.g-
dog parks) and not just on the
shelter property**

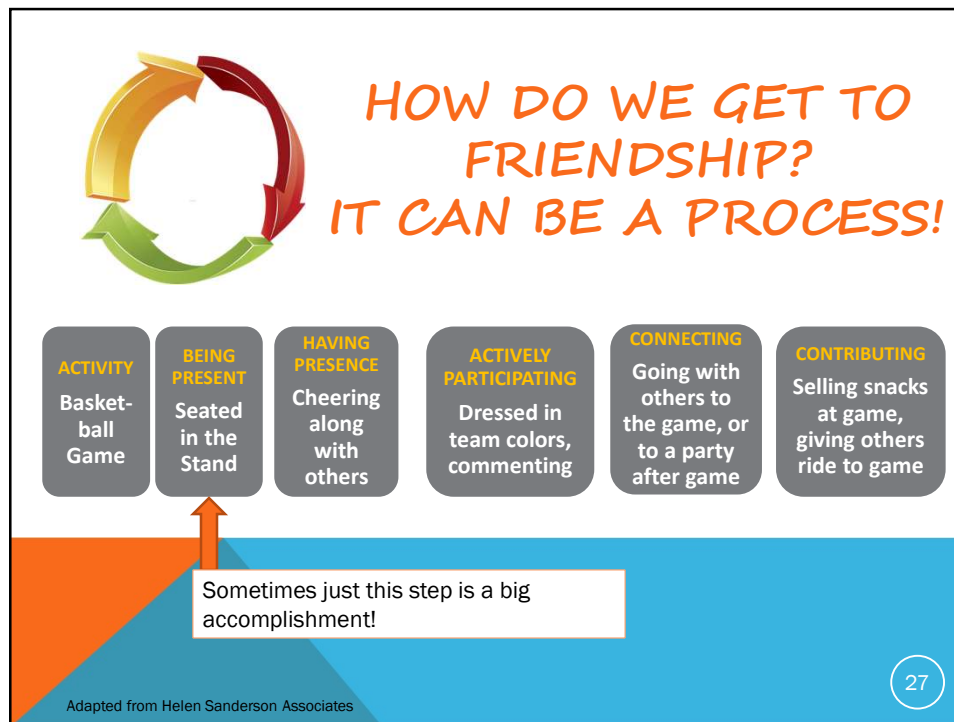


**WORKING OUT AT A LOCAL
FITNESS CENTER TWICE A
WEEK**

- **Same day(s) & time(s)**
- **Same fitness class(es) weekly**
- **Saying hello to other
“regulars”**



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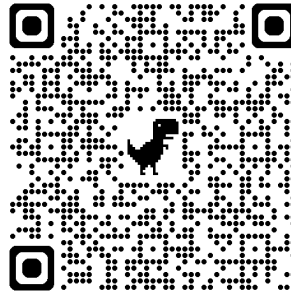
Brainstorm An Idea for Your Family Member:

- What activity?
 - One that meets regularly, not one-off
 - Doesn't have to be a formal activity, could be becoming a regular at the coffee shop or a member of a faith community
- How do they join/be present?
- How can they meaningfully participate?
 - Involves interacting with others
- How can connect?
 - Interacting outside the setting where they met
- How can they show reciprocity?

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LILLY & SYDNEY

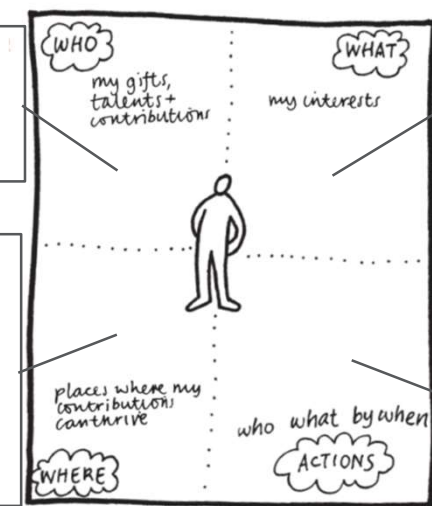


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IDENTIFY WHERE PEOPLE GO REGULARLY WHO SHARE INTERESTS:

- What are your child's gifts?
- What do others like and admire about your child?

- In what environments does your child thrive?
- Where do people regularly gather who share my child's interests?
- Where can they be a member?



- What are your child's interests and passions?

- Who can help connect your child to others with shared interests?
- What supports will be needed?
- When can this happen?

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USE THE IEP AND ISP TO SUPPORT FRIENDSHIP

Friendship is not a separate goal but should be built into other current goals. For instance, if working toward healthy living and exercise how can this be done in a way that encourages meeting other people? Instead of working out alone, can they join a Zumba class? Can they focus on reading with a partner?

- **IEP for School:** Remember, the school is responsible for your child's social and emotional progress, not only their academic progress! Use your IEP to ensure they have regular, meaningful opportunities to socialize with peers who do not have disabilities
- **ISP for Adults:** It is easy for adult service providers to get consumed with "health and safety." Remind them that research proves that relationships are a critical component to health and safety!



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SUSTAINING FRIENDSHIPS

Once a friendship develops, efforts are needed to sustain and grow it:

- **Trust & Reliability** – Being honest and dependable deepens bonds
- **Reciprocal & Support** – Balanced give-and-take in care, listening, and help
- **Emotional Openness** – Empathy, respect, sharing about selves, and constructive conflict management
- **Shared Experiences Over Time** – Creating memories together reinforces the relationship



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LET'S MAKE IT HAPPEN!



What is one thing you will commit to doing after this presentation that will increase the likelihood that friendship will develop between a person with and a person without a disability?

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Pathways to Friendship Resources

<https://thearcofmass.org/friendship/>

- Free Toolkits, Presentations, Friendship Stories, Networks, and more!

Download these TOOLKITS on How to Make Friends Where You...



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LEARN MORE IN THE TRAINERS CORNER

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Pathways to Friendship Toolkits QR Codes

Making Friends at Work 	Making Friends Where You Live 
Making Friends at School 	Making Friends in the Community 
	Friendship-Building for Community Organizations 

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THANK YOU!

Any Questions or Comments?

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