

## Social Connections

Grown ups as facilitators closing the friendship gap



## Mission

This interactive multimedia presentation seeks to remind us of the important role that friendship plays in everyone's life. Research indicates that children who experience disabilities have a more difficult time accessing social connections with peers. Adults can facilitate friendship making in classrooms, on sports teams, in church groups-anywhere in community. The presentation discusses the importance of friendship, how adults can support friendships for students regardless of ability and provides some tools to encourage lasting social connections.

## What is Friendship?

Common Ground    Mutuality    Chemistry    Intimacy  
 Affection    Bond    Reciprocity

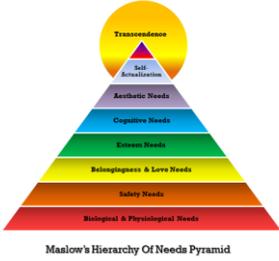
Friendship is a relationship of mutual affection between two or more people. [Oxford Dictionary]

Shared values, ideals, interests, likes/dislikes  
 Harmony    Accord    Understanding    Rapport  
 Relationship

Proximity does not equal friendship.

## Why is Friendship so Important?

- Abraham Maslow's groundbreaking work in 1970 demonstrated that in the hierarchy of human needs-A sense of belonging - the need for Friendship & Love-comes before mastery of skills.



Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs Pyramid

## Why is Friendship so Important?



- Friendship fosters a feeling of belonging and of personal worth.
- Without friendship societies would be isolated and alienated from one another.
- "Joy is connection." Social ties link with longevity, lower stress levels and improved overall well-being." The Harvard Grant Study, Triumphs of Experience: The Men of the Harvard Grant Study. Williams 2012.

## What Would it be Like if YOU Had NO Friends?

What would you feel like?

Yesterday, how would your day have been different?

## What are the Barriers to Friendship for Children with Special Education Needs?



The root of the problem is "Ableism"

## Ableism-A societal attitude that people with special needs are less worthy

• Ableism is [discrimination](#) against people who experience disabilities. The "ableist" societal world-view is that the [able-bodied](#) are normal and people who experience differences must either strive to become normal or become invisible.

• The ableist worldview says disability is an error, a mistake, or a failing, rather than a simple consequence of human diversity, akin to [race](#), [ethnicity](#), [sexual orientation](#) or [gender](#).

• Disability is then cast as a diminished state of being human.

• People who do not have a disability or who are not close to someone who does, might not understand how the world is wired for non-disabled people. Persons who experience disabilities face many barriers on a daily basis whether physical, attitudinal or systemic.



## The Eco-System of our Lives



## So let's remember, people who experience disability . . .

- are full human beings
- are worthy of you believing they can learn and grow
- have gifts and talents just like you
- have a difference about them just like any human characteristic
- are worthy of being celebrated for exactly who they are
- are more like you than different
- are competent perhaps in different ways
- are people first before their label

## Known barriers to friendship and tools for how you can break down the walls then build bridges instead!

- Pull-Outs from Class
- Self Contained Classrooms
- Resource Room
- "Little Bus"



## “Well Intentioned”



## Researchers Rosetti & Tashie report

- “students cite the continued use of pull outs, the obvious low academic expectations, ineffective and age-inappropriate curriculum modifications, the prevalence of ‘inclusion rooms,’ the over use of paraprofessionals and the culture of benevolence towards students with disabilities as real and seemingly insurmountable barriers to friendship.”



## Barrier: Paraprofessionals-The Tight Rope Walk

“I was kind of getting embarrassed because I always had, like a mother right there. People were like looking at me and stuff, and saying, ‘why do you always have this person with you who is twice as old as you?’”  
middle school student

“Students are denied typical opportunities to develop peer relationships and a sense of self that is so important for social-emotional maturation.”  
Dr. Mary Schab

Aid and Fade

“Oreo Story”



## Solution: Use a Child’s Multiple Intelligences

- By **knowing** the child and **understanding** how she or he learns, you can help **build esteem**, find **common interests** and **connect** the child to other children.



- “Meow Story”

## Inclusion Works



•What is inclusion?  
•Why does it work?

•Why it has to happen in order to build friendships?

“ It is better to be an insider going out, then an outsider going in” --- --Jeff Strully

## Strategies for Implementing Inclusion

### ◆ Learning to be Together by Being Together

- ◆ Pay Attention to the Sparks and Natural Connections
- ◆ Take Advantage of the Most Under-Utilized Resource: Students
  - The Knack of Talking with Kids
  - Ask Students General Fact Finding Questions
  - Ask Student Specific Questions
- ◆ Tell Students What They Want to Know
- ◆ Find an Insider

## Strategies for Implementing Inclusion

- ◆ Create Opportunities in Social Settings
- ◆ Find out and Support Whatever is Typical
- ◆ Use Get Acquainted Activities
- ◆ Avoid Clusters
- ◆ Be Visible
- ◆ Peer Advisory Boards
- ◆ Deconstructing the Passion

## Least Dangerous Assumption & Presuming Competence

Least Dangerous Assumption  
 states that in the absence of absolute evidence, it is essential to make the assumption that, if proven to be false, would be least dangerous to the individual. Absence of evidence can never be absolute evidence of absence, and as such, it is always safest and most respectful to make the least dangerous assumption.”

Presuming Competence  
 has intellectual ability, provide opportunities to be exposed to learning, assume the child wants to learn and assert him or herself in the world.” Douglas Biklen  
 Presume the child has a valuable social role.

## Solution: Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, Van Bockern, 1990)

- After observing a day in the life of a student Cathy Apfel asks the adults these four questions:
- Where in his life is the student able to give?
- Where does he belong?
- When is he trusted to be in charge of his decisions?

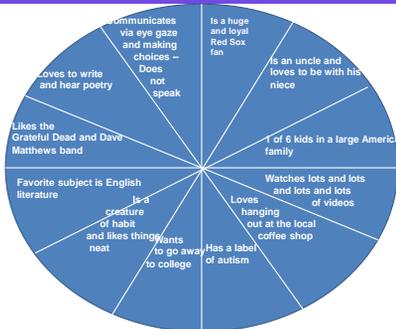


## More Strategies for Thinking Out of The Box to Facilitate Social Connections

- Who is this young person?
- What does she want?
    - What are her likes?
    - What does she dislike?
    - What are her gifts and strengths?
  - How does she spend her time?
  - How does she want to spend her time?
  - Who are the people in her life?
    - Who is missing?
  - What supports does she



## Another tool-Characteristics Pie



## Summary

- Think Out of the Box
- What Does the Child Need?
- What is BEST for the Child
- Make it Real
- It's about NEEDS not Wants
- Proximity Promotes Friendship



## Sources & Resources

- The Social Skills Picture Book by Jed Baker
- Carol Gray- Social Stories
- Brenda Smith Myles-Hidden Curriculum
- Parent Information Center- Disability Tool Kit
- Michelle Garcia Winner – [www.socialthinking.com](http://www.socialthinking.com), Superflex ... A Superhero Social Thinking Curriculum, and more publications
- PIC Disability Kit
- Northeast Passage (TREK)
- Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future by Larry Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern
- Jeff Strully
- Zach Rossetti & Carol Tashie
- Brendtro, Brokenleg, Ban Bockern, 1990
- Shaffer's work "The Characteristic Pie"
- Responsive Classroom
- Oerthwills. Anti-Bullying

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