

Friends Like YOU Friends Like ME



Many children with autism do not have the necessary social skills needed for socialization to play with peers. They do not learn naturally how to be spontaneous, interpret social action, pretend play, or play organized games. These skills need to be directly taught. As a result, it is often difficult for these children to join their peers in shared leisure activities.

Teachers can encourage positive peer interactions in subtle ways and discourage children with autism from being excluded from valuable peer activities. In the classroom, peer pals can help children with autism to interpret social cues, provide clear direction, and help encourage shared activities with other children. Peers may imitate the teacher's model of how to interact with students who have autism.

Shared play with typical peers is beneficial in the overall development of social behaviors including communication, understanding feelings, resolving conflicts, and sharing mutual interests. All of which support the development of meaningful friendships.

- Always convey a positive attitude when speaking about a child with special needs. Be conscious of how you react or respond to irregular behaviors. Children observe and model a teacher's approach and interactions. A teacher's exchanges and tone provide students with clues about how they should act. Demonstrate that each student is a valued part of the class.
- Children with autism may not be aware or may lack effective strategies to recognize and protect themselves from teasing and bullying. Research indicates only fifteen percent of bullying incidents are observed and many of those are treated as isolated incidents.
- Develop story boards or cartoons to help illustrate social interactions and feelings.
- In order to facilitate positive interactions, encourage activities that link students' capacities, and social skills. Look for shared common interests to pair peer pals who can assist or champion for their classmates with special needs. These pals can ease transitions, help other students understand sensitivities and mannerisms, and clarify appropriate social behaviors.
- Help guide the social atmosphere during transition periods (e.g. class changes, before school begins, walking to the playground, during assemblies, etc.) Initiate a topic of shared interest; invent a simple, fun game that can be shared by all; invite student suggestions for imaginative ways to change an activity.
- Help students understand and be responsive to social boundaries and sensitivities. Some children have difficulties with surprise interactions, close proximities, being touched, or large crowds.
- Help students understand different forms and tempos of communication. Provide practice to wait for responses and be attentive to alternative forms of expression.



- Request students to identify favorite games, playground, and sport activities and rules associated with those activities. Discuss how some children may not know, understand, or remember these rules. Ask students to exchange ideas on how to encourage all children to participate.
- Share information about alternate/augmentative forms of communication. Share how technology can increase the capacity of children with communication challenges (socially, academically, etc.)
- Share ways children can be disrespectful to others who are not like them. Evoke various ways of teasing and exclusion. Have students share personal experiences and feelings of being left out and teased.
- Solicit discussion or composition about three aspects of friendship: being kind; sharing something in common; and respect.
- Talk about the types of services your community provides for individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities. What can the class/school do to help?
- Have the students research what services the community provides for individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities. Lead discussion regarding if there are needed services which are not provided.
- Talk to the students in a foreign language or special code. Discuss ways they can “decode” the conversation and ways that could help them better understand (pictures, hand gestures, etc.)
- Teach students about social stories. Have students use pictures to create social stories about fun and interesting activities or events. Help them to describe the various aspects and expectations of the setting.
- Work with a student group to create an autism-related display about friendship for the local library.

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