

1 **BUILDING POSITIVE
AND SUPPORTIVE
PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

2021 TEXAS SYMPOSIUM ON DEAFBLIND EDUCATION

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3 **POSITIVE SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND FRIENDSHIPS
PROVIDE**

- Nurturance and support.
- Sense of belonging to a community.
- Opportunities to develop interpersonal skills while participating in social and educational activities.
- Positive attitude toward school.
- Increase in self-confidence and self-esteem.

4 **EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE
OF FRIENDSHIP**

- Supportive peer behaviors and friendship are not an educational area measured in yearly assessments.
- However, it is an important quality-of-life issue that has long-lasting impact on students' lives.
- Positive social skills are important to routines and activities at home, at school, and in community settings across the years.

5 **IMPORTANCE OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

- Peer relationships are fun, provide natural support, and a sense of community.
- Important Quality of Life satisfaction indicator.
- Natural experience in childhood and youth.
- Can be difficult to form and maintain for children and youth who are deafblind and emerging communicators.

6 **FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT
OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

- Limited opportunities to develop relationships if students and peers are segregated.
- Impact of limitations in vision, hearing, communication and social skills.
- Use of different modes of communication.
- Peers lack of awareness about sensory differences and the support needs of some learners.
- Insufficient use intervention strategies that facilitate reciprocal interactions and joint engagement in shared activities.

7 **PRESENT doesn't equal PRESENCE**

- Presence is essential to membership and social connection.
- People with a presence are known not just by name, but also for their interests, skills, and their unique support needs.
- People with a presence contribute something of value to the group or community.

8 **SUPPORTING DEVELOPING POSITIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

1. Increase opportunities
2. Provide information
3. Use effective facilitation strategies
 - Modeling
 - Coaching
 - Set-up, then fade
 - Encourage and support

9 **Expand Opportunities**

- Inclusive and integrated classes
- Use common spaces
- Engage in common activities at the same time
- Shared activities around shared interests
- Join or start clubs

10 **OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT**

- To build that connection between the student and their peers, the students need opportunities to learn to communicate and interact as directly as possible.

- A great question for adults providing support to ask is, “Do I need to do this with the student or could a peer do it instead?”

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A child with disabilities often spends hours being taught how to interact with others...

But why don't we spend time teaching those without disabilities how to interact with them?

Source: @asd_reading on IG

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12 **PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR RECIPROCAL POSITIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

- Provide ability awareness information that helps peers better understand their peer and supports they use.
- Teach peers about how student communicates.
- Identify shared activities that are interesting and can be easily modified.
- Create a judgement free zone.
- Encourage open communication. All questions are welcomed.
- Check in often with student and peers.

13 **PROVIDE INFORMATION**

- Reciprocal interactions occur when two or more people are able to communicate messages and share ideas and emotions easily with each other.
- If the partners don't communicate or express themselves in the same ways, it helps to provide information to bridge that barrier.
- Interest and questions by peers is a GOOD thing.
- Offering information helps peers feel more confident and comfortable in approaching, interacting and getting to know their peer who is deafblind.

14 **ABILITY AWARENESS**

- Be aware of the different abilities you want peers to understand.
- Your activity will be different based on the age range, the abilities, and the goals.

- Primary school example
- Secondary school example

15 **Information to share**

- Individual's interests, strengths and talents
- Emphasize similarities to peers
- Impacts of sensory losses
- Differences in communication
- Accommodations, equipment and other supports
- Ways to interact and engage in activities with peers

16 **FORMATS FOR PROVIDING INFORMATION**

- Whole class or small group presentations.
- Ability awareness fair or schoolwide event.
- Social group meetings, like lunch club or Sign Language Club.
- Sharing an *All About Me* book.
- Reading children's literature to class followed by discussion.
- In high school develop an elective class on diversity, that includes disability.
- Possibly through carefully planned simulation activities (see Julie's article about tips for planning these activities).
- Informally, as peers engage with each other in class and other school activities.

17 **WHO PROVIDES THE INFORMATION?**

A person with knowledge and experience with the information you're sharing. It could be:

- The student or another person who is deafblind or has a disability.
- Teacher, intervener, or other related service provider.
- Parent or sibling.
- Informed peers who know the student.

18 **CONNECT WITH THE TEACHERS TOO**

- Ability Awareness activities helps general education teachers and school staff too.
- Modeling for everyone.

- Positive talk ALWAYS around other teachers and staff.
- Stand up for your students, even if it is just gently correcting others' impressions or expectations.
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19 **ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS...**

- Peers are watching and listening to how adults treat, interact and speak to students with disabilities.
- Demonstrate respect and high expectations.
- Staff needs diversity and ability awareness training too.

20 **FACILITATE RATHER THAN DIRECT**

- Be a BRIDGE, not a barrier, for peer interactions.
- Lead by example.
- Use peers as social role models during typical school routines.
- Point out connections between the students.
- Be creative when identifying shared activities and ways for student to participate with peers.
- Prepare the environment for interactive opportunities.

21 **PROVIDE A MODEL OF POSITIVE, RESPECTFUL INTERACTIONS WITH THE STUDENT**

- Provide a positive, age-appropriate model for peers and others. Interact with the student in a positive, fun, humorous manner.
- Direct interactions to the student, ensuring that they are the focus and receiver of information.
- Direct peers' questions when appropriate to student and support them to answer peers.
- Model interactions with the student. Demonstrate how to use adaptive materials, equipment, communication system, assistive technology.

22 **USE COACHING AND MODELING TO BUILD SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE**

Some areas to target:

- Getting to know the student and their interests, skills, dreams etc.
- Learning specific signs or signed phrases.
- Use of a tactile or photo or picture communication system.

- Interpreting a peer's vocalizations or speech.
- Completing a particular routine or activity.
- Types of questions or prompts to offer when completing a class assignment or playing a game together.

23 **QUALITY OVER QUANTITY**

- Start with a focus on developing a few strong, sustainable relationships.
- These relationships can expand to more friends through peer connections.
- Identify peers who share interests and interaction style. This is what typically draws kids together.
- The same goes for activities and events. Focus on enjoyment and meaningful participation.

24 **Final Thoughts...**

“Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.”

~Helen Keller

25 **Two articles about building and supporting positive peer relationships**

- Julie wrote these two articles for the CDBS reSources newsletter. They provide more information about the practices we discussed in this presentation.
- *Creating connections requires opportunities, informed peers and facilitation (pp.9-11):*
<http://files.cadbs.org/200002726-cae03cae04/reSourcesFall2019.pdf>
- *Building peer partnerships through information provision (pp. 1-4):*
https://cdbs.webnode.com/_files/200002740-926a8926a9/CDBSreSources2020Spring.pdf