

## *Creating a friendship-friendly environment*

1. Revisit policies and procedures to check that they support inclusive practice. Policies should help friendships to happen, manage risk and safety and support informal networks.
2. Support people to nurture friendship, to make and maintain connections.
3. Raise expectations – everyone who wants to can have friends. Promote the value of friendship to family, carers and professionals. If necessary, work with the person to grow self-esteem and social confidence.
4. Be aware of all opportunities that could possibly extend networks.
5. Promote social skills and possibly offer training – but be clear what this is about. Learning when it is OK to touch, skills needed in meeting new people. Know the rules - e.g. recognise when it is OK to have a chat.
6. Share stories – ‘therapeutic grumbling’ can allow the person to subsequently listen to other points of view.
7. Extend invitations to include the person. Pick your time to visit and introduce people. Introductions are easier if the person has a role. Ask questions, show interest and locate some common ground. Encourage a two way process. Shared activities and a variety of them are better than sitting around in a group. Create opportunities for one-to-one time.
8. Use a variety of activities within the local community. Provide specialist equipment if needed.
9. Hosts that give clear information and instructions will help people to feel OK rather than confused. Well signposted buildings reduce the number of people who get lost. Install coffee machines and comfortable chairs. Try to create a relaxing atmosphere. Lay the room out in a way that promotes connections.
10. Ensure that the person has regular contact with others throughout the day. Be aware of the person’s boundaries. Find out their likes and dislikes.
11. Use existing friendships. Support the ending of friendship where necessary. Recognise and respect cultural diversity in the area of friendships.
12. Fix the person up with a mentor or buddy. Find the bubbly personalities.
13. Share resources. Be flexible and creative within budgets and resources. Create time to support the person.
14. Promote independent travel, the person’s own vehicle and exchange of lifts.
15. Make sure lunchtime and other breaks promote connections. Use icebreakers (ask someone if they would like a coffee, tell a joke, have a cigarette etc.)
16. The first point of contact with the group needs to be positive. Introduce the person to others and encourage them to get involved. Work on the induction process. Staff and everyone should be warm, happy, friendly, natural and welcoming with their words and body language.