

• FRIENDS •

The idea of friendships should be familiar to us all.

How we make friends and keep these relationships is an important part of who we are and how we get involved in the world around us. This can often be more difficult for people with learning disabilities.

The information in this booklet offers ideas about how you can develop friendships. It also suggests what support you could get if you need help with this.

To help think about this take a look at the link below which highlights the importance of friendships for us all. <http://bit.ly/thinking-friendship>

Independent Voices, Redcar & Cleveland have produced a video about friendships. Watch it here:

<http://bit.ly/friendship-video>



INTERESTS

We are all interested in different things. Think about what your interests are. For example

- health & fitness
- coffee & cake
- arts & crafts
- film & theatre
- shopping
- photography
- music
- TV

Find out where you could go to develop these interests. This is where you are likely to meet people who have the same interests.

If you know people already who have the same interests, is there something you could do together?



Support

Support the person explore how they can develop their interests. This may include

- training or work opportunities
- linking up with special interest groups
- using community resources
- setting up something new

Offer direct support where needed. Look to develop natural, peer support where possible.

Think about the people who are already part of the persons' life. What connections or networks do they have which would complement their interests? How could you support this to happen?



GIFTS & SKILLS

We all have gifts and skills. These can be used to help develop friendships.

Think about what these are for you. For example, are you...

- confident in new places
- able to travel independently
- good fun, have a sense of humour
- patient and kind
- a good cook or gardener

Thinking about this will help you understand more about the type of person you want to be friends with.

All your gifts and skills are important no matter how big or small they may seem. You will be able to use these to help others, share an interest or try something new.



Support

Many people find it is hard to think about the gifts and skills they have. Work together to highlight things like:

- personality traits
- knowledge
- experience
- practical skills

Knowing this can help develop new friendships or build on existing ones.

Good person centred planning can be part of this. It will help the person know what they have to offer to other people or the wider community.

You need to have an open mind and be creative in your approach. Believe it is possible, everyone has the potential to be a great friend.



GIVE AND TAKE IN RELATIONSHIPS

What does friendship mean to you? If you know what this is you are more likely to find the right kind of friendship for you. There needs to be give and take in all friendships

Think about...

- How will you treat your friends and how would you expect them to treat you?
- What will you bring to your friendships and what do you want from them?

It can be difficult to understand other people's thoughts and ideas on things. It is important to know it is ok to disagree. Think about what it would feel like to fall out. What would you do in this situation?



Support

Talk about what positive friendships may feel like. Look at what the person needs to do to make this happen. This will encourage them to aim for this type of friendship and highlight the risks of less positive relationships.

Support the person to think about what they would do if things did not go to plan. What support or skills would they need to help in this situation?

Think about the relationships individuals have with staff. How are these similar or different to the friendships they have?

Be aware of mate crime. Support people to recognise when they are in this situation and how this might be resolved.



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Think about the people and resources in your community. For example do you...

- know your neighbours
- use the local shops, church or pub
- go to the neighbourhood watch meetings

What parts of your community would you like to be more involved with? Are there any new communities you would like to find out about?

For example

- the local football club
- scouting association
- political party

Think about how your gifts, skills and interests can all be used and developed within these communities.

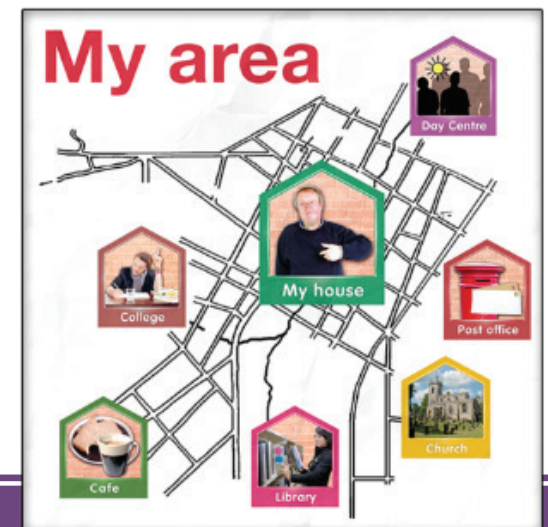


Support

Start by mapping the community with the person. There is often more going on than you realise. This will help the person see how their gifts, skills and interests link with their community.

Support the persons use and involvement in these community resources. Being present in a community is very important. It is often the small interactions that bring a sense of belonging. Depth of friendships may be different but a 'friendly face' in your local community is a real asset and has the potential to develop into more over time.

Community connections bring safety, people notice when you are not around and look out for one another.



GO OUT AND ENJOY!

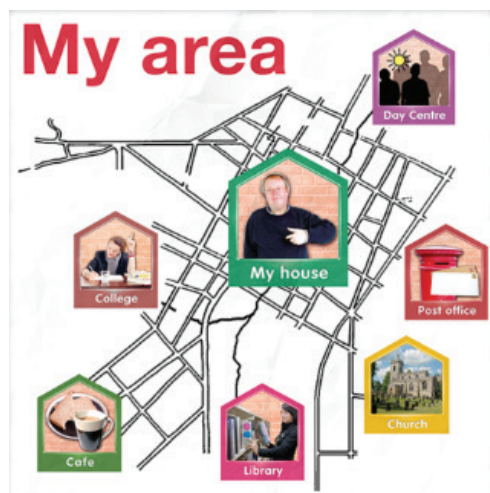
You need to go out and do it! Get everything in place and off you go. Do you know how to get there? Who you might meet? Think about the things you will need. For example

- money
- staff support
- equipment
- tickets
- phone

When you get back think about

- what worked well
- what you enjoyed
- what you might do differently next time.

Build on the unplanned contact you have with people and places too. This can develop into new and exciting opportunities you never thought of.



Support

Building the persons confidence to go out and meet people can be supported by

- reassurance
- shadowing
- direct support
- peer support
- practice
- planning

Think about how you as staff can reduce your presence within the friendship. The support offered can be reduced gradually as more natural supports develop or the person's confidence grows.

It is important to always show an interest in the person's experiences. Celebrate their achievements and support them to resolve any difficulties.



COMMUNICATION

Think about how you keep in touch with the people that are important to you. For example

- making phone calls
- texting
- meeting up face to face
- sending a card.

Are you confident in doing this?

Do you take turns contacting one another?

Do you listen to what is important for your friend?

Do you remember things about your friend and show an interest in these?

It is really important to find ways of communicating which are right for both you and your friends.



Support

Identify with the person what support they need to keep contact with their friends.

This could include support to:

- keep an address book
- mark dates on a calendar
- write a letter
- use face book
- use a mobile phone.

Work together to understand how they like to communicate and if there are any skills they want to develop in this area.

For example you could:

- practice conversation skills
- think about how they might introduce themselves to someone new.



PRIVACY AND SPACE

Think about the opportunities you have to invite friends into your home.

- Do you have somewhere you can spend time without interruption?
- Do you need to arrange with others who share your home or with staff for this to be possible?
- What will you need to do to make your friend feel comfortable in your home?

Also, when you are out together are you able to talk without being overheard by staff or others?

It is important you have the privacy and space you need to develop your friendships.



Support

Having private time with friends is really important and should be made possible in all living situations. Support the person to arrange this if living with others.

Think about how you as support staff keep a 'low profile' when supporting the development of friendships. For example

- Waiting in the reception area rather than the room when the person is involved in an activity.
- Redirecting the conversation if it is focused on you.
- Positive introductions where the connection is about the person not their support.



RISK

Are there any risks you need to think about in relation to what you are going to do and who you are spending time with. For example

- getting lost
- becoming unwell
- having no money
- being understood

How can these risks be reduced or managed so that they don't stop you from developing friendships? Just because there is a risk does not mean you cannot do it.



Support

Start from the position that there are risks involved in everything we do. We manage these risks on a daily basis in order to lead interesting and varied lives.

Positive risk management should be followed. This should not be overly restrictive, allowing for an amount of necessary risk to be taken in order to support the development of friendships.

Talking with the person about how they see the risks and how they can manage them is really important.



CONCLUSION

The importance of friendship in a person's life cannot be underestimated.

Friendships are essential to our wellbeing and the valued contribution we make to society.

This booklet gives some ideas on how you can develop friendships and how to be supported with this.



INFORMATION

For more information about how we make this essential part of all our lives more realised for people who have a learning disability go to:

www.friendsaction.co.uk

www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/type/pdfs/friendship.html

There are also 'side by side' online training modules from Open Future Learning. This training is so people who use support and the people providing it can learn together.

www.openfuturelearning.org

- About friendships and community
- Finding and building community
- Finding and building friendships





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