

# Chapter Member Training

## *Best Buddies International*



Best Buddies is thrilled to invite new volunteers to join in our mission of fun, friendship, and acceptance! We want every volunteer to feel excited and prepared to enjoy their new friendship and their role in the chapter. Using the “How to be the Best Best Buddy” video, we invite chapter leaders to engage in a discussion about programmatic goals and hopes for a fun experience for all volunteers, with and without disabilities. Each volunteer interested in joining the Best Buddies chapter is encouraged to participate in this discussion to learn more about our goals for an inclusive experience for all!

### Facilitation Notes

Best Buddies invites leaders to engage all interested members in a discussion following a chapter viewing of the “How to be the Best Best Buddy” video. The link to the video can be found on [Best Buddies University](#), our online resource library.

The video will address a few areas that we feel are important to discuss with volunteers as they prepare to join the program. After watching the video, revisit the key areas the video touches upon and invite volunteers to engage in a discussion about how these areas will impact their involvement in the chapter.

Please note: throughout this discussion, the word ‘buddy’ should be used to recognize both volunteers with and without disabilities. Everyone who volunteers for this organization is giving their time and energy to the mission; both buddies are volunteers who should be given support in building their new friendship.

### What to Do

Begin the discussion by ensuring that all volunteers feel welcomed and excited about the opportunity to join the Best Buddies movement. What we do is simple: we have fun making new friends. Through our inclusive friendships and leadership opportunities, we share with our community the abilities, similarities, and fun of all of our members, with and without disabilities.

### Common Ground

Share with the group that being matched in a new friendship *can be* scary. Meeting anyone new for the first time is always a bit awkward and nerve-wracking. But Best Buddies is here to help. We have lots of tools and resources to make sure members feel comfortable and have fun. Be sure to share these resources:

- Tools: Sanford Harmony toolkits which provide games and activities to build connections.
- Network: A network of volunteers around the globe experiencing the same things as you – there are plenty of people to ask questions of and gain inspiration from.
- Activities: Best Buddies has an online treasure box of activities and best practices for chapters to share as members get to know each other. But we also invite conversation, time, and patience as volunteers ask each other about their interests and seek common ground.

#### Ask the group:

- What are some things we all enjoy doing?
- What would be a fun chapter activity?
- What do you hope to be able to do with your Buddy?
- What questions do you have about the available activities or events our chapter plans?

# Chapter Member Training

## *Best Buddies International*



### Give it Time

Like all friendships, Best Buddies pairs need time to get to know each other and feel comfortable in their friendship. Remind the group that it's important to give their friendship the time it needs to thrive.

#### Ask the group:

- Reflect on when they first met their best friends: did they automatically click with a million things to talk about? Or did their friendship take time to grow? How did they get to know each other?
- What do volunteers feel they need to help their friendship grow?
- How can we give the friendships time to flourish? What time and attention needs to be given to the friendship?
- Who can help make this happen?

Be sure to share the resources available to volunteers, such as a Best Buddies global network and the trained faculty who will support the chapter on campus, like the Special Education Advisor or Host Site Coordinator.

### Seek Help

It is important that as a leader, you make all members feel comfortable and safe during their participation in Best Buddies. Part of this will be building trust and encouraging honesty from members. The biggest challenges in a Best Buddies friendship happens when members have questions or are nervous about their friendship and don't ask for help.

#### Reiterate with the group:

- Best Buddies is a safe place; every question is welcome and there are people (like the advisors and the officers) who can help answer questions and make you feel comfortable with your match.
- The only way to grow the friendship is to give it time and be honest about any challenges you might be experiencing; be sure to tell officers and advisors if you need help.
- Don't wait to ask for help; you should feel comfortable and have fun with your buddy! If you are not, then talk to a leader in the chapter.
- Ask specific questions; nothing is off-limits and being honest is the only way to build a long-lasting and life-changing friendship.
- When possible, make sure to connect with your buddy's family so that you are aware and feel comfortable with the network of support, all of whom are invested in making your friendship fun and easy!

### Struggles

Joining a new group and making time for new friends can be hard. Balancing something new and feeling uncomfortable as you make new friends can be awkward. Be honest about this with your chapter members. But also be sure to emphasize the fun that comes out of a Best Buddies friendship! Encourage members to communicate with chapter leaders when they experience challenges or have concerns. Chapter leaders are also encouraged to communicate with Best Buddies staff who can help them navigate and troubleshoot difficult situations. Submitting a member update sharing feedback about how things are going is another way for members to voice concerns and for chapter leaders to monitor the quality of their experience.

# Chapter Member Training

## *Best Buddies International*



### Reiterate with the group:

- Best Buddies wants to normalize friendships between people with and without disabilities; this means treating your Best Buddies friendship like any other friendship. This means being honest if you have a challenge with your new friendship; if your buddy calls too often or is always busy, tell them! Honesty and finding common ground for the expectations of your friendship is the only way this friendship will grow.
- Be honest: if you do not have time to spend time together, tell your buddy and pick a time that works for both of you to hang out and talk.
- Remember: this may be the first friendship some members have made with someone who has a disability or with someone who doesn't have a disability. This might be the first time your new friend has ever had someone to talk to on the phone or hang out with after school. They might not know the etiquette about making plans and might be so excited that their expectations seem hard to meet. The only way to make sure everyone is happy is to talk about it!
- Be patient and try to understand where your buddy is coming from; if you need help, ask your advisors or your buddy's family.

## Changing Lives

Joining Best Buddies is joining a movement to share inclusion and build a more accepting culture at your school. It's more than just a club. Members can take pride in the fact that they are helping to p

### Reiterate with the group:

- Your buddy is counting on you to participate in meetings and build your friendship; be sure make time and communicate with your buddy whenever you are able
- Have fun! Our program is all about building relationships and enjoying time together!
- Invite others to join this mission of inclusion!