

Citizens Friendship Guide

Best Buddies International



Congratulations on being matched in a one-to-one friendship! You and your new friend are embarking on an exciting journey to get to know one another and develop a friendship. This guide includes tips and suggestions for building your friendship over the coming months.

One to One Commitment

Each month buddy pairs have a commitment to regularly communicate and get together. Buddy pairs are expected to communicate with one another on a weekly basis. This can be done via phone, email, social media, etc. It is recommended that buddy pairs get together in person twice a month during the first six months of being matched. After the initial six months, matches have the option to get together for a longer period of time (four hours or more) once a month. Each match is asked to commit to their friendship for at least a year.

Getting to Know Your New Friend

As with any relationship, your friendship with your buddy/peer buddy will take time to develop. Don't feel pressured to be best friends right away and be prepared for some growing pains in the beginning. It is completely natural for things to feel a little awkward in the beginning while you're getting to know one another. Use the tips below to make starting up your friendship easier.

Communicating

Find out what type of communication will work best for you and your buddy/peer buddy. Your communication doesn't have to take place over the phone. Many people may prefer online methods of communication. The important thing is to discuss what means of communication each of you has access to. Once you have determined what will work best for you, make sure you've exchanged your contact information. In the beginning, it may help to set up a schedule for regular communication, such as choosing a day of the week and time that works best for the two of you to connect.

Spending time together

When you're first starting your friendship, it is recommended that you limit the time for your initial get-togethers. As you are getting to know someone it is better to do multiple shorter outings than trying to pack in multiple hours. Try grabbing a meal together or getting coffee for one outing and going to the movies for your second outing. Pacing your early interactions can cut down on the pressure to make conversation and allows you to get know one another at a steady pace. Once you're both feeling more comfortable spending time together, start adding on time to your outings.

Starting off slow

When you start a new relationship, you don't need to share everything about yourself right away. It's important to recognize that some people may take a little bit longer than others to open up and share about themselves. A good practice is to share a little bit each time you get together or communicate with one another. Gradual sharing allows time to build trust and really get to know one another.

Know your supports

Remember the supports that you have available to you as you start your friendship. Resources are available on [Best Buddies University](https://www.bestbuddies.org/best-buddies-university) (BBU), an online resource library for Best Buddies program participants. You can also reach out to Best Buddies staff at any time if you have questions or concerns. They are here to support you as you develop this new relationship and can help you navigate any challenges. Open communication between the buddy pair and your families and friends can also help to strengthen your friendship.



One to One Activities

The foundation of your one-to-one friendship will be based on the activities that you do as a buddy pair. Below are some suggested activities that can help you build a connection with your buddy. When planning your outings, be sure to consider each other's interests and availability as well as any accommodations that may be needed for accessibility.

General Activities			
Amusement park	Dance lessons	Makeover/spa day	Street festival
Aquarium	Feed ducks	Manicure/pedicure	Swimming
Art/Science museum	Fishing	Mini-golf	Take a class together
Biking	Fitness day	Movie theater	TV show taping
Birthday parties	Fly kites	Planetarium	Visit a farm
Boat/bus tour	Game day	Play on computer	Visit an arcade
Bonfire	Garage sale	Play sports	Visit an orchard
Bowling	Go to a show	Pool party	Visit the beach
Candy factory tour	Hiking	Roller Skating	Visit the city
Car wash	Horseback riding	Shopping	Walking tour
Concert	Ice Skating	Sledding/tubing	Walks
Costume party	Karaoke night	Special Olympics	Water balloon fight
Dance contest	Light show	Sporting event	Visit the zoo

Eating/Food Activities			
Bake-off/Cook-off	Cook on your own	Go to a restaurant	Make sundaes
Barbeque	Dinner and a movie	Ice cream shop	Pot luck
Cook dinner at home	Friendsgiving dinner	Make s'mores	Take a cooking class

Holiday Activities			
Christmas caroling	Make holiday decorations/cards	Mardi Gras party	
Decorate pumpkins	Make ornaments	Paint Easter eggs	
Go see holiday lights	Make scarecrows	Thanksgiving crafts	
Host a holiday party	Go to a parade	Go on hayride	

Craft Activities		
Ceramics	Make key chains	Scrapbook
Cookie decorating	Make pillowcases	Sewing / Cross-stitch
Decorate picture frames	Painting	Sign-up for a class at local craft store
Make a video	Photography	Take an art class
Make a vision board	Origami	Wood working
Make jewelry	Quilting/ Knitting	Tie-Dyeing

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Short-On-Time Activities

Get ice cream	Go to the gym	Read magazines
Go grocery shopping	Meet for coffee / dessert	Run errands
Go to a farmers market	Practice e-mail / social media	Walk dogs

Community Service

Beach clean up	Plant a community garden	Teddy bear or toy drive
Canned food drive	Plant trees	Trash pick-up
Care baskets or cards for troops	Volunteer at an animal shelter	Visit residents at a nursing home
Charity walk	Assist the elderly	Volunteer at a community center
Habitat for humanity	Register to vote	Volunteer at a soup kitchen
Host a fundraiser for BB	Restore a park	Volunteer at the library

Group Activities

In addition to the time you spend one on one with your buddy/peer buddy, participating in small group outings, Citizens events, and/or statewide Best Buddies events can make it easier to get to know one another in the beginning. Group activities are an amazing way to build a larger network of friends and connect with others in the community.

Small Group Outings

Best Buddies staff can introduce you to other buddy pairs living in your area. You and your buddy/peer buddy can get together with other pairs for an activity. Having a group of people to talk with can reduce the pressure of it being just the two of you.

Citizens Group Events

Best Buddies staff will notify you of upcoming Citizens events. These events are a great way to get to know the participants in the program from around the state and another way for you and your buddy/peer to continue to get to know one another in the early stages of your friendship.

Best Buddies Statewide and National Events

Best Buddies International hosts events throughout the year on both a state and national level. These events vary from programmatic celebrations, to fundraisers, or trainings. Events are advertised by your local Best Buddies office and on the Best Buddies website.

State Events

Best Buddies Friendship Walk

National Events

Annual Best Buddies Leadership Conference
Best Buddies Challenges

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Member Updates

Best Buddies uses our online database, [BB360](#), to monitor and support buddy pairs. All Best Buddies participants are asked to submit feedback about their experience through a brief survey, called a Member Update. The survey can be as simple as a thumbs up or thumbs down but also allows you to share any successes or challenges so that staff can offer support.

Citizens Program FAQ

As you are starting on your journey with Best Buddies Citizens and learning more about your new friend, you may have questions about the program and commitment expectations. Below are some common topics and questions that may arise as you are developing your new friendships and addresses helpful ideas on ways to model appropriate behaviors and responses. Please remember that Best Buddies staff are available and willing to assist in any way in order to ensure you and your buddy feel supported in the development of your friendship.

Activities

What type of activities can we do together?

Outings should be planned around your common interests. For example, grab some coffee, go bowling, watch your local sports team on TV, or go for a walk in the park. The one-to-one activities listed on pages two and three will give you some great ideas to get started! And remember, like all friendships, when spending time as a buddy pair, both parties are expected to contribute their own money to the outing unless otherwise agreed upon for a special purpose.

How long should our outings be?

The type of quality time spent together is much more meaningful as you are developing the foundation of your friendship. In the beginning of your friendship, activities are encouraged to be anywhere from 45 minutes to a couple of hours. Once you have a solid foundation to your friendship, you can plan longer outings if both have you are interested and have the availability.

How can I support or provide assistance to my buddy/peer buddy in a respectful way?

Ask, don't assume, that your buddy/peer buddy needs your support. If you notice your buddy/peer buddy struggling with something (using the stairs, reading a menu, making change, etc.) be sure to ask your buddy/peer buddy if they would like assistance before helping.

Communication

Is it ok to ask my buddy about their disability?

Yes, so long as it is done in a respectful way. Remember, knowing what a person's disability is does not indicate how they will behave or what their personality will be like. Every person is an individual and each person's disability is unique. Your buddy's family may also be a great resource and can be contacted should you feel more comfortable asking them.

My buddy/peer buddy calls me several times a day. What should I do?

Coming up with a weekly time to talk may help establish a more appropriate frequency for calls. Talk with your buddy/peer buddy to explain that you can't talk every day and/or multiple times a day and would like to arrange a specific date and time each week to speak. Reach out to your buddy's/peer buddy's family, or Best Buddies staff for support.

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My buddy/peer buddy isn't responding to my texts or calls?

Leave a message asking for your buddy/peer buddy to call you back by a certain date (within reason). When you are able to get in touch with your buddy/peer buddy, ask them what way is best for staying in touch. If communication challenges persist, talk with your program manager and your buddy's/peer buddy's sponsor or family to help ensure your friend gets back to you in a reasonable amount of time.

What do I do if my buddy/peer buddy is upset with our communication?

As with all friendships, open communication is key to a healthy and strong relationship. Ask them what exactly they are upset by and discuss it. If you need further support, contact Best Buddies staff.

Friendship Development

What do I do if we are struggling to find time in our schedules to get together?

Talk to your buddy/peer buddy and be honest that you are having a hard time with scheduling. Determine if this is a particularly busy time, or if this is going to be an ongoing issue. Try to plan ahead so that you can identify times when both of you are available. Throughout the year, things may come up that will put constraints on the time you have available. It is important that you tell your buddy in advance if you are going to be busy and will have limited availability to get together. If scheduling seems like it will be an ongoing issue (e.g. you work days, and your buddy/peer buddy work nights), talk to Best Buddies staff about the challenge.

It seems like we only do things my buddy/peer buddy likes to do. How should I handle that?

Talk to your buddy/peer buddy. Remind him/her that it is important to have a balance in a friendship and that both people should have input on selecting activities. Let them know that you enjoy doing things that they're interested in, but that you have some ideas for outings that you would like to try.

What do I do if my buddy/peer buddy does something I am not comfortable with while we're spending time together?

First, identify what about the action or behavior made you uncomfortable and talk to your buddy/peer buddy about it. If you're not comfortable talking with your buddy/peer buddy about it directly, contact Best Buddies staff. Remember, some people may not have as much experience in social settings, and by spending time together you can model more appropriate behaviors.

What do I do if my buddy/peer buddy and I are not connecting?

Developing a friendship can take time. It can often take at least six months to get into a comfortable rhythm. If after working towards developing a friendship, you still find you are not able to make it work, you and your buddy will meet with Best Buddies staff to discuss next steps with your friendship.

Conclusion

Remember, it is okay if you or your buddy/peer buddy have questions or encounter challenges along the way in the development of your friendship. This is a completely natural and common. The important thing is being open and honest in your communication. If you are ever uncertain about how to handle a situation talk to Best Buddies staff. Do not ignore an issue if it comes up as this could lead to long term challenges in your friendship. The sooner you reach out Best Buddies staff, the sooner the issue can be resolved, and you and your buddy/peer buddy can continue to develop your friendship!

Thank you for your commitment to the Best Buddies' mission and your interest in making a new friend. Best Buddies is excited about the journey of inclusion, fun, and friendship you are about to embark on and we look forward to supporting you in your role as a Citizens member along the way!