

One-to-One Friendships

Best Buddies International



Why does Best Buddies value one-to-one friendships? What makes the connection of two people so integral to our mission? This training will explore the value of the one-to-one friendship and why creating mutually enriching, diverse, and inclusive one-to-one matches is critical to mission integrity and program success.

Let's Explore:

Research:

[American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities \(AAIDD\) Journal](#) Vol. 51, No. 5 outlines that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have few friends; that on average, individuals with IDD have 3.1 people in their social networks and of those 3 people, one of them is a paid staff member (For reference, the average social circle of someone without IDD is 125 people.) Fifty percent of those with IDD in the study reported feeling lonely and one in three reported that it is difficult to make friends.

This same journal also demonstrates research that proves social supports leads to success in inclusion for people with IDD, namely “regular contact in integrated environments with opportunities for meaningful interaction.” The research shows that weekly inclusion in club activities greatly increases social success for people with IDD. Benefits of inclusive community groups: *increased sensitivity, caring, and friendship* for people with and without disabilities.

This is why chapter activities and buddy pair communication on a weekly basis is so important.

Additional research also highlights:

- “People with ID who have expanded friendships (having friends/best friends that are neither family members nor paid staff) felt less lonely, accessed the community for recreational activities more often, participated in more self-advocacy meetings and exercised more than those with limited friendships (not having a friend/best friend, or only having friends who are family members or paid staff).” [From National Core Indicator.](#)
- “Social exclusion, loneliness and a lack of friends present many people with intellectual disability with a health and well-being triple jeopardy. Social inclusion can be described as not only being present in a community, but also having meaningful social connections and participating in fulfilling social activities. Participation in meaningful social activities has been demonstrated to have a significant positive impact on loneliness for people with intellectual disability.” From [Wiley Online Library.](#)
- “You’re going to cultivate a closer relationship with the one person than you would with ten [people].” From [Psychology Today.](#)
- Having one best friend can boost your mental and physical health, build your self-esteem, and make you more successful at work (sources [here](#)).

Impact

By not cultivating one-to-one friendships between volunteers with and without disabilities in the Best Buddies program, we run the risk of perpetuating feelings of loneliness and exacerbating the false idea that people with disabilities cannot make good friends.

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According to [John O'Brien \(c. 2013\)](#) there are *Five Valued Experiences* that make up the dimensions of inclusion:

1. Belonging
2. Being respected
3. Sharing ordinary places and activities with other citizens, neighbors, classmates, and coworkers
4. Contributing
5. Choosing

When you operate a Best Buddies friendship chapter, it is your responsibility to ensure that all volunteers share in these valued experiences. **This is how you demonstrate inclusion.** When you match two people without disabilities with one person that does have a disability, are you allowing that person to:

- Belong? To feel truly included and equal with his/her peers?
- Respecting their ability to build a friendship with one person who will invest in them?
- Share ordinary experiences, like developing a relationship, enjoying an outing, becoming comfortable with another person to watch TV with or talk on the phone with?
- Contribute their gifts as a friend to the one person they are working to know and understand?
- Choose outings, conversation topics, and new experiences in a truly equitable way?

When you take away these opportunities, you limit participants with IDD the chance to practice and experience true inclusion.

Intention

Best Buddies is all about inclusion – so it may seem counterintuitive to ‘exclude’ anyone from a buddy pair experience. Let’s unpack this idea.

Best Buddies is committed to building one-to-one friendships for the reasons outlined above; that said, the program models offer limitless opportunities for members of the chapter to make friends. *Members do not have to be officially matched to build a friendship, hangout, and spend time together.* Chapter activities, group outings, the Best Buddies App and leadership training experiences are just a few examples of Best Buddies events where members are encouraged to spend time in groups and make new friends.

When you don’t match people with IDD in a one-to-one friendship, you run the risk of:

- Furthering isolating the person with IDD by grouping them with people who have a shared experience and similar history, thus giving them a leg-up in developing their friendship.
- Take the responsibility and accountability for success in the friendship away from the people in the friend group; how are they evenly distributing their investment in another person? How can we guarantee equitable communication, invitation, sense of belonging, etc. for all?
- Perpetuate the idea that someone with IDD requires the work of *two people* to experience a good friendship. While this may not be the way the group feels, it is how the friendship group looks from the outside, especially to people who are unfamiliar with the Best Buddies program

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How to Make It Work:

Everyone in Best Buddies deserves – and is entitled to – a place of belonging. The truth is 70% of our members are not matched in a one-to-one friendship. We have more people enjoying the Best Buddies mission outside of a friendship match than those who serve as a buddy or peer buddy. So, what do they do?

Officers

Best Buddies values leadership equal to friendship; leadership development is a core pillar of our organization. Developing leadership opportunities and cultivating student growth in these roles are critical to our mission. Best Buddies requires a Chapter President and Buddy Director for each chapter. However, every chapter is encouraged to develop additional leadership roles based on what the chapter *needs to be successful*. Examples include:

- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Social Media Coordinator
- Historian
- Walk Chair
- Recruitment Chair
- Event Coordinator
- Membership Coordinator

Each leadership position can be filled by chapter members with and without disabilities.

Each chair is encouraged to have a committee focused on their specific efforts; these committees are fantastic opportunities for members who are not matched to contribute and advance chapter success.

Unmatched Members

Unmatched members are comprised of students with and without disabilities in the chapter who are not matched in a one-to-one friendship. These members are encouraged:

- Serve in a leadership role
- Act on a committee
- Participate in all chapter events
- Create opportunities for further engagement with members, like holding lunch meetings, celebrating birthdays with members, planning group outings, finding new ways to connect to members, etc.

New Friends

Everyone is encouraged to be friends with all members. Even for those not matched as a buddy pair, building friendships through time spent at chapter events, lunch, and outings is paramount to the Best Buddies mission of building social opportunities for people with disabilities. We encourage pairs to include other chapter members in their outings and communication. The goal is to build wider social circles and normalize friendship between all people.

What Can You Do?

- Share the value and reasoning behind one-to-one friendships in Best Buddies chapters. Ensure that all members understand the one-to-one commitment and member code of conduct.
- Encourage all members to be active participants in the chapter by offering creative leadership roles.
- Develop ongoing opportunities for friendships to thrive in your chapter, within and outside of buddy pair matches through fun and engaging event opportunities and consistent communication so that everyone can feel a sense of belonging.