

New Chapter Guide

Best Buddies International



Welcome to the Best Buddies family! We're so glad that you've chosen to develop a Best Buddies Chapter at your school! You are one step closer to building a more inclusive school community and creating a culture of kindness, acceptance and belonging for all! This New Chapter Guide will provide you with an overview of the steps involved in launching your chapter and the elements needed to make it successful.

Program Goals:

- **Educate:** To build awareness about inclusion, disabilities and Best Buddies' Mission among chapter members and school community.
- **Engage:** To create an inclusive school community which provides opportunities for students with and without disabilities to develop meaningful friendships.
- **Empower:** To foster leadership skills in participants and help them become advocates for themselves & others.

Steps to get started:

- ☐ Meet with a Best Buddies staff to learn more about the program model
- ☐ Gain approval from school administration to develop a Best Buddies Chapter at your school
- ☐ Identify at least one member of the school faculty who can serve as an Advisor
- ☐ Complete a Best Buddies School Partnership Agreement and submit to Best Buddies staff
- ☐ A Chapter Account will be created on BB360 where Advisor(s) will submit their member application(s)
- ☐ Advisor(s) will identify inclusive student leadership positions
- ☐ Chapter Leaders will attend training provided by Best Buddies' staff
- ☐ Advisor(s) & Chapter Leaders will host an interest meeting to recruit members
- ☐ All participants submit member applications on BB360 platform
- ☐ 1:1 Friendship Matches are identified for those interested in being matched in a Buddy Pair
- ☐ Chapter Leaders plan and host monthly inclusive events throughout the year

The Best Buddies Commitment

The information included in this section will help you understand the basic program structure of a Best Buddies chapter and the expectations we ask each school commit to when starting a chapter at their school.

Chapter Leadership

Chapters are managed by an inclusive group of student leaders who work closely with one or more faculty members who serve as Chapter Advisors to plan monthly events and create awareness and opportunities for inclusion within the school community. Leadership roles include but are not limited to: Chapter President, Vice President, Buddy Director, Secretary & Treasurer. Buddy Director is a role reserved for a student with IDD. Other positions may be assigned as needed. Some additional roles include: Friendship Walk Captain, Social Media Manager and Communications Coordinator.

Chapter Meetings

Chapter meetings bring the chapter members together to discuss chapter business and are used to plan chapter activities or talk about other issues related to chapter operations. These meetings provide an opportunity for peer buddies and buddies to share their ideas and concerns. Chapter meetings are led by the chapter leaders and are recommended to be held on a monthly basis.

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Group Activities

Group activities bring members together to foster social connections and can be opportunities to have fun, build awareness and give back to the community. The chapter leadership team is responsible for making activity schedules and should try to plan outings that everyone will enjoy. Many activities can be offered at no expense but if supplies, transportation or admission fees are required, chapter leaders should work with the advisor and school administration to ensure that there are funds available. Planning fundraisers throughout the year can help cover costs of activities and ensure that there are minimal costs passed on to members for participation.

Making Matches

By matching and cultivating new friendships, we advance our mission of inclusion and take one step closer to a world of acceptance. While members do not have to be officially matched in order to build friendships with their peers, establishing one to one matches can help deeper, more meaningful connections form. All applicable chapters should strive to make at least 10 matches in the first academic year, successfully matching 10 peer buddies without IDD with 10 buddies with IDD. Prior to being matched, it is important that each potential chapter member reflects on the following commitments:

- ☐ Remain matched in the friendship for at least one academic year
- ☐ Buddy pairs should maintain weekly communication as well as two one-to-one activities per month
- ☐ Prioritize attendance at all monthly chapter, events and activities
- ☐ Abide by the guidelines outlined in the Best Buddies [Member Code of Conduct](#)

One-to-One Activities

One-to-one activities allow buddy pairs to spend time developing their friendship and can be anything the buddy pair chooses to do. The goal is simply to spend time together and have fun! Buddy pairs are matched based on similar interests, so deciding on activities should be relatively easy and natural. What do other friends do together at your school? When planning activities, it is important to consider the cost of the outing and plan activities both of you can afford; spending time together does not need to cost a lot of money. Try to be creative and plan things that do not cost a lot or, better yet, are free.

Recruitment

Building the membership of your Chapter should be an ongoing effort but particularly at the beginning and end of the school year in preparation for the following year. Some suggested methods include:

- ☐ Host interest meetings to share what prospective members can expect from your chapter
- ☐ Set up a Best Buddies info table at lunch, at school sponsored events and at activity fairs
- ☐ Host a "Bring a Friend" meet & greet event
- ☐ Hang up Best Buddies posters and flyers around the school
- ☐ Create a video highlighting your Chapter's events and activities
- ☐ Invite another school club to host an event with you
- ☐ Utilize the school announcements or newspaper for promotion
- ☐ Keep teachers and parents informed so they can encourage participation
- ☐ Build a strong social media presence to draw new members.

Planning Events

It is recommended that Chapters plan their annual calendar of events in advance to provide plenty of time for preparation and promotion. Chapter events should be age appropriate and accessible for all and should foster social connection with ice breakers and interactive opportunities. Chapter leaders should seek out donations of goods & services, when possible, to keep costs to a minimum and should plan periodic fundraisers throughout the year to support activities. When planning, Chapter leaders should be collaborative and creative. Events can be elaborate or simple, what matters is that you are creating inclusive opportunities for all!

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Chapter Resources

Chapters are provided with resources and marketing materials to manage and promote their programs through Best Buddies' resource library, [Best Buddies University](#) (BBU). This site provides documents pertaining to chapter leadership roles, meeting agendas and recruitment tools as well as graphics and videos for promotion and awareness building.

Best Buddies has a partnership with [Harmony](#), a company that offers social and emotional learning resources that can be utilized to support the establishment of inclusive friendships. More information about these resources can be found on BBU.

Each chapter can also count on the support of [Best Buddies staff](#) who will provide training and guidance throughout the year. It is crucial that chapter leadership maintain regular communication with their Best Buddies contact and make them aware of issues and concerns as they arise. Staff will also provide ongoing communications through email and text messaging apps to update leaders on upcoming events and expectations for the chapter.

BB360 is the chapter management portal that Best Buddies utilizes to collect membership applications and through which the Chapter President and Advisor will manage their Chapter's roster, make matches, enter event information and complete end of year reports. This platform is also used to survey members through the [Member Update](#) feature. This feedback can be submitted monthly and can help Chapter leaders and Best Buddies staff monitor the quality of the member's experience and ensure the mission is being delivered effectively.

Training Opportunities

Student leaders are offered a variety of training opportunities throughout the year to ensure that they have the tools and knowledge needed to deliver Best Buddies' mission within their school community. A [Local Leadership Training Day](#) is offered at the start of the school year to provide an overview of best practices and a [Back to Best Buddies](#) event is hosted in the spring to support the continued engagement of chapter participants. It is required that each chapter have at least one representative at each of these opportunities, but additional officers and advisors are encouraged to participate as well. Chapter leaders are also provided with resources in order to train the members of their chapter regarding commitment and expectations of participation.

In addition to these local training opportunities, each July, Best Buddies International hosts an annual [Best Buddies Leadership Conference](#) (BBLC) at Indiana University in Bloomington Indiana, which provides opportunities for networking and collaboration across our global programs. Each High School and College Chapter is required to send a representative to participate in BBLC. This is typically the incoming Chapter President but can also be one or more members of the officer team as well as advisors. The chapter will be responsible for the conference registration fee as well as travel expenses for each attendee, however, scholarship funding and fundraising options are available if needed. Information regarding conference registration, travel, logistics, and sessions will be shared by Best Buddies staff as BBLC approaches.