

# Children's Therapy and Family Resource Centre

801 McGill Road, Kamloops, BC V2C 6R1 Phone: (250) 371-4100 Fax: (250) 371-4120  
www.kamloopschildrenstherapy.org

## Promoting & Encouraging Friendship for Children with Special Needs

Friendship plays an important role in everyone's life. When one has no friends, life spans are significantly reduced. Experts agree that friendship is not a luxury, it is essential to life. Despite this fact, the social network of friends and intimate relationships for children with disabilities are often smaller than are the social networks of children without disabilities. Children with disabilities may have unique barriers that prevent them from developing and maintaining friendships. These barriers, however, are not insurmountable but should serve to challenge the creative parent to incorporate strategies for promoting friendship. Friendship is an art so there is no one way to approach its development. However, you may want to consider some of the following ideas and strategies to promote friendship development.

### Make Friendship Development a Priority

Make friendship development a priority. This may sound simple enough, but families have such busy lives it is easy to put off scheduling play dates or other social activities. Families who have children with special needs often have additional demands to their schedules like doctor or therapy appointments. Look for an activity, club or group in your community that you think your child would enjoy. Make time to set up play dates with neighbours or classmates.

Capitalize on your child's strengths and interests. Friendships often begin based on mutual interests. Maybe your child loves basketball, is there a local team that he/she could join? Even if a child's physical limitations may not allow him/her to fully participate in playing basketball, is there a role he/she could fill on the team?

When your child participates in activities, be sure to set him or her up for success. Make sure the appropriate adaptations are in place and his/her abilities are highlighted within the activity. Observe the group and how the children interact with one another. Could the group be restructured to promote socialization? Can children be regrouped to break up cliques? Are there opportunities to pair kids up one-on-one? The group leader may be open to some suggestions to create a sense of belonging for all children within the group.

### Teach Friendship Development

Practice being a friend with your child. Some children with special needs may require help learning how to be a friend. We often spend a lot of time teaching children with special needs specific skills like walking or tying their shoes but neglect teaching them skills for friendship development.

When developing a goal plan, think about friendship. Can strategies be implemented that will help your child make friends. For example, if your child needs assistance in the lunch line can peers take turns helping him or her? Maybe your child and his/her friend would get to go to the cafeteria a couple of minutes early and be first in line, now the child will view getting to be your child's buddy as a privilege. It is not possible for you to "mandate" friendship for your child. However, it is possible to create opportunities for your child to meet and spend time with other children in ways that encourage friendship to take root and flourish. It is essential that families think about the many ways to facilitate these opportunities.

*"A true friend is the most precious of all possessions and the one we take the least thought about acquiring"*

*La Rochefolcauld*

Information taken from: [www.earlyinterventionsupport.com](http://www.earlyinterventionsupport.com)