



Best Buddies Virtual Lesson

October – Understanding Inclusive Friendships

Session: To provide chapter members with an understanding of what inclusion means, how it applies to Best Buddies, and practice building inclusive friendships!

Materials: Internet access (optional)

Objective: Chapter members will gain a greater understanding of what inclusion means and what the expectations are as a member of a Best Buddies chapter. Chapter members will be taught some practical skills in how to make friends, and then practice those skills by sharing their interests and discussing opinions with each other.

Note to the Leader & Best Practices

Hello There! We hope that these lesson plans provide a meaningful opportunity for you. If you have access to a computer, plan to double check that you have completed the chapter's membership application (links and references below). If not, you can request a paper application from the chapter advisors. If you have access to internet, you will also be asked to watch "Being the Best Best Buddy". Please note that closed captioning is not currently available but we've included the video text at the end of this document.

Introduction

Having friends and spending time with those friends is an important part of every person's life! Research has shown that people who are satisfied with their social lives live longer, stay healthier, and are happier than their peers who feel lonely. This is especially true for people with disabilities, who may have extra barriers to socializing, such as being isolated in a special education classroom or at home, and dealing with discrimination and prejudice in their community. You are a part of Best Buddies, so clearly friendship and inclusion is important to you! But knowing that something is important, and knowing how to make it happen are two different things. Today, we are going to talk about what it takes to be an inclusive friend, and then start building those friendships with each other.

What Does Inclusion Mean?

To understand how to be an inclusive friend, we first need to understand what inclusion means. In Best Buddies, inclusion is about making sure everyone in our club can freely express who they are, share their own opinions and points of view, and fully participate in activities, all while feeling a sense of safety and belonging. In order for people to feel safe sharing who they are and to join into our activities, everyone needs to understand that there are some basic expectations for being a part of our chapter. Importantly, there is a Code of Conduct that every single person in the chapter has to follow! It is part of the Membership Application that you fill out on www.bestbuddiesonline.org, and exists at <https://www.bestbuddies.org/member-agreement/>.

Best Buddies Code of Conduct

As a Best Buddies member:

- I will be respectful, truthful, and inclusive in my interactions with others.
- I will recognize and celebrate the diversity of character and abilities of all people.
- I will conduct myself ethically, obey all laws, and act in good faith at all times.
- I will abide by the rules, directives, and guidelines set forth by Best Buddies International.
- I will respect the decisions and requests made by Best Buddies staff members and chapter leadership.
- I will NOT harass, threaten, embarrass, or insult others.
- I will NOT say or do anything that is harmful, abusive, racially or ethnically offensive, vulgar, sexually explicit, or objectionable.
- I will NOT make inappropriate or unwanted physical, verbal, or sexual advances.



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All chapter members are held to the same standard, and officers and advisors are working hard to make sure we maintain a safe, inclusive space for everyone to feel like they belong!

What Does it Take to Make a Friend?

So! You are a part of Best Buddies, a group all about creating inclusive friendships! But what does it take to make a friend? Let's start by hearing from Best Buddies chapter members and advisors about *How to be the Best Best Buddy* (5m18s) <https://youtu.be/sTp2WWxT--k>

As the video explains, there are a few key steps to making a friend:

1. Taking Your Time

Meeting someone new is often a little awkward! Sometimes you'll meet someone and you will immediately feel like peas in a pod or long-lost siblings. But most of the time, friendships form after you have spent a few days or weeks talking to each other, getting to know each other's quirks, and building memories together. It is important to make sure you are building in that time right from the beginning! Especially right now when it can be difficult to spend time together in person, scheduling time to talk or video chat is important.

For 1-to-1 Matched Buddy Pairs:	For Associate Members and chapters without 1-to-1 matches:
The Buddy Pair Commitment is to <u>talk once a week</u> (snapchat, facebook, texting, phone call...) and to <u>see each other's faces twice a month</u> (chapter meetings, video calls, socially distant meetups...)	Attending meetings is really important in the process of making friends! As you spend more time in this chapter, you will learn more about your peers and new friendships will grow naturally.

2. Talk About Challenges

We are all here to be friends! Nobody wants to make anyone else feel sad, or lonely, or uncomfortable. At the same time, nobody is a mind-reader. It is important to teach each other how you want to be treated. For example, not everyone likes to be hugged. You are absolutely, 100% allowed and encouraged to tell your Best Buddies friends that you would prefer a high five instead of a hug! Or another example: if someone isn't communicating with you the way you'd like them to (such as texting too much, or not answering the phone when you call), it is important to talk about that. Maybe you can schedule a specific time each week to connect, or you can talk over email instead.

Please remember, if you are having trouble or have questions, or want some advice before you talk to your friend, your chapter advisors and officers are here to help!

3. Find the Common Ground

This makes sense, right? It is easier to be friends with people who like the things you like, or who have the same opinion as you. You definitely don't have to agree on everything, but finding out what makes you similar will give you stuff to talk about and ideas for things to do together! Finding your common ground can be as easy as asking yes or no questions: Do you like French fries? Did you watch the Harry Potter movies? Have you ever been to Canada? Do you have any pets? Once you have a topic you agree on, then you can start to learn more about each other's opinions and experiences: What condiments do you put on your French fries? Who is your favorite Harry Potter character? Where would you like to travel someday? What kind of pet do you have?



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When you are making a new friend, it is important to find the things that make you similar. Focus on what you both have in common to start, but understand that you are two different people, so you won't agree on everything. As you become better friends, it will be easier to understand each other's opinions. Also remember that it is important to be a good listener, and ask your friend questions about their lives, but it is also important to share things about yourself!

What About You?!

Now we want your fellow chapter members to learn more about you, so that they can be the best friend possible. In order to do so, it's helpful for you to be able to identify a few things about yourself. Answer these questions below on your own or with someone else to get started!

1. My favorite thing to do on the weekend is: _____
2. I enjoy _____ with other people.
3. My favorite place to eat is _____.
4. One thing I know a lot about is _____.
5. My favorite subject in school is _____.
6. I really like to talk about/listen to _____.

Now that you've completed these questions, we recommend you send this information to your advisor and chapter president. They can then help you connect to some other people in your chapter, maybe by video, phone calls, letter-writing, or texting! There are still ways to connect with one another outside of group video chats and in-person activities. The key is to get to know as many people as possible, which gives you more opportunities to find someone that has similar interests and a personality that clicks.

Wrap Up

Today we learned that inclusion is about making sure everyone can freely express who they are, share their own opinions and points of view, and fully participate in activities, all while feeling a sense of safety and belonging. Everyone needs to work together to make sure that's true in our club, by following the Code of Conduct. We also learned that friendships take time and communication. The more people you meet and find common ground with, the better friends you will make. Finally, we spent time thinking about our own opinions and interests, so we can share those with others! Who else can you find common ground with? Are there people at your home who like the same things as you?

"How to Be the Best Best Buddy" video text, for reference as needed:

- Advisor 1: The most common challenge I see with students who are newly matched in a buddy pair is Just not quite knowing what to do. They're both very eager to be matched up and to form a new friendship but they don't know what their common ground is, and they don't know how to respond when somebody's struggling.
- Advisor 2: That's usually the biggest conflict we see is they're just unsure, you know, how to interact with their buddy, you know especially if they're nonverbal or things like that. There's those communication barriers.
- Advisor 1: Work through the awkward time. It's gonna be awkward when you first meet somebody you're not instantly gonna be best friends and so figure out what you have in common no matter how different we may seem from somebody else, we have so much in common.
- Peer buddy 1: I was nervous too in the beginning and it can be pretty nerve-racking walking into a friendship That doesn't seem 100 percent normal or natural at first but then as soon as you find those common factors then it just becomes natural from there.



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- Senior VP, BBI: Try to identify an activity and an event that both of you enjoy and that will help facilitate the two of you to get to know each other.
- Advisor 3: For new buddy pairs the most important thing is it needs a little time to make sure you get to know one another and to take that time to get to know one another.
- Peer Buddy 2: A life is like a lot more than that so really getting to know that the intimate parts about each other and in our lives what we care about and what we like and our dislikes and that definitely took, I think, time for sure as any relationship does even though we we hit it off from the start. We're still getting to know each other almost eight years later.
- Peer Buddy 3: Well, you definitely should see each other, you know, at least twice a month and talk at least once a week, but Peyton and I we see each other at cheer practice which makes it really easy and then at football games we talk more than, I guess, the minimum which I think makes it even better.
- Peer Buddy 2: At times you just don't always see eye to eye and you want someone to kind of try to help you figure out you're still getting to know each other and even today We're still getting to know each other and when you want help I would often lean on like our advisor in our chapter or a parent I reach out to his mom sometimes "Okay, Brian said this to me" or "used this tone" "and I'm just wondering is that Normal?" You're just trying to figure out each other so you want to go to people that that really know him.
- Advisor 1: I think so often students are afraid to say it's not working because they think they're doing something wrong.
- Advisor 2: I always have a open-door policy in my room to talk to the students about when we match them They don't understand friendship or they might not understand how to interact with the person with the disability Come talk to me so I can help educate you on you know how we can talk to that student.
- Advisor 1: More often than not they struggle kind of silently and I have to pick up on that and say hey it looks like you guys might need some help. When they ask for specific help that is very helpful to me because then it's easy to address when they don't ask for help it's harder to address and typically goes on longer than it has to.
- Peer Buddy 1: Every time if we have some kind of disagreement we- I know at least you and I- are really good about just making sure we talk it out to be on the same page but I've never seen either of us really blow up at each other I think we've just really gotten used to just talking things out and making sure on the same page I think we get annoyed with each other because sometimes we're around each other a lot. Just like any other friends...sometimes we bicker and we get a little bit irked at each other but the majority of the time it's fun.
- Buddy 1: Nooo!
- Peer Buddy 1: All the time it's fun?
- Buddy 1: Yeah!
- Peer Buddy 4: Yeah, if that level of commitment to kind of get over the hump of you know that nervousness...like you know, what am I doing here? Why did I sign up for this because I'm a college student and free time as a college student is- you know -a very very big rarity most of the time. And I'll answer..say something, you know, like "Hey, man, I'm studying for a test tomorrow. I can't talk tonight, but you know tomorrow night. I'll be free...Let's do it then". Once you get over that first level the commitment, there's no problem with it, but you have to establish that relationship and the friendship first.
- Advisor 1: Nobody comes into a buddy pair because they're not eager for it to work. Everybody comes in eager But then when it's awkward, they're not really sure.
- Peer Buddy 4: When I signed up. I was super nervous They're like you got a buddy I met him and I was just freaking out texting his mom asking all these questions you think might be applicable Bedtime, allergies, does he have any medicine he needs to take... stuff like that, then it turns out his mom's like "no dietary, nothing, no bedtimes" ...like that was my misconception going into it. I really didn't know what Best Buddies was I assumed that that you might have something you have to abide by or you know some medicine you might have to take Because you had Down syndrome because I've never had any experience with people that have Down syndrome or any other kind of IDB
- Peer Buddy 3: It's been awesome to get to know all of it, you know the good and the bad because everyone has that...Yeah stay positive, right? Everybody has good and bad parts of life.
- Senior VP, BBI: Be yourself have tons of fun and know that both of you are nervous But at the end you both have an opportunity to make a really amazing friendship