

## Friend 2 Friend Programs: Demystifying Autism – Simulation Game



### What to expect:

This 60 minute program includes a powerpoint lecture, videos and a short “stimulation” of participants’ senses (anyone is welcome to leave the room for these few minutes). The “Simulation Game” helps participants to experience sight, smell, taste, touch and sound in a different way, and then we break down how Autistic people may experience the world through different sensory experiences. This program includes stories of two Autistic people, one who is hypo- sensitive and one who is hyper-sensitive to stimulation and what challenges they have faced. We discuss strengths and challenges of all people and tips for being friends with anyone. (There are no puppets.)

### The need to bridge a social void:

There is often a social void between autistic children and their typically developing peers. Since children begin to make social comparisons between the ages of seven and nine (Rubin, 2002), it is natural for them to have questions and concerns about differences they see between themselves and their classmates. The purpose of the Friend 2 Friend program is to give children accurate information about autism (what we call “demystification”) in an age-appropriate and sensitive manner and to foster mutually beneficial friendships between children on the spectrum and their peers. Our larger goal is to promote full social inclusion of *all* children. Creating a truly inclusive school culture is to create a collaborative identity within the school where everyone regards themselves and others as different, and regards different as the norm (Gest, Graham-Bermann, & Hartup, 2001).

### Learning Objectives of the Friend 2 Friend Program:

The inclusive model of this program was designed to promote empathy for autistic individuals by modeling, labeling, explaining, and normalizing the characteristics of autism, while never singling out the individual who may be participating in the program, and if a child self-identifies, they are supported by our staff. Normalizing characteristics of autism provides participants with an opportunity for emotional perspective-taking. The sense of identifying with an individual on the spectrum shifts the typically developing perspective beyond simply understanding and accepting to feelings of empathy (not sympathy). In turn, empathy translates into prosocial behaviors. Prosocial communication is the basis for fostering mutual friendships between autistic individuals and their peers.



For more information about  
our programs or ways we  
support families, please visit  
[VermontFamilyNetwork.org](http://VermontFamilyNetwork.org)  
[PuppetsInEducation.org](http://PuppetsInEducation.org)  
or call  
(800) 800-4005



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*We would like students to....*

- Recognize and accept differences in oneself and others by identifying their own strengths and challenges
- Recognize Autistic individuals as valuable friends
- Know it's okay to ask questions and express feelings
- Understand the unique challenges of ASD
- Empathize with what it might feel like to have ASD
- Experience positive relationships with all peers

## **The Seven Basic Friendship Tips:**

When peers know how to communicate or interact with Autistic peers, they are more willing to do so. These strategies are concrete tools that can be used to enhance social interactions in ALL relationships.

1. **Get Your Friend's Attention** - Say your friend's name to get his or her attention before you speak. *(note: some people may avoid eye contact)*
2. **Use Small Sentences, Gestures, and Wait** - Too many words can sound like blah-blah-blah, so use small sentences and gestures to help your friend understand you. Then wait to give your friend time to answer you. *(note: some people may have delays processing information they hear)*
3. **Watch Your Friend** - so you can learn the things that he or she is good at or likes to do.
4. **Give Your Friend Choices** - When asking your friend to play, try giving choices of the things you know he or she likes to do or is good at.
5. **Ask Your Friend Questions** - Everyone likes to be asked questions about themselves like, "What are you drawing?" "Will you sit beside me?" "Will you play with me?"
6. **Use Friendly Words** - Sometimes "hi" is the friendliest thing you can say to someone!
7. **Accept Differences** - We are all different in our own way. Being a good friend means accepting differences in ourselves and others.

## **F2F Program Benefits:**

### Autistic Children

Increased social success & inclusion  
Decreased anxiety and stress  
Diversity of interests and play  
Increased self-confidence  
Better communication skills  
Fun and friendship

### Non-Autistic Peers, Classmates, Siblings

Increased inclusion  
Better understanding/acceptance of differences in oneself and others  
Increased self-confidence  
Better communication skills  
Fun and friendship