



Friend 2 Friend: Demystifying Autism

Maximum Number of Students: 50
Program Length: 60 minutes

Program Synopsis

This show is about Friendship. Crystal wants to play with Freddie but does not understand why Freddie—who has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)—does some of the things he does.

Freddie, Crystal's friend Angela, and her two teachers educate her about ASD, stims, communication, and friendship. We discuss strengths and challenges of all people and tips for being friends with anyone. Students then have an opportunity to take what they learned in the puppet show and try it with small puppets.

The Need to Bridge a Social Void

There is often a social void between autistic children and their neurotypically developing peers. Since children start making social comparisons between the ages of seven and nine (Rubin, 2002), they often have questions and concerns about the differences they see between themselves and their classmates.

The Friend 2 Friend Program gives children accurate information about autism in an age-appropriate and sensitive manner and fosters 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

This program promotes empathy for autistic individuals by modeling, labeling, explaining, and normalizing the characteristics of autism without singling out the individual who may be participating in the program.

Normalizing characteristics of autism provides students with an opportunity to identify with an individual on the spectrum and shift their perspective beyond accepting and understanding to empathy. This translates into prosocial behaviors and communication, which are the basis for fostering mutual friendships between autistic individuals and their peers.