



## Friend 2 Friend: Demystifying Autism Simulation Game

Maximum Number of Students: 50

Program Length: 60 minutes

Program Note: this is a puppet-free workshop

### Program Synopsis

This program includes a PowerPoint lecture, videos, and a short “stimulation” of participants’ senses (those who wish can leave the room for this part). The “Simulation Game” helps participants experience sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound in a different way. We also discuss how autistic people may experience the world through different sensory experiences. This program includes stories of two autistic people—one who is hyposensitive and one who is hypersensitive to stimulation—and what challenges they face. We discuss strengths and challenges of all people and tips for being friends with anyone.

### 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 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 an 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 is designed to promote 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 understanding and accepting to empathy (not sympathy). This in turn translates into prosocial behaviors and communication, which are the basis for fostering mutual friendships between autistic individuals and their peers.