WIDENING THE CIRCLE
Expanding opportunities for friendships between people with and without disabilities
http://thearcofmass.org/programs/widening-the-circle/

(A partnerships between The Arc of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Disabilities)
8 Reasons Why I’m Here
Since 2012 Widening the Circle has been encouraging the development of friendship between people with and without disabilities.
PEOPLE WITH FRIENDS ARE...

HAPPIER

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45REpVRulEM
PEOPLE WITH FRIENDS ARE...

HEALTHIER

https://www.livescience.com/53315-how-friendships-are-good-for-your-health.html
PEOPLE WITH FRIENDS ARE...

SAFER

https://www.marccenter.org/educators
MORE REASONS WHY FRIENDS AT SCHOOL ARE IMPORTANT!
This is NOT What We Mean...
And this is NOT what we mean either!

He had over 2000 Facebook friends. I was expecting a bigger turnout.
Pros & Cons of Social Media
Strategies for Students of All Ages

FIRST develop a friendship mindset!

Increase the QUANTITY of Social Opportunities by:

• Maximizing inclusion.
• Writing social goals into the IEP.
• Building bridges.
• Decreasing adult proximity.
• Being a facilitator.
Strategies for Students of All Ages

Improve the QUALITY of Social Opportunities by:

• Highlighting students’ similarities.
• Interpreting student behaviors.
• Teaching students how to interact.
• Preparing students for social interactions.
• Conveying student strengths.
MAKING FRIENDS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

“I am a friend when... I help people. Also when I play games with my friends. Then I be nice to people. I can also be honest. Friends are amazing.” – 1st grader
Strategies

• Minimize the times that students are pulled out of the classroom.

• Monitor interactions to address classmates acting as adults.

• Proactively support inclusive play (for all students) at recess.
MAKING FRIENDS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

“A friend to me is someone who will stick by you. Someone who will like you for being you. Someone who will want to play soccer, basketball, and maybe catch with me. A friend is someone that will pick you up when you are down. They don’t gossip or talk bad about you. Also, when you are with a friend you feel free.” – 6th grader
Strategies

• Schedule students with and without disabilities “who seem interested” in the same homeroom.

• Plan ahead for lunch in middle school.

• Consider supports to be as age- and culturally-appropriate as possible.
“I wanted to be friends with Sara (a classmate with Down syndrome) because she was always so fun and energetic in the mornings. She was always dancing in hallways. When I told my parents they thought it was nice, but then they realized it wasn’t just me being nice. Sara was really fun and we were really friends.” – 9th grader
Strategies

• Support students with disabilities to travel to and from school as their peers do.

• Support students with disabilities to join interest-based clubs/activities and attend them without adults.

• Teach classmates/peers how to engage in “friendship work.”
MAKING FRIENDS IN COLLEGE

"I feel I've grown a lot as a person since I've been living on the BSU campus. Not only have I gotten to know many new people, this has also been a great opportunity to further my independence.” —College student
MAKING FRIENDS IN COLLEGE

www.thinkcollege.net
NEXT STEPS
Resources

• Dr. Zachary Rossetti, Boston University, zsr@bu.edu
• Jim Ross, Co-Coordinator, Widening the Circle, jbriii@comcast.net
• Mary Ann Brennen, Co-Coordinator, Widening the Circle brennen01@charter.net
• Widening the Circle, http://thearcofmass.org/programs/widening-the-circle/
• “MAKING FRIENDS With and Without Disabilities in School” Toolkit http://thearcofmass.org/toolkit/