

Research Highlights

Topic: Person-Center Planning and Friendships

Turnbull, A.P., Pereira, L., & Blue-Banning, M. (1999). Parents' facilitation of friendships between their children with a disability and friends without a disability. *Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 24(2), 85-99.

BOTTOM LINE

Parents, children/youth with and without disabilities, other family members and teachers participated in group and individual interviews. The interview data provided information about parents' facilitation of friendships between children with a disability and peers without a disability. One foundational facilitation strategy across all parents was their unconditional acceptance of their son or daughter with a disability. In addition, the article identifies seven other facilitation strategies such as advocating for inclusion in neighborhood schools, encouraging others to accept their child, and advocating for partial participation in community activities. The eight strategies are organized into a friendship facilitation framework.

TIPS

- Provide new opportunities for participation in order to introduce the child/youth with a disability to a new group of potential friends.
- Encourage inclusion in existing neighborhood and community activities with the same children as in the neighborhood school to further friendship opportunities (e.g., girl scouts, swimming at the YMCA).
- Be creative in thinking about the types of community activities the child might participate in. For example, participating in a local beauty pageant for youngsters was a positive experience for one young woman with disabilities.
- Use Circle of Friends to facilitate friendships. Openly discuss the child's strengths and needs to reduce the disability stigma.

TIPS
cont.

- Identify potential friendship facilitators by looking for others who affirm the gifts and strengths of individuals with disabilities and who view their potential friendship as a positive experience for others.
- Encourage parents to invite others with whom they interact in the community around friendship facilitation to participate in individualized education plan (IEP) meetings.

KEY FINDINGS

- Content analysis resulted in the identification of one foundational facilitation strategy and seven other facilitation strategies used by parents of children with disabilities. The eight strategies were organized into a friendship facilitation framework using the work of Lutfiyya (1998) and Schaffner & Buswell (1992)—(a) finding opportunities, (b) making interpretations and (c) making accommodations.
- *Foundational theme:* All parents strongly emphasized that their own unconditional acceptance of their child formed a foundation for facilitation of friendships and acceptance by others of their child. Parents' unconditional acceptance of their children made it easier for them to highlight their children's strengths and commonalities to others.
- *Finding opportunities:* The four identified strategies involved arranging opportunities to bring individuals with and without disabilities together:
 - ◆ Advocating for inclusion in the neighborhood school
 - ◆ Supporting participation in community activities
 - ◆ Initiating and facilitating a Circle of Friends
 - ◆ Involving siblings
- *Making interpretations:* This involved parents interpreting or highlighting their son's or daughter's strengths and commonalities to others:
 - ◆ Encouraging others to accept their child
 - ◆ Ensuring their son or daughter maintains an attractive appearance
- *Making accommodations:* Parents discussed the actual changes or adaptations in the physical environment that helped to involve their son or daughter:
 - ◆ Advocating for partial participation in community activities
- The majority of the time a new opportunity was found, interpretation and accommodation were part of the necessary facilitation in order to actualize the child/youth's participation in the opportunity.

KEY FINDINGS cont.

- All parents focused their efforts on general rather than specific friendship facilitation. This meant increasing opportunities for friendship with a wide variety of people rather than targeting efforts toward friendship with one particular person.
 - The families interviewed emphasized more strongly the role of the mother as a friendship facilitator than the father.
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METHOD

- In four states, Hispanic children with disabilities and one or more of their friends, as well as parents, other family members and teachers participated in individual and group interviews.
 - Purposive sampling and extreme case sampling were used to identify five Hispanic children/youth with disabilities who had a successful friendship with a peer who did not have a disability.
 - Criteria for successful friendships emerged from an extensive review of the friendship and social network literature related to children without disabilities.
 - The 31 participants talked about the children's successful friendships and the parents' facilitation of these friendships.
 - A Hispanic community leader within each community served as a research site coordinator. The site coordinators had many responsibilities including assisting in the identification of participants and finding a location for and scheduling the interviews.
 - A participatory action research committee provided advice and guidance to ensure that the research outcomes would be relevant for children with and without disabilities, family members, teachers, and researchers.
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RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Amistad: Stories of Hispanic children with disabilities and their friendships. (1997). Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, Beach Center.

Blue-Banning, M., Turnbull, A.P., & Pereira, L. (2002). Hispanic youth/young adults with disabilities: Parents' visions for the future. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 27(3), 204-219.

Schaffner, C.B., & Buswell, B.E. (1992). *Connecting students: A guide to thoughtful friendship facilitation for educators and families.* Colorado Springs, CO: PEAK Parent Center.

Turnbull, A.P., Pereira, L., & Blue-Banning, M. (2000). Successful friendships of Hispanic children and youth with disabilities. *Mental Retardation*, 38(2), 138-152.

Turnbull, A.P., Pereira, L., & Blue-Banning, M. (2000). Teachers as friendship facilitators. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 32(5), 66-70.

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