

The Role of Peers: Creating a Peer Program

Peer Interaction vs. Peer Programs

Peer interactions refers to any time students are interacting with one another. It could be before school, in the classroom, during break time, after school, and even weekend activities. It is necessary for students who are deafblind to have interactions with their peers in order for them to connect and grow as individuals. Sometimes, based on the complex needs of certain individuals, these interactions with peers need to be facilitated by families, teachers, or related staff.

Peer Programs refers to a structured or intentional time when general education peers are trained on how to interact and communicate with peers with disabilities. Peer Programs go by many different names: Peer Tutoring, Peer Mentors, Peer Buddies, Peer Supports, Peer Intervention.

Creating, Building, and Maintaining a Peer Program

Elementary Level

- **Creating Peer Programs**
 - Speak to general education teachers and students about peers getting involved with your students.
 - Maintain an organized, calm, and inviting classroom so peers feel connected and needed.
 - Provide training and literature to general education teachers and related staff.
 - Get [Parental Permission](#) to disclose information about specific students and their disabilities.
 - Be excited about inclusion! Always!
- **Building/Recruiting for Peer Programs**
 - Provide a warm and inviting space during recess, lunch etc.
 - Encourage peers to stop by during passing periods, recess, lunch, etc.
 - Ask teachers to recommend students.
 - Network informally, at lunch break, during recess, afterschool.
 - Look for interactions between peers that are happening naturally

- Allow general education peers to come into your classroom at any time.
- Struggling general education peers
- Create opportunities for struggling students
 - For example, if a fifth grade student is reading at a first grade level, invite them to read to your younger students.
- **Maintaining Peer Programs**
 - Provide support and training to all involved: students, aides, teachers, etc.
 - Provide recognition: thank you cards, ice cream parties. (be sure the recognition is not the only motivator. You want peers who want to be there because its fun, not for the reward)
 - Show results to students and staff: point out different scenarios where peers have made a difference
 - Check-in with your peers and ask them if they have any concerns.
 - Reassure them it's ok to ask questions
 - make sure peers are comfortable doing what you ask
 - Explain why you do what you do and why you are asking them to do it.
 - For example, explain why it is better to use hand-under-hand instead of hand-over-hand. Or why we allow processing time for a student.
 - Use data collection to grow and change the program as needed.

Secondary Level

- **Creating Peer Programs**
 - Speak to general education classes about the opportunity to become a Peer Tutor. Provide them with ideas about how to help create a more inclusive school environment.
 - Maintain an organized classroom so peers feel connected and needed. Provide a [To-Do List](#) with activities or errands that can be done during downtime or when a student is absent.
 - Provide training and literature
 - Get [Parental Permission](#) to disclose information about specific students and their disabilities
 - Get your principal/administration on board
 - Have an open door policy. Encourage peers to stop by during passing periods, recess, lunch, etc.
 - Send out an [Email to other teachers](#) and follow-up

- Watch video of principal talking about a peer program at a high school.
- **Building/Recruiting for Peer Programs**
 - Offer Peer Tutoring as a credited class
 - Include Peer Tutoring opportunities in the morning announcements
 - Provide a Peer Tutor Packet
 - Create a display outside your classroom to catch the attention and curiosity of peers
 - Have an Open Door Policy: allow general education peers to come into your classroom at any time.
- **Maintaining Peer Programs**
 - Provide support and training
 - Provide recognition: give out awards or have your students write thank you cards
 - Show results: point out different scenarios where peers have made a difference
 - Check-in with your peers and ask them if they have any concerns. Reassure them if it's ok to ask questions
 - Check comfort level: make sure peers are comfortable doing what you ask
 - Explain why you do what you do and why you are asking them to do it. For example, explain why it is better to use hand-under-hand instead of hand-over-hand. Or why we allow processing time for a student.