

# How to Start a Buddy Program

## Overview:

This plan below is specifically for elementary schools. Several middle and high schools do their own Buddy Programs, and there are also options to create a chapter with Best Buddies International

<https://www.bestbuddies.org/>.

School Staff (and parent volunteers) plan monthly 30 minute sessions to encourage friendships between older student mentors, and students with disabilities and other students identified as needing help making friends or adjusting socially in school.

A Buddy is a student in grades 4-6 who partners with another student ("friend") and does games, crafts, and activities together. Activities are led by PTA parents and staff members. Activities include crafts, activities related to holidays, games, Bingo, Would you Rather type games, outdoor games, and other activities.

Several schools have set their Buddy Program to be at the same time as Safety Patrols and Student Council Association meetings, so that it is not competing with core instruction time.

## Buddy Program Timeline

- Ideally in the Spring: Meet with the school principal to talk about implementing in the fall, and identify a Staff Sponsor.
- Early Fall: Identify Meeting times and location(s)
- Early Fall: Applications: Promote in newsletters, morning news shows, and talk with 4th - 6th grade teachers to encourage applications. Students turn in a Buddy program application that is signed by their teacher and parent, and teachers should identify kids that would make good buddies, and flag any kids who would not be a good fit for the program.
- Staff Nominations for Friends: Work with special ed and counseling staff to identify kids that would benefit from the program. Send a consent form home to parents with information about the program.
- Buddy Pairing-students are matched by staff. This should be done by staff only to protect confidentiality. Depending on interest, it is ok if buddies double up with a friend, or if two friends work with one buddy.
- It is realistic to do these items above in August/September, and plan for the first meeting in October.

## Buddy Training

- Staff Sponsor drops into 4th - 6th grade classes to give a brief overview of the program and talk about how to be a good friend. (Talk about acceptance, different communication styles, and that buddies should say hi to their friends when seen elsewhere at school.) This is a great discussion for all students!

## Planning

- Staff sponsor and parent volunteers meet monthly, ideally a week before the Buddy event to plan out activities and identify supplies that might be needed.
  - Keep in mind the characteristics of your students!
    - Some students might be non-speaking and might prefer motioning to things (like Would You Rather type games.)
    - Some students might prefer active games while others might prefer crafts.
    - Loud noises might be difficult for some students.

- You may have to consider multiple locations to host the Buddy event. (At one school, we found that the majority of the kids liked meeting in the cafeteria, but others found the cafeteria too overwhelming and preferred meeting in a smaller room, like a special ed classroom that they were more comfortable with.)

### **Suggested Activities**

- Crafts- Decorating Pumpkins, Decorating gingerbread houses or assembling craft or sticker gingerbread houses, Crafts related to holidays like Thanksgiving or Valentine's, or crafts related to seasons
- Games: Bingo, Spot It (spot the differences between 2 cards),
- Field Day type activities (that all can participate in)
- Dance Party
- Would you Rather Activities related to holidays or seasons (Can print out, so students can point to activities or discuss, or can have kids move to different sides of the room based on preference.)
- Conversation Cards (being mindful of students who use different ways to communicate, like an AAC device or by pointing)
- Scavenger Hunts (Either for items outside the school, or for common items, like "a kid wearing a red shirt.")

### **Budget**

A Buddy program could be done with a very small budget, and buying craft materials from dollar stores and asking the art department for supplies. One school worked with their PTA to get a budget of \$500 to cover more elaborate crafts like buying pumpkins, and to have craft supplies for other activities.