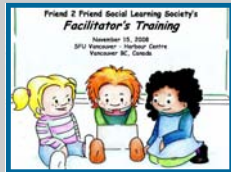


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Welcome Back to school, work and the fall issue of *Here's What's Different About Us* the Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society's bi-annual newsletter. This newsletter is dedicated to providing current information on the social, communication and play needs of individuals on the autism spectrum and our community.

Parent's Perspective



Hi! I'm Lori. I'm a Lead Presenter delivering the Friend 2 Friend Programs in Calgary Alberta. I am the proud and somewhat warped mother of two magically wonderful boys. My younger son, Josh, has ASD, Wahoo! That is cause for celebration. When I think of the experiences I would've missed out on, the people I'd never have met and all that goes with raising a child on the autism spectrum, I'm glad I have the opportunity to travel down this nice, bushy, tropical path in life wielding my Mom machete as well as that other more-travelled one. Lucky me!

Next month, we'll deliver the Friend 2 Friend Programs at Josh's school for the third year in a row and I didn't even have to ask! The entire school population has clearly benefited from the sparkling effects of the programs, because they want us back each year. The first time we presented at Josh's school he was in Grade 3. The very next morning, when I dropped Josh off at school, a young man named C.J. was walking by the car. I knew C.J. had antagonized Josh on the playground more than once and while I claim to love all children, this one was a bit of a challenge for me personally. When Josh got out of the car, C.J. looked over and very casually said, "Hi, Josh," then kept walking. The power of "hi" strikes again. If that's not instant gratification, I don't know what is.

The second year we presented to Josh's school, it was Grade 4. When in grade three Josh's class had participated in the Friend 2 Friend Puppet Presentation Program, but now it was time for the Simulation Game Program. As Lead Presenter I used a couple of examples of Josh in the presentation, and man, was he pumped to be the star of that show! Couldn't get the grin off his face as he listened to his classmates ask questions about ASD and about Josh specifically (which of course I redirected to Josh otherwise our speech pathologist would've found me and slapped my wrist).

I love working with Friend 2 Friend, combined with my other job as a comedian, it provides a fabulous balance in my life. To date, I haven't confused the two jobs (knock on wood) although handing out stickers after a comedy show would amuse me greatly. There are times when I'm acutely aware that the things kids blurt out are often paralleled by audience members at a comedy show. Once, while on the job, somebody told me their special talent was picking their nose with their tongue, and then they proceeded to demonstrate.

Which job was I at? I'll never tell!

Lori Gibbs is a mother, stand-up comedian and music teacher. She has two sons, one on the autism spectrum. Lori is Lead Presenter delivering the Friend 2 Friend Programs through the Autism Calgary Association www.autismcalgary.com

Read our new article

Creating a Culture of Inclusion Through Play and Friendships

in November's issue of

Autism Quarterly Magazine

www.asquarterly.com

Professional's Ponder

How I Use the "That's What's Different About Me!" Program

by Wendy Holtan

I work for the North Vancouver School District as an Itinerant Autism Support Worker. In this position I move throughout schools and classes in the District. As part of my job I have had the opportunity to introduce the concept of different thinking to many classes. One of the ways I have found helpful with the younger students is to use the Friend 2 Friend "That's What's Different About Me!" program. The puppets are a natural draw for the younger children and they become easily engaged in the story.

The information contained in the DVD goes a long way in demystifying different behaviours and explaining supportive approaches. The language is simple and the "Friendship Tips" are straightforward and useful. The students are easily engaged and are eager to discuss the presentation when the puppets are finished.

The way in which I use the program is this:

- * I use a puppet (Freddie) to introduce the DVD version of the F2F Puppet Play
- * I use Freddie at the end of the puppet show and ask the students if they have any questions for Freddie
- * Following the puppet play on DVD I review each of the tips by offering the Picture Communication Symbol corresponding to the tips and asking the children if anyone can tell me what the tip is.
- * I leave one of the That's What's Different About Me colouring/story books with the class for silent reading times,
- * I leave the teacher a set of the black and white colouring pages of the F2F Seven Basic Friendship Tips with a suggestion that the students could create a poster for the classroom and/or hallway with the pages they've coloured.
- * I leave the teacher a laminated poster of the F2F Seven Friendship Tips.

The responses to the program are delightful and even young students are able to remember the friendship tips.

As a final piece I make a follow-up visit a few weeks later, with my friend Freddie, of course. The students are always excited to share what they remember and what they are doing to include all their friends with "different kinds of minds"

Wendy Holtan is a member of the Autism Support Team for North Vancouver School District.



Looking for books???

Visit our "new" on-line bookstore at:

www.friend2friendsociety.org/bookstore/index.php

Ask DD!

Q: Many of the children in my son's class treat him like a younger sibling. They all like to "help him" but do not see him as an equal or friend. How do I help the children in my son's class see him as a friend?

A: When typically developing peers are encouraged to *help* their classmates on the autism spectrum, this often results in highly solicitous behaviours on the part of the peers or what I refer to as "Helping Peers". In this scenario, peers are encouraged and even rewarded (with the best intentions) by caring and well-meaning adults. Unfortunately one-sided helping behaviours between any individuals within a group will usually lead to an inequality in the group dynamic. When typical peers are encouraged to "help" the child on the autism spectrum they will start to perceive the child as younger and/or less able. This perception promotes an imbalance in the peer group. And, on some occasions, peers will inadvertently dominate the child on the spectrum interfering with independent communication and socialization.

When supporting children on the autism spectrum in inclusive classrooms or community settings, it is important to provide **all children** with prosocial communication strategies for successful social interactions. This means if peers are asked or expected to help the child on the autism spectrum, then the child on the autism spectrum should be asked or expected to help his or her peers as well, "Quid pro quo".

When promoting the idea of helping one another in a peer group, we must utilize everyone's special skill or affinities, thus creating a classroom or culture of inclusion that embraces diversity.

Promoting social, communication, play and friendships between children on the autism spectrum and their typical developing peers starts with empathy - not sympathy!

Heather McCracken is a parent of three, one of her children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and is the creator of the Friend 2 Friend Programs and the founder and executive director of the F2FSLs.

For more information on designing social strategies for including children on the autism spectrum within their peer groups watch for our new books entitled "**The Autism Code: Designing Meaningful Social Strategies for Supporting Children on the Autism Spectrum in Inclusive Classrooms and Community Settings**"

For more information on the Friend 2 Friend Programs and Services contact:



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