

For users of AAC and their caregivers: Making and maintaining friendships

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Friendships develop as part of a process of being present with another. It is a process that requires not only time and opportunity, but also openness to and interest in the other.

Although individual therapy or instruction on how to improve interpersonal interactions can be of use, it is the frequency of interaction and experiences *with others* that ultimately enhances the development of friendships. The interaction between peers and our ability to stay at a relaxed distance give impetus to this delicate social thread. Self-other awareness, empathetic listening and presence as well as an openness to different manifestations of meaning-making are essential in cultivating the delicate thread of friendship between students.

This presentation discusses the concept of friendship and outlines some ways in which one can deepen and enhance friendships between students who use AAC and their communication partners. The following will be addressed:

1. Meaning-making and different types of friendships
2. Skills that enhance social closeness with others
3. Strategies to promote friendships

Differences and similarities between making a friend and maintaining a friendship will be addressed. And finally, the importance of dedicating time and energy to the development of friendships between users of AAC and their peers both at home and school is highlighted. Close friendships are the best investment in the future academic and socio-economic well-being of our students.