



**The
Children's
Society**

Friendship for All

Training for short break carers

childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall

Training
short
breaks
carers to
support
friendship

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1. Introduction

The Children's Society's Friendship for All service is funded by BBC Children in Need and has worked directly with over 100 disabled children and young people from all over the country. We've worked with professionals from short breaks services in North Yorkshire, Nottingham, Leeds and York to design short breaks which increase children's access to friendship. We have also run a pilot with the City of York Council to demonstrate how short break services can provide safe and exciting opportunities for children to meet with their friends. With the support of the Short Breaks Network, we have captured best practice from local authorities throughout the country.

Friendship for All's suggested training programme is designed to work alongside existing carer preparation, provide further development for approved carers and assist with the supervision of carers who are supporting a child's friendship. The suggested scenarios can be easily customised to client and organisational needs and practices.

Our research has shown the majority of children and young people would like to have their short breaks with friends, yet short breaks providers often continue to support on a one adult to one child ratio. When young people are not

engaging with friends, they miss out on essential social skills, don't learn to manage differences of opinion, don't increase their independence and become dependent upon adult carers – indeed many children name adult carers as friends. Carer training, support and supervision will need to be responsive to changing culture. Increasingly the outcomes agreed in disabled children's Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are related to children's need to have fun with their friends and there will be an expectation that short breaks services will be able to flexibly meet these identified needs.

The aim of this training resource is:

- to support short break service link workers and managers to safely prepare, train and support carers and approved volunteers to flexibly facilitate the friendships of children in their care
- to increase and develop an understanding of the importance of friendship in the lives of disabled children and consider how they, as short breaks carers, can become facilitators and enablers of friendship.

The DVD – Short Breaks and Friendship – captures children and young people safely enjoying leisure time with their chosen friends. It's designed to motivate and inspire short breaks services to include friendship as an essential part of their short breaks offer to families.



'This would be the answer to all our problems! Jane is bored with her family! She is a typical 14 year old girl who wants to meet other girls/boys her age and listen to music, do hair, nails and chat.'

Parent of disabled young person

2. Perfect day

Aim

A fun introductory activity that gives participants the chance to reflect on the challenges young disabled people face when trying to make and maintain friendships.

You will need:

- Plain paper or a 'Perfect day' worksheet, which is freely downloadable on the My Organiser page of the website: childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall
 - Pens, crayons, pencils (optional: old magazines, newspapers, scissors and glue).
1. Ask participants to imagine their perfect day with a friend. They can think back to when they were a teenager and what they used to do with their friends.
 2. Then (after handing out coloured pens, pencils etc) ask them to make notes or draw pictures to illustrate what would be their 'perfect day' with their friends.
 3. If you complete a picture reflecting your own perfect day beforehand, you can share this with the group to prompt ideas and encourage people to share their memories.
 4. When everyone has finished ask if they would like to share their drawing or description with the group. Go round and give everyone a chance to share their picture.
 5. Next, ask people to work with a partner and to think about one of their clients and ask themselves: 'Would your client be able to do what you did as a teenager?' 'Would any adaptations need to be made to venue, transport, activity, supervision, forward planning etc?' 'Who would their chosen friend be?'
 6. Ask each pair to feedback from their discussion. Ask people not to use real names to maintain confidentiality.

Tips for the facilitator:

Hopefully this activity and the discussions following it will reveal that your clients do not have the same opportunities for friendship that we all took for granted. Here are some points that you can elaborate on if they don't arise in the conversations:

- Sometimes more planning is needed to enable disabled young people to spend time with their friends when the activities haven't been specifically tailored to meet their needs.
- There is often less opportunity to be spontaneous, take risks and have freedom. Many venues and activities might not be accessible to them or their chosen friend.
- It is important to be creative and think of ways around potential barriers, don't be defeatist otherwise young people end up with fewer opportunities again and again. Allow children to tell their own story to parents/carers when they arrive home.

3. Scenario work – based on practice

Aim

To help the participants begin to think about how short breaks can be used creatively to increase opportunities for different young people to see their friends.

You will need:

- Space to break up into pairs or small groups.
- 1.** Print out the scenarios from the My Organiser page on the website after removing the facilitator's notes. Available on childrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall
The scenarios can be customised to your organisation or you may wish to write new scenarios relevant to your service.
- 2.** Give each pair or group a scenario. Ask them to discuss the questions at the bottom of each scenario and make brief notes from their discussion.
- 3.** Set a time limit to allow sufficient time to read and discuss in their groups.
- 4.** Ask each group to come back, read their scenario to the group and share the main points from their discussion.
- 5.** Use the facilitator's notes at the end of each scenario as suggestions to add to the discussion if they haven't already been mentioned.

The scenarios provided are all based on real life examples from different short break schemes. The four young people are:

James: A 16 year old boy attends mainstream school and has autism. Key themes are approaching adult life; social skill and confidence development; seven years of the same activities; encouraging independence from carers.

Claire: An eight year old girl who attends special school, she has a learning difficulty and is a wheelchair user. Key themes are Education, Health and Social Care Plans (EHCP) and a family who are new to short breaks.

Chloe: A 14 year old girl who attends mainstream school and has epilepsy and a mild learning difficulty. Key themes are feeling different and excluded from peers; readiness for increased independence and confidence; frustration; lack of meaningful friendships.

Evie: A 14 year old girl who attends special school. Evie is physically and learning disabled and is non-verbal. Key themes are friendship for young people with complex health needs and friendship opportunities during overnight short breaks.

James

James is a 16 year old who attends mainstream school, likes playing football and playing computer games (especially Minecraft).

He has autism and finds it difficult to initiate conversations. He is very popular and has lots in common with some of the other boys who access the Learning Support Unit at his school. James is verbal and talks passionately about his interests. James never sees any friends outside of school and his family don't know who he gets on well with, because James himself finds judging this difficult.

Since James was nine he has been accessing short breaks care and he has a short break every other weekend with Sue (a 55 year old Community Short Breaks worker). Sue takes James out to museums, cafes, parks and sometimes to town.

James has been doing the same sort of things on his short break for seven years and he enjoys being with Sue, but he says he is lonely and feels he has no friends.

- What are the main challenges James faces with regard to friendship?
- What role could the short breaks service provider play in supporting the young person to meet existing friends or make new friends?
- What would your next steps be to put your plan into action?



Image posed by model

Facilitator's notes:

James is 16 and he could be using his short breaks to see his own friends. His carer could act in the role of facilitator whilst supporting James to develop his independence and improve his social confidence.

James's social worker or short breaks worker could speak to James's teacher or learning support worker to find out who James gets on particularly well with and who might potentially be a good friend for him. They might observe how he interacts with friends at school.

It may be that some of James's friends from school also access the short breaks service and their carers could arrange sessions together. The short breaks worker could research groups with shared interest where friendships can emerge, for example a mainstream or specialist football club.

Chloe

Chloe is 14 years old, she likes going to the theatre, listening to music, watching any TV dramas about vampires and spending time with her mum.

Chloe has epilepsy and a mild learning difficulty. Chloe always needs to be with someone who knows how to administer emergency medication in case she has a seizure. Chloe loves school, she finds maths difficult and her dyslexia makes English a challenge but she loves being with girls her own age and has a group of girls who she hangs around with. Chloe doesn't say much because she lacks confidence but she loves listening to the other girls chatting and they are kind to her. Although Chloe regards the girls as her friends, she isn't included when they meet up at each other's houses and in town.

Recently Chloe has been getting frustrated and angry and has been very argumentative with her Mum. She is beginning to feel different and isolated and like she has nothing to talk to her friends about.

Chloe started using short breaks a year ago and her worker Jenny (aged 22) takes her to Guides where it is hoped she will get the chance to make new friends. Chloe doesn't go to her local Guides because they felt they couldn't safely manage her epilepsy, so she travels to Guides in the next village where there are no other girls from her school. She has never really enjoyed it much and has not made any friends.

- What are the main challenges Chloe faces with regard to friendship?
- What role could the short breaks service provider play in supporting Chloe to meet existing friends or make new friends?
- What are the next steps to put your plan into action?



Image posed by model

Facilitator's notes:

Chloe is feeling increasingly left out at school because her group of friends all meet up and do things outside of school without including her. Her isolation is likely to increase as they all get older, unless she can become more involved in after-school get-togethers.

The Guides group isn't really working for Chloe. The short break worker could have a chat with Chloe (and her mum) to rethink alternative ways to use her short breaks.

Chloe could invite some of her friends from school to go out with her or invite them to her home, supported by her short break worker's unobtrusive presence in case of seizure.

Claire

Claire is eight years old; she loves music, making loom bands and playing on the computer. Claire attends a special school which she enjoys; she has a learning difficulty and uses a wheelchair. She is very chatty and usually happy, delighting in the presence of other young people.

Many of the young people in Claire's class access short breaks but, although she's entitled to a short break, Claire's mum had never requested the service because she felt she should provide everything for Claire herself. Recently Claire's mum's health has been poor and she is finding it difficult as a single parent to meet Claire's needs. She has made a referral to the short breaks team.

Claire has recently been supported by her social worker to complete an Education, Health and Social Care Plan (EHCP). She identified 'having a really good friend who I get to see after school' as her personal aspiration.

- What are the main challenges Claire faces with regard to friendship?
- What role could a short breaks worker play in supporting Claire to meet existing friends or make new friends?
- What are your next steps to put your plan into action?

Facilitator's notes:

Claire has friends who are already accessing short breaks, so there is an obvious opportunity to ask lots of questions about who Claire's friends are while she is being assessed for the service.

As Claire's mum has been reluctant to access services in the past, it may be that she finds this transition difficult. Claire's mum might feel more comfortable if the short break helps Claire to meet up with friends to enjoy an ordinary out of school activity. It may not feel like such a specialist service or 'intervention' if it is set up with the intention of providing age-appropriate opportunities to meet up with friends.

If Claire's chosen friend or friends are already receiving short breaks, there is potential for their respective short breaks workers to be introduced to one another. They could instigate an introductory joint meeting with Claire and her friend(s), then share ideas about where they want to meet. The outcomes of Claire's EHCP aspirations will be monitored and recorded at her review. As Claire uses a wheelchair, careful planning will be needed to ensure good access to activities, toilets, public transport etc.



Image posed by model

Evie

Evie is a 14 year old girl who attends her local special school. She enjoys listening to music, being around people, and going to town to listen to the bands that play on the streets at the weekend.

Evie is physically and learning disabled, she has no verbal communication. She communicates through facial expression and posture. Evie makes it very clear who she likes to be with as her face lights up and she will put her hands out to be held, especially when she bumps into any friends from school in town. Evie is very popular and knows a lot of people.

For the last three years Evie has been having short breaks with a contract carer who is approved to have three young people at one time in her home, which is specially adapted to support young people with complex health needs. Evie stays at the house one weekend every month and especially enjoys the sensory room. Evie doesn't see any of her friends outside of school unless she sees them in town and her carer has noticed recently how animated and happy she looks after she has seen someone she knows.

- What are the main challenges Evie faces with regard to friendship?
- What role could the short breaks service provider play in supporting the young person to meet existing friends or make new friends?
- What would your next steps be to put your plan into action?



Image posed by model

Facilitator's notes:

It may be that some of the other young people who go to stay with the contract carer are already friends with Evie, although that cannot be assumed. This should be explored by the short breaks coordinator. They could speak to school and find out who Evie gets on well with – there could be opportunities to arrange the placements so that Evie goes to stay at the same time as her friend.

If any of Evie's friends have been offered community short breaks, they could join Evie at her contract carer's home to use the sensory room, all friends together. This could offer Evie the chance to see her friends and also provide an activity for the other young people using existing resources, without increasing the level of responsibility for the carers.

4. Experience of short break carers

Aim

To learn from the experience of other short break workers who have practice of / knowledge of in taking out young people with one friend or in a friendship group.

Here are some quotes from carers who have experience in taking out young people with one friend or in a friendship group. These quotes could be given as a hand-out or read out and used as prompts for discussions.

Benefits

It makes the job easier

'Four hour sessions can be long and lonely places, especially when working with a non-verbal young person... If they have a friend with them it's so much easier acting as a facilitator and letting the natural friendship just work.'

It can be more fun for the young person

'It made the short break more exciting for him and enjoyable for me, it made the day go quicker, much better for the child.'

Seeing the young person develop

'I got to see the young person I had known for a while becoming a much more socially confident and independent person, I don't think that would have happened if it was just me taking him out by myself every week.'

Challenges

Planning can be tricky

'It can be hard to find times that are convenient for both young people and carers to be free to meet up. Particularly when the children are at school and they

are tired in the evenings so sessions sometimes need to be rearranged. That's why we prefer to meet up during school holidays.'

Sometimes behaviour can be harder to manage

'He gets so excited and quite "hyper" when his friend is with him and his behaviour can be more excitable and unpredictable, but that's because he's happy so it is important not to just avoid it because it's more challenging.'

Tips

An important role for carers

'There is a real role for carers to introduce communication skills, use of phone etc so young people (where possible) can start to make their own arrangements, fix up their own social occasions with their friends with the support of carers.'

Mixing one to one and friendship sessions

'They benefit from one to ones but also from being together, so we mix it up so they tend to meet each other during school holidays. I think it may be more about taking a step back and just being there when needed, rather than being the main event.'

It should be introduced early on

'If there was a taster session for new short break workers it would be a good time to have a session about friendships while people are new to the role, as they won't have established ideas about what a short breaks service has to look like.'

The timing of including a friend is important

'It is usually best to get the short break link established first before introducing the child's friend, but there is no set way, it varies from child to child.'

Practical considerations

When embarking on a new way of working there will always concerns and questions about possible challenges and difficulties. Here is a table showing some of the challenges that other services have faced and the solutions that worked for them. It's useful to have a discussion about who should be responsible for any actions and this can be reviewed and updated as everyone learns from experience. You can add extra boxes and give people the opportunity to raise potential challenges and see if you can come up with any solutions together.

Potential challenge	Potential solutions	Responsibility
The young people falling out and not wanting to go out together anymore.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have a break from going out together, it's not compulsory and everyone falls out. ■ See this as a learning opportunity for the young people to develop skills in negotiating, sharing, making friends and forgiving. 	
The chosen friend demanding all of the carer's attention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Explain to the young people what friendship is about and that they are friends and you are there just to support them if needed. ■ Try to distance yourself from the activity as much as possible so it is not about your relationship with them. ■ Encourage them to ask each other questions and not direct questions to you all the time. 	
Confusion about who the short break is actually for.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It is crucial at the beginning of any friendship link where there is only one carer that the arrangement is clearly explained to both parties. ■ A letter of understanding must be sent to the chosen friend to state that they might be invited out sometimes to join in the short break with their friends, but this won't be every week and is not guaranteed. 	

Potential challenge	Potential solutions	Responsibility
<p>Is the carer insured to take out two young people?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It is sometimes assumed that insurance is a barrier to one carer taking out two young people. This needs to be discussed with the company who insure the carers as it is usually not a problem at all, assuming proper risk assessments and safety measures are put in place. 	
<p>The young person's behaviour becoming more challenging because they are with a friend.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Some young people get really excited about having their friend join them on a short break (which is a real positive), they may be more excitable and maybe show off. This won't be a problem if both young people have their own carer, but if there is only one carer it might be sensible to have an extra volunteer on the first few sessions when you think this may cause any potential safety risks. 	
<p>Difficulties in making arrangements when two sets of young people and carers are involved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is no doubt that a short break that supports a friendship will involve more planning and arranging. ■ It could be the responsibility of a member of the Short Break Team to help with these additional arrangements at the request of the carers. ■ Families will have to accept that sessions might need to be changed or go ahead without the friends on occasions – as long as this is made clear when the link is being established this should be fine. 	

5. Friendship events

Aim

To generate some ideas for large events which will give workers the chance to network and young people opportunities to see their friends. Short break services that have made their service more inclusive of friendship have often found that holding events provided invaluable opportunities for carers to get to know each other and observe which children in the service already know each other and get along.

What you will need:

- Space to break into small groups.
 - Post-it notes, or note paper to write ideas and action plans.
1. Ask participants to break into small groups to think of different events for short break workers to attend with their link children.
 2. Encourage participants to be as creative as they can and think about what their clients would really enjoy.
 3. For each activity, ask groups to jot down a few action points (see example).

Activity: Picnic in the Park

Venue: Green Park

Age Range: 0-18

Purpose: Allow short break carers to meet each other and let young people meet others who use the service, to see if they already know each other and if they get on well. Carers can swap contact details and make arrangements to meet up again if the young people and their families are happy with this arrangement.

Action points

- ✓ Short breaks team would need to create and send out invitations to carers.
- ✓ Risk assessment.
- ✓ A communication to be sent to carers to explain the purpose of the event.
- ✓ Wet weather plan.
- ✓ Arrange activities or entertainment.

**Visit our website to download
this guide and other
resources:**

**[chidlrenssociety.org.uk/
friendshipforall](http://chidlrenssociety.org.uk/friendshipforall)**

The Children's Society

It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect. Too often their problems are ignored and their voices unheard.

Now it is time to listen and to act.

The Children's Society is a national charity that runs local services, helping children and young people when they are at their most vulnerable, and have nowhere left to turn.

We also campaign for changes to laws affecting children and young people, to stop the mistakes of the past being repeated in the future.

Our supporters around the country fund our services and join our campaigns to show children and young people they are on their side.

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For further information contact:

The Children's Society
Edward Rudolf House
Margery St
London WC1X 0JL
Supporter care team: 0300 303 7000

friendshipforall.org.uk
childrenssociety.org.uk

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Names used in this report have been changed to maintain anonymity. All scenario photos posed by models.

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