

Developing Your Circle of Friends Plan: Next Steps

Now is the time for a specific plan and time table. Either by yourself or with your team members develop a workable plan and timeline for implementation. Consult the Circle of Friends virtual learning community website for ideas:

bit.ly/cofne

Watch the following webinars in this two part training series before completing this Next Steps document. Webinars are approximately 30 minutes in length each:

<https://youtu.be/Hfn8oPgEoms> (training webinar part 1)

<https://youtu.be/xrfMt8OHpmU> (training webinar part 2)

Collaboration:

While not required, you may wish to consider inviting a colleague to help with your group implementation. The person(s) who will implement your CoF group is/are:

Notifying Parents:

How will parents of peers and focus student(s) be informed? Who? When? It is not necessary to provide the ASD Network permission forms from parents, however, there are samples for your own personal use on the virtual learning community website. Copy, use, and modify as needed.

<https://sites.google.com/view/circle-of-friends-community/paperwork>

Choosing Focus Student(s):

Names of focus student(s) for next school year? At least one focus student must have autism per grant requirements.

Choosing Peers:

How will you choose peers? Who will do this? Will you seek requests from gen ed teachers? How many peers will you need? Date peers group will be chosen by?

Notifying Focus Student:

Who will explain to the focus student about CoF? When? How?

Notifying Peers:

Who will explain to peers about CoF? When (date, time, place)? How?

Meeting Structure:

Will you run a small group or a large group? One focus student? More than one focus student?

I/we will meet on (day/time) each week:

Will you have peer mentor only meetings? If so, how often? Whole group meetings? Peer only meetings are not necessarily needed as long as peer mentors have some opportunity to communicate how social interactions are going. It is recommend if peer only meetings are held, one out of four meetings is usually enough. You want plenty of time for the kids to be together with the focus student(s).

Meeting Dates:

Create a calendar of meeting dates for the upcoming school year. Indicate which meetings will be peer only and which will be whole group.

Meeting Implementation:

Who will run the first Circle meeting with peers explaining CoF? When? Concepts covered that first meeting?

Meetings--Awareness Lessons:

Some of your meetings should focus on teaching students about autism and other special needs. What materials could you use? What lesson topics could you develop? Examine materials on display at training today or in your ESU lending libraries; view 'Ideas and Resources' drop down screen, and 'Success Stories' on project web site.

<https://sites.google.com/view/circle-of-friends-community/ideas-and-resources/awareness-and-bully-prevention>

Meetings--Individual Focus Student Awareness:

Will you communicate individual focus student needs to peers? How will you do this? Specifically, how will you teach peers to provide social, academic, and/or behavioral support? How will you support peers, observe, and give them feedback? What adult will be in charge of this? Teacher(s)? Paraprofessionals?

Meetings--Obtaining Peer Feedback:

In order to target social and behavioral skills, how will you build in a mechanism for peers to communicate focus student needs with CoF adult facilitators?

Ideas include: starting peer only meetings with success/challenges (in interactions with focus student) , teaching peers how sharing information on focus student is helpful as opposed to tattling, providing peers times/places facilitators are available if/when they need to discuss a problematic issue regarding the focus student.

Meetings-Teaching Social Skills:

What social skills could you target for instruction at your meetings? What materials and/or activities could you consider to teach these skills? See the 'Social Skills' and 'SEL Lessons' section in the virtual learning community website under 'Ideas and Resources'.

<https://sites.google.com/view/circle-of-friends-community/ideas-and-resources/social-skills-teaching-ideas>

<https://sites.google.com/view/circle-of-friends-community/ideas-and-resources/sel-literature-lessons>

Meetings-Providing Social Opportunities:

Some meetings are planned simply for providing fun, social time and a vehicle for practicing your targeted social skills. What activities could you consider for your group?

After/Out of School Activities:

Out of school activities are not required, but if you are planning on your CoF group participating in them, what could you have your group do? See 'Activity Ideas' under 'Ideas and Resources' and also 'Success Stories' in the virtual learning community site.

<https://sites.google.com/view/circle-of-friends-community/ideas-and-resources/activity-ideas>

<https://sites.google.com/view/circle-of-friends-community/success-stories>

Service Learning/Fundraising:

Service learning and/or fundraising activities are not required, but if you are planning on your CoF group participating in them, what could you have your group do? See 'Activity Ideas' under 'Ideas and Resources' in the virtual learning community website.

<https://sites.google.com/view/circle-of-friends-community/ideas-and-resources/activity-ideas>

Fundraising:

It is not necessary to do any fundraising for your Circle of Friends groups. However, some groups enjoy earning money and participating in fundraising projects not only for the additional funds they provide for group activities, but also for the opportunities they provide

to practice social skills. If you are planning on doing any fundraisers for your group, what are some ideas you could consider? To see what other groups have done, go to the 'Fundraising Ideas' link under 'Ideas and Resources' in the virtual learning community site.

<https://sites.google.com/view/circle-of-friends-community/ideas-and-resources/fundraising>

Obstacles:

What obstacles do you anticipate encountering as you implement your CoF group this coming school year? Brainstorm possible solutions. Take a look at the 'Frequently Asked Questions' page for obstacle/solutions other facilitators have experienced:

<https://sites.google.com/view/circle-of-friends-community/faq>

Training and Support Available to Circle of Friends Facilitators:

Contact Mary Schlieder at:

mary.schlieder@gmail.com anytime with questions. I offer training and support to anyone interested in starting a Circle of Friends group.