



# Building Relationships and Community

## By Steven Nguyen

Having friends is one of the most rewarding experiences in a child and adults life. Friendships provide the companionship and emotional support we all need as individuals opening doors to new experiences. Friends build each other up and are there for you through the good times and bad.

As individuals, we all know the importance of having friendships.

Unfortunately for some, especially those with disabilities, making friends can be

extremely difficult. Growing up as someone with a physical disability and a non-verbal learning disorder, at times I felt shy, isolated, and alone. I can count on one hand the number of birthday parties and invites to the movies I received during this time of my life. The thought of it can be daunting!

Research has suggested the average person has about 150 important relationships in their lifetime. Whereas, a person with a disability has on average

around 25. (Reference: Dr. Al Condoluci's Ted Talk video on [\*Social Capital and the Power of Relationships\*](#))

We can all be a part of encouraging positive and healthy relationships for everyone. I'd like to share a few of my tips on how to encourage these relationships:

- ◆ **Think Inclusive!** It's not only important to be around people who understand what you go through on a day-to-day basis, but equally as important to be around those who may not.
- ◆ Don't focus too much on what the individual's needs are. Think about what they will be able to contribute by focusing on their strengths, talents, and abilities.
- ◆ Figure out their interests and tailor activities around them. Activities can include a particular sport, TV show, or movie.
- ◆ Parents, invite your children's friends to come over to play and make it a routine.

- ◆ Working, attending school, and volunteering are great ways to connect with other people. These are places where individuals have the opportunity to show their strengths, trust can build, and friendships can be made.
- ◆ **Believe!** Believing can sometimes be difficult for families, but a little positivity can go a long way.



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