



Making Friendships In The Spellerverse!

By: Staci Warren, PIT

Many professionals assumed to be “experts” on autism, believe that there is a lack of desire or motivation for autistic people to be SOCIAL and connect with others. There are myths that autistic people are unwilling to form meaningful RELATIONSHIPS and lack the ability to feel emotions such as EMPATHY, love, and JEALOUSY. Also, there is myth that autistic people don’t have a sense of humor or understand how to tell a joke. This lesson is going to not only DEBUNK these myths, but also provide some tips and resources for how to make friendships and develop social relationships in the “SPELLERVERSE”. The “Spellerverse” describes our community of spellers, or individuals from the non-speaking, minimally, and unreliably speaking who use spelling and/or typing as a means of communication. You will also hear from a few real experts who are speller ADVOCATES, who share about their own experiences in developing friendships after they were able to gain COMMUNICATION with spelling to communicate. No matter where you are in your journey with spelling to communicate, making friendships is a possibility!

Spell MYTHS Spell EXPERTS Spell JOURNEY

This lesson is about how to make what? FRIENDSHIPS or FRIENDS

There are myths that autistics people lack the ability to feel _____. EMOTIONS

In this lesson who are the real experts that you will hear from? SPELLER
ADVOCATES

Name one of the three emotions listed in this paragraph. EMPATHY, LOVE,
JEALOUSY

Name another emotion besides love, empathy, and jealousy. ANGER, SADNESS,
EXCITED, SHOCKED, ENTHUSIASTIC, DEPRESSED

Name one emotion or feeling that you feel when you are about to meet a same
aged peer for the first time.

Sometimes making friendships can be difficult for autistic people due to APRAXIA.
Apraxia is best described as having a brain body disconnect, making it difficult to



execute PURPOSEFUL movements with the body. The PREVALENCE of apraxia and sensory motor differences among autistic people is underestimated. Further, studies on apraxia tend to focus more on apraxia of speech than apraxia of the whole body and both can impact SOCIALIZATION. In apraxia of speech, the person has trouble moving the mouth ARTICULATORS to produce sounds of speech verbally and/or consistently and reliably. But as we know, this does not mean the person does not have awesome, insightful things to say! Another example of how apraxia can impact making friendships is the person's body struggles to stay engaged in a group doing an activity or purposely INTERACT with others. People who do not understand apraxia and sensory-motor differences in autistic people may assume the person does not want to be included and socialize. This can make it hard, but not impossible, to make friends. Making friends takes some CREATIVITY, effort, and joining with your allies and advocates to help. We will dive into ideas later in this lesson.

Spell INSIGHTFUL Spell EFFORT Spell PERSON

Apraxia is best described as being a brain body _____ . DISCONNECT

Apraxia can make it hard, but not _____ to make friends. IMPOSSIBLE

Name one of the 3 things mentioned that have an underestimated prevalence in autistic individuals. APRAXIA, SENSORY DIFFERENCES, MOTOR DIFFERENCES

Name one of the 3 things mentioned that it may take to help making friends.

CREATIVITY, EFFORT, JOINING WITH ALLIES AND ADVOCATES

Give a synonym for the word "interact". CONNECT, ENGAGE, COMBINE, MERGE, MESH, RELATE

Provide one assumption you think people make about you when it comes to socializing.

In 2013, one boy name CHRISTIAN BUCKS from PENNSLYVANIA got creative in bringing an idea to foster friendships he saw at an elementary school for kids in GERMANY, to his own school in AMERICA. It was called the "BUDDY BENCH". If a kid was sitting on the designated, decorated bench on the playground alone, it would be a signal to other kids that he or she wanted a friend to hang out with.

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Question Type Key

KNOWN – SEMI-OPEN – PRIOR KNOWLEDGE – MATH – OPEN - VAKT



Christian asked his school PRINCIPAL to build a “buddy bench” at his school because he witnessed many kids alone at his school during recess. The idea went VIRAL (circulated widely and rapidly on the internet) and now there are approximately over 2,000 schools that have implemented a “buddy bench” both in the United States and in a dozen other countries.

Spell RECESS Spell PLAYGROUND Spell IMPLEMENTED

Christian got the idea for a buddy bench from an _____ school in Germany. ELEMENTARY

The buddy bench is a designated, _____ bench on the playground. DECORATED

Name one country a buddy bench can be found. GERMANY, AMERICA, UNITED STATES

What year was the buddy bench brought to America? 2013

Approximately how many buddy benches are there today? Over 2000

Describe what you think about the idea of the buddy bench.

You may be thinking to yourself that some people, autistic or not, maybe content by themselves. However, whether an INTROVERT or EXTROVERT, making social connections and friendships is important and has many benefits. It is also important to note that the QUALITY of friendships is more important than the quantity. For example, having a close, meaningful relationship with even one person can impact your life more than having 10 ACQUAINTANCES. Let’s dive into the many benefits! According to the Mayo clinic, friendships can improve your sense of purpose and belonging. It also may improve your health. This improvement in health can happen due to a decrease in ANXIETY and stress and/or increased joy. Also, if your friends have healthy habits such as exercising and eating well, you may adopt those same habits due to influence. Friendships can also help you cope with emotions of trauma or sadness if you are going through a tough time. If your friend is also experiencing the same emotions, you can EMPATHIZE with each other. Finally, healthy friendships may help to improve SELF CONFIDENCE and self-worth.

Spell CONNECTIONS Spell CLOSE Spell HEALTHY



Making social connections and friendships is important and has many _____
BENEFITS

The quality of friendships is more important than the _____. QUANTITY

According to the Mayo clinic, name one of the two things that friends can
improve your sense of. PURPOSE, BELONGING

Name one of the healthy habits mentioned that you could adopt from a friend.
EXERCISING, EATING WELL

Give an antonym for the word extrovert. SHY, INTROVERT, QUIET

In this paragraph, it says having one close, meaningful relationship can impact
your life more than having _____ acquaintances. 10

VAKT:

Check out this awesome song (2:42) featured on “Boards and Chords” 2022 titled
“Me & Joe” written by Joel and Caden, fellow spellers, about their friendship.

<https://vimeo.com/688931505>

Now that you know the benefits of making friendships, we are going to talk about how you can make it happen no matter where you are in your JOURNEY of acquiring reliable communication with spelling to communicate. It is important to remember to always be yourself! Forming friendships with people who accept and love you UNCONDITIONALLY is crucial. Finding people who seek to understand who you are can lead to long lasting friendships. If you seek to find new friends who can bond with you on your spelling journey, there are many AVENUES to do so! You may need someone to assist in online searches, but it is worth it. FORGING Friendships has a website called <https://www.forgingfriendships.com> where you can meet weekly online to talk or spell with peers. There are also sometimes existing COMMUNITIES of spellers to be found on FACEBOOK in your own city or town. Sometimes “meet-ups” are planned to provide a chance to meet new people and connect. Even if 2 people are not quite fluent on the letterboard, a connection can still happen just by being around each other on a CONSISTENT basis. Therefore, arranging frequent times to see each other can help to develop trust and a friendship. This is important, since

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sometimes it is MAINTAINING the relationship that is harder than initially meeting someone. Online you can also find upcoming in-person events for spellers including MOTORMORPHOSIS, the main conference on Spelling to Communicate in July 2022 in HERNDON, VIRGINIA. Remember, meeting friends takes an effort and sometimes help from family, CRP, and allies, but it is well worth the time!

Spell WEBSITE Spell LETTERBOARD Spell TRUST

In this paragraph it says it is important to remember to always be _____
YOURSELF

To seek to meet other spellers, you may need help to do searches _____
ONLINE.

Name one method mentioned you can use to make speller friends online.

FORGING FRIENDSHIPS, FACEBOOK, MEET UPS

Arranging frequent times to see new friends can help to develop what? TRUST,
FRIENDSHIP

VAKT: Check out this video (5 minutes, 47 seconds) by Danny Whitty (a minimally speaking autistic man and fellow speller) that he made on friendship with his new Speller friends for Spell X 2020. (from i-asc.org)

<https://vimeo.com/478650797>

What are your thoughts on the video made by Danny Whitty and his friends?

Finally, let us conclude this lesson with sharing from more non-speaking experts on friendships. In the movie, “The Reason I Jump” the long-term friendship of non-speaking advocates and fellow spellers, BEN and EMMA, is FEATURED. They met in a preschool class and SUSTAINED their friendship for several years. In the blog on I-ASC.ORG called “Connected Through Friendship”, Ben says “Friendship is forever when you have autism. It is so hard to make friends that you keep them forever. People probably can’t understand our friendship. Most people tell their friends what they need and want from each other which is something we can’t easily do. Our friendship requires only that we find some peace from the world.”



So you see, friendships are possible and can be very REWARDING. Be encouraged to CHERISH the true friendships you may already have, and also to find new ones if you desire to!

Spell MOVIE Spell FOREVER Spell EASILY

Where did Ben and Emma meet? PRESCHOOL

What is the name of the blog by Ben and Emma on i-asc.org? CONNECTED THROUGH FRIENDSHIPS

Name one of the spellers mentioned in this paragraph. BEN, EMMA

VAKT: Point to Ben and then to Emma in the picture below. They are pictured at the premiere of “The Reason I Jump” at The Sundance Film Festival in 2020.



From i-asc.org’s “Connected through Friendship” blog.

Ben and Emma are pictured at the premiere of “The Reason I Jump” at The Sundance Film Festival 2020.

Creative writing:

Describe some characteristics that you hope to find in a friend.



Describe one of your existing friendships with details of how you met. If you do not have one to share, describe how you would like to meet a friend.

Describe one of your favorite fictional “dynamic duos” in a movie or TV show that you like to watch.



Staci Warren is a Practitioner in Training and lives in Chandler, Arizona. She has been a physical therapist since 2003, so she loves exercise and working on purposeful motor skills. Staci is a mom to 3 amazing kids, one of whom is a fluent speller. She loves spending time outside with her husband and kids, but always welcomes a chance to have coffee with a friend! She is especially grateful for all of her new friends in the spelling community!

Resources:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2016/04/04/kids-dont-have-to-be-lonely-at-recess-anymore-thanks-to-this-boy-and-his-buddy-bench/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/friendships/art-20044860>

<https://i-asc.org/words-with-friends/> (blog by Danny Whitty)

<https://www.forgingfriendships.com/>

<https://adsd.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/adsdnvgov/content/Programs/Autism/ATAP/Autism%20Myths%20and%20Misc%20conceptions.pdf>

<https://i-asc.org/motormorphosis-2022/>