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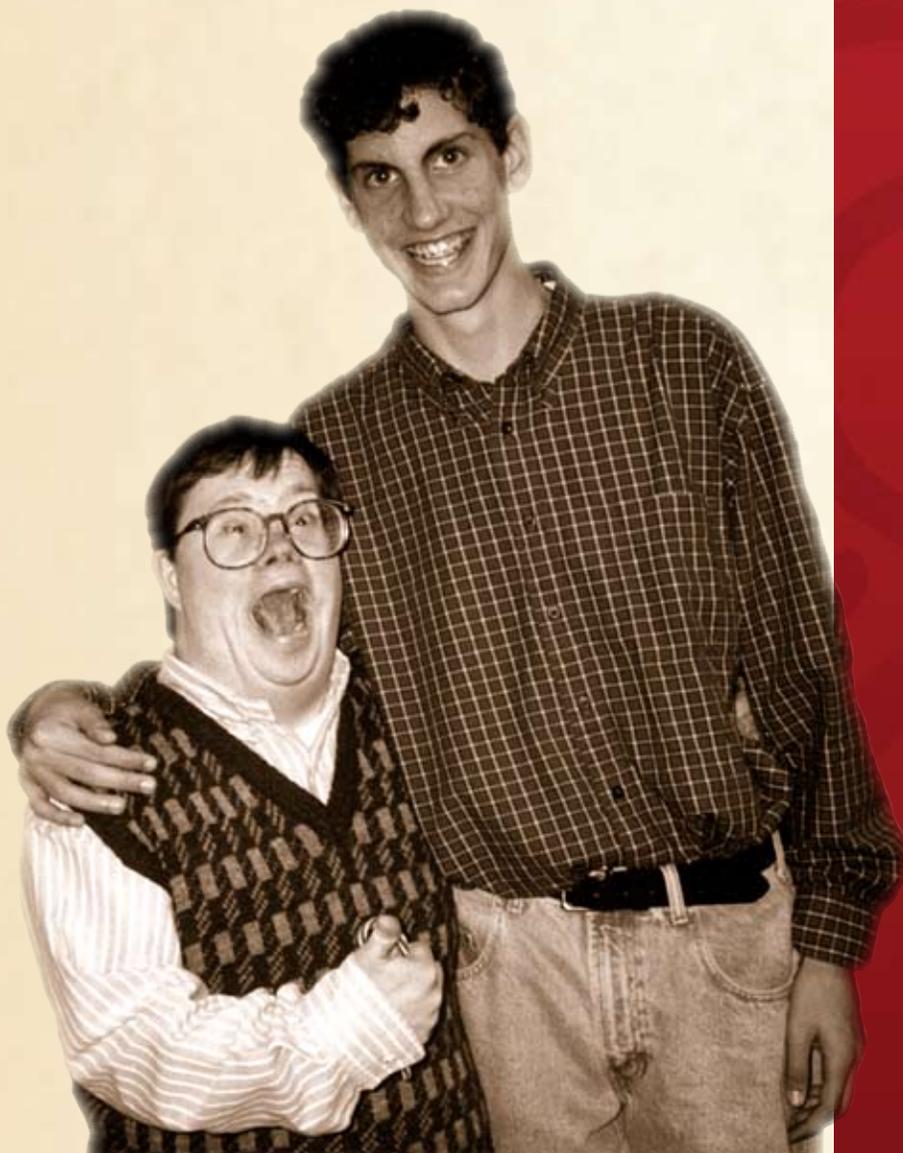
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# Friendship Program Guide

A Resource for Leaders



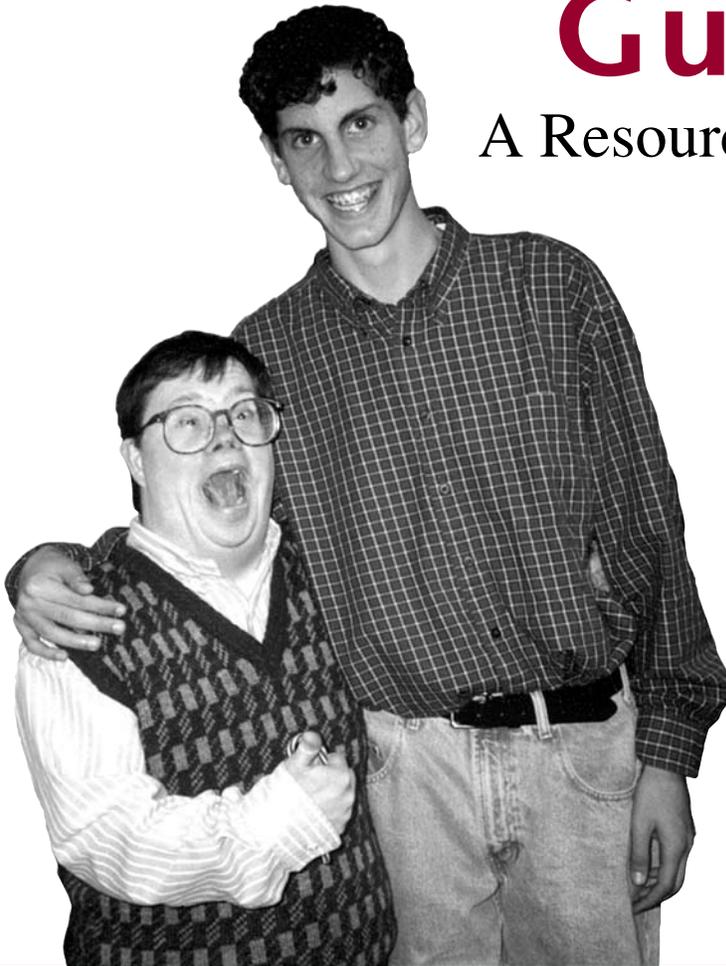
REVISED EDITION



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# Friendship Program Guide

A Resource for Leaders



**Friendship**  
MINISTRIES

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Friendship Ministries is a not-for-profit 501 (c)(3) organization that promotes the spiritual development of youth and adults who have intellectual disabilities and encourages churches to include them in their fellowship.

To learn more, call us at 888-866-8966, e-mail us at [friendship@friendship.org](mailto:friendship@friendship.org), or visit [www.friendship.org](http://www.friendship.org).

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# Friendship Ministries: Making a Difference!

Friendship Ministries was initiated in the early 1980s when Jack and Dottie Wiersma, parents of Sherman, who has Down syndrome, came to CRC Publications (now Faith Alive Christian Resources) asking for help. Their single request for a program to teach people with intellectual disabilities has grown into a ministry that has worked with more than sixty denominations in North and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe. The ministry has also expanded into Latin America through the work of *Ministerio Amistad*—that's Friendship Ministries in Spanish.

Yet Friendship's greatest impact still remains one-on-one relationships. Jim and Kevin (pictured on the cover) are just one of many examples.

Kevin began helping out at his church's Friendship program when he was in grade school. Kevin's profound communication disorder (apraxia) didn't bother Jim, then a young adult with Down syndrome. Jim gave Kevin unconditional acceptance and love as Kevin learned to accept his own disability.

When Kevin was in junior high, he became Jim's Friendship mentor. Kevin's own faith grew as he told Jim about Jesus' love. In return, Jim taught Kevin that God's love is for *everyone*. Friendship and their one-on-one relationship have made a difference in both Kevin's and Jim's life.

## Welcome!

Whether you are a new leader or one who has experienced the joy of Friendship for many years, we welcome you with love that is as unconditional as Jim's. We hope this program guide will make your leadership role easier as we focus on these key responsibilities:

- sharing God's love (mission and goals)
- appreciating each person
- getting organized
- choosing materials
- defining volunteer roles
- recruiting friends and mentors
- training mentors
- tending to details
- building community: helping friends to become active members of the community and to share their gifts

### **A Promise to Experience**

Ralph and Carol Honderd are the proud parents of Karyn, who has intellectual disabilities. Karyn was already a young adult when a Friendship program came to the Honderds' church. Ralph admits he was skeptical. His view now? "The Friendship program has helped transform our congregation." Karyn now actively participates in the program through singing and even sharing at talent night. He describes changes in programs, worship, and individuals. "The Friendship program is nothing less than a channel of grace. Get into this program, and you'll see God at work—I promise you."



Our goal is to help you and your friends with intellectual disabilities grow together in love for each other and service to God. Our prayer is that you will see God at work in your community. And as God works through you, your friends, and your mentors, let us know about your concerns as well as your victories. You can contact us at

Friendship Ministries  
2215 29<sup>th</sup> St. SE, Suite B6  
Grand Rapids, MI 49508

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www.friendship.org  
888-866-8966

# Sharing God's Love (Mission and Goals)

Since the early 1980s, Friendship Ministries has been *sharing God's love with people who have intellectual disabilities and helping them become active members of God's family.* Support for this interdenominational ministry comes from individuals, businesses, and churches.

## **Leader Tip**

It will be important for your local Friendship ministry to define its mission and goals. In this section, we share the overall mission, principles, and goals for the larger program as a guide to help you in that process.

## **Reaching Out**

Friendship Ministries enables churches to minister with people who have intellectual disabilities, their families, and their communities. It is guided by these core truths:

- *Equality.* Everyone is created in God's image. Each of us is created uniquely, equally suited for God's particular purposes, and enabled by grace to enjoy redemption, worship, and a lifetime of service.
- *Interdependence.* We all have qualities that enable us to serve each other; we do that best in community as partners, bonded together with God and each other to renew the world.
- *Compassion.* We experience mutual compassion as we share our joys and burdens in the church, a worldwide, interdependent community.
- *Hospitality.* Instead of trying to make others be like us, we welcome and capitalize on "different-ness." We overcome our fear of strangers and celebrate communion in the midst of difference.

## **Setting Goals**

Friendship Ministries enables friends to

- experience the joy of knowing they are valued by God and by God's people.
- grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ, claiming him as their Savior and Lord.



- grow in their relationship with Christ's church, making a public profession of their faith and participating in the church's life and work.
- be truly accepted and loved by the Christian community.
- use their gifts to serve others.

## **Growing Together**

Probably the most unique aspect of Friendship Ministries is our emphasis on friendship and mutuality. We struggle with our terminology, not wanting to use *teacher* and *student*, because that implies a one-way relationship. We prefer to simply use one word—*friends*—but that doesn't always work because we sometimes need to differentiate between the one with recognized intellectual disabilities and the one without. So we use the words *friend* and *mentor*. We always focus on growing together in our love for God and for each other.

### **Leader Tip**

We need to say a word here about *inclusion*. The premise of Friendship Ministries is that inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the regular programs of the church is the ideal situation. A few adjustments may have to be made, but generally, inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the regular Sunday school programs works very well. That goes for worship too: relationships are formed when friends of all ages are invited to sit with families in the congregation as they worship. And friends can share their gifts in worship by being invited to sing, or read, or usher, as they are able.

Realistically, inclusion in educational programs often begins to fall apart around the time of adolescence, when social situations begin to vary dramatically. It's at this age that we recommend Friendship groups for people who have intellectual disabilities. Friendship groups provide a context where friends can grow spiritually and where meaningful relationships are formed. These relationships help foster full inclusion in the life of the church—on Sunday mornings and beyond.

Friendship Ministries also offers consultation on an individualized planning process to include people with disabilities in the church.



## Tips for Working with Friends

Friends are real people who happen to have a disability. They may live with their families, in a group home with supportive care, or independently in their own home. They may attend school, or they may work in supportive settings or at a job site. Friendship groups typically include youth in their teen years and adults of all ages.

### **Leader Tip**

These unique life situations are reflected in Friendship program materials (see overview, pp. 13-16). They are designed to include youth and adults with a wide range of intellectual disabilities. Special attention is given to involve friends who may be

- nonreaders.
- nonverbal.
- hearing impaired.
- visually impaired.
- physically challenged.

Each friend is a one-of-a-kind person created in God's image. Friends are people like you and me with likes and dislikes, joys and sorrows. And, like you and me, friends have spiritual gifts to share with the body of Christ.

### **Qualifications for Mentors**

The number one qualification for mentors is that they have a love for people with intellectual disabilities and a desire to share God's love with them. Mentors come from all kinds of backgrounds and have a variety of gifts that God uses in amazing ways. While getting to know your friends is often the best source of information about them, here are some general tips that mentors may find helpful in working with friends.

### **Respect Friends as Individuals**

Friendship Ministries emphasizes friendship and mutuality—we're learning and growing together. To show respect,

- affirm your friend as an individual whose opinions, desires, and feelings are worthwhile.
- treat adults like adults by addressing them as adults and by selecting activities that relate to an adult's world of work and leisure.

- give help only when asked; do not assume that help is needed or desired.
- allow time for your friend to make his or her own decisions.
- accept your friend's work, showing that you believe your friend is capable.
- be sensitive to special needs such as medical issues and dietary needs that require attention during your friend's time at Friendship.

### **Respect Is Two-Sided!**

Respect is two-sided; it's all about mutuality. Kevin and Jim learned this together—and they've taught their church family how to live it out. Nearly every Sunday for three years, Jim greeted Kevin with a huge smile and followed him down the aisle to sit with Kevin's family. People in the balcony smiled—often through their tears—as Kevin, tall and strapping, stooped down to nudge Jim to sing the hymn. When Jim sang from his heart, the people at his church knew Jim belonged to them and to God!

### **Enable Friends to Learn the Way They Learn Best**

Although learning may be a challenge for most of your friends, they may surprise you with their enthusiasm and understanding. It will help to remember the following points:

- *Friends are concrete learners.* What they experience is what they know. For example, if a drama involves the death of someone in the Bible story, some friends may think that the actor died. It's important to say that the actor is pretending.
- *Friends may have a short attention span.* You can draw attention to one thing at a time by pointing, covering part of a page in a take-home paper, reviewing only the key ideas in a Bible story, and so on.
- *Friends can learn new information.* Repetition is important; drill and practice facts and routines as you review Bible stories and lesson truths together.
- *Friends may have difficulty transferring what they learn in one setting to another.* You can help friends by teaching





skills in the actual environments in which they will be used. For example, if your Friendship group will sing for a worship service, practice in the sanctuary.

- *Friends may be reluctant to participate in large group or small group activities.* Be ready to encourage and to walk alongside, but learn also to be quiet in each other's presence. To increase participation, model appropriate behavior, sing facing your friend so that he or she can catch the words, help your friend come up with prayer requests, volunteer to play a part in a drama with your friend, show how to do an activity or make a craft, and so on.
- *Friends can do many things but may need adaptations for some activities.* Adapting activities to meet your friend's specific needs is crucial. If your friend cannot read the Bible, read to him or her and highlight key words. If a take-home paper for adults is too difficult, use the one designed for youth. If a group activity is too noisy, work one-on-one off to one side of the larger group. If your friend is nonverbal, use simple signs or pictures to tell the story or sing songs.
- *Friends may communicate in various ways.* Never assume that a friend who is nonverbal is low-functioning or cannot understand you. A friend who doesn't use verbal expression may actually understand everything you are saying but not be able to let you know this. You'll want to work closely with group leaders, family members, and caregivers to determine how best to communicate with your friend.

# Getting Organized



## Group and One-on-One Relationships Build Community

Groups vary widely in how they operate, depending on factors such as the size of the group, the church, the community, and the personalities of those involved. Groups may include as few as three friends or as many as fifty or more. Some groups are organized by a single church; others are a cooperative ministry between several churches within a community or the same denomination. Some groups include friends from neighboring communities. Your group may reflect a combination of several of these characteristics.

### Group Session

The Friendship program model used in all the program materials (see pp. 13-16) includes a *group session* that brings together all the friends and mentors in one place. During the group session the group leader, either alone or with the assistance of other volunteers, leads the worship and prayer time and presents the Bible story.

### One-on-One Time

Following the group session, friends and mentors meet in *small groups*. Ideally, this is *one-on-one time*, with each friend meeting with a mentor who will help him or her respond to the Bible story at the friend's own ability level and together apply the truths to the individual's life situations. Through these relationships, friends and mentors alike experience God's love in a very concrete way.

#### Leader Tip

We've included more information about the roles of the group leader and mentor on page 17 and a description of the steps in a session plan on page 16.

### When Should We Meet?

Typically, Friendship groups meet on a weekday evening or during church education time. We suggest you avoid holding your Friendship group during the worship service, so that friends can worship with the rest of the congregation. When you meet will impact the amount of time you have, your space needs, the number of volunteers available, the kinds of activities you plan, and so on.

Here's a suggested schedule for a 60- to 90-minute session:

5-10 minutes	Arrival, conversation, getting settled, announcements
25-30 minutes	Group session for youth and adults: Steps 1-4* (welcome, worship and prayer time, Bible story)
20-30 minutes	One-on-one mentoring session: Steps 5-6 (review and response activities)
10-15 minutes	Social time with refreshments and fellowship**

\*Some groups do the group session one week, followed by a brief review and the mentoring session the following week.

\*\*Sometimes the entire group comes back together for a craft activity, service project, or other group activities toward the end of the session.

Many groups take time off during the summer, although they may schedule a summer picnic or other special outing to keep in touch. The break avoids volunteer burnout and gives leaders time to plan for the next year. Some groups also take off during Christmas and spring break.

