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## INTRODUCTION

College is an ideal setting to develop and expand a person's social network. Using strategies that maximize social opportunities centered around shared interests and common experiences can often lead to the development of authentic friendships and increased campus membership.

Educational coaches are in an ideal position to recognize opportunities for social engagement and to support and encourage students to develop social networks and new friendships. Effective coaches believe that friendships are critical to a person's overall well-being, and that friendships are possible, regardless of a person's disability.

## MAKE CONNECTIONS TO FAMILIAR PEERS

An important way for coaches to facilitate connections is to recognize who the student already knows on campus, and to consider how those casual acquaintances can be strengthened and deepened. For example, some students receive support from a classmate for note-taking, or have been connected to work on group projects by the instructor. Although those roles are different from being friends, coaches have opportunities to facilitate friendships through these experiences by encouraging the student to invite classmates to connect outside of class.

In another case, some students may recognize other people on campus who went to their high school. Coaches have an opportunity to capitalize on these connections by suggesting to the student that they invite this classmate to meet up for lunch or simply hang out at the campus cafeteria. Just spending time together at the cafeteria can lead to meeting each other's friends, thus widening both students' social network.

## CONNECT STUDENTS THROUGH INTERESTS

Another way students get to know others is through shared interests. For instance, a student may have a talent using technology to create presentations or to find information on the college



**D E C**

The Student Support for College Success Grab and Go series summarizes best practices for coaches and mentors who support dually enrolled students with intellectual disability on college campuses. A checklist for educational coaches is included.

app. Less tech-savvy students may benefit from this expertise and appreciate learning from a college peer. This could then lead to increased time spent together as they get to know each other.

Similarly, a student who likes radio production may enjoy being at the campus radio station with other students who share the same passion.

Finding out a student's interests can be accomplished by asking them directly, or by checking with others such as family, teachers, and friends.

## TAKE ADVANTAGE OF STUDENT ACTIVITIES AND CLUBS



Teaching students how to pursue interests is a great way to make friends. Coaches can help students find time in their schedules to visit the student activities office to get a calendar of events and a list of clubs available on campus. Encouraging students to attend a campus club expo at the beginning of the semester is a perfect opportunity for students to explore the variety of club offerings. Remember, though, that going once to a club meeting will not provide enough time to make a friend. Coaches can help students build time into their weekly schedule to attend club events regularly, thereby providing maximum opportunities for students to get to know each other. Similarly, identifying volunteer opportunities on or off campus where students work together toward a common goal can foster social connections. Finally, encouraging students to work out at the campus athletic center is a natural way for them to make friends. Going to the gym on a regular basis at the same time and on the same days is going to increase the chances that they will see and become familiar with the same people exercising.



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1. Create a list of contacts on their phone or in their planner?
2. Identify peers who share the same interests?
3. Invite a classmate to lunch?
4. Get a list of clubs from the student activities center?
5. Join/follow Facebook or other social media groups?
6. Work out a way with their families to attend campus events on nights and weekends?