# Peer Network Facilitator Manual



Some of the content for this manual was adapted from the *Peer Partner Project*: Carter, E. W. & Asmus, J. (2010-2014). *Peer support and peer network interventions to improve peer relationships and school engagement*. Special Education Research on Transition Outcomes for Special Education Secondary Students, Institute of Education Sciences.

Dividers for Binder. We used the Office Max Insertable 5 tab dividers template.

| | |
|---|---|
| CSESA Overview | Peer Network Overview |
| Preparing for Intervention | Identifying Peer Partners |
| Peer Training Meeting Guide | Orientation Meeting Guide |
| Orientation Meeting Quick Guide | Orientation Meeting Checklist |
| Interaction Schedules | Weekly Meeting Guide |
| Weekly Meeting Quick Guide | Weekly Meeting Checklist -Facilitator |
| Weekly Meeting Checklist -Coach | |

# Overview of the Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism

This five-year project funded by the Department of Education focuses on developing a comprehensive program to meet the needs of high school students along the entire autism spectrum. Researchers from six universities across the United States will collaborate with schools, families, and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) to create and implement effective and doable peer-mediated interventions addressing five components in high schools: social competence; transition and families; academics; personal responsibility, independence, and self-management; and professional development.

## Which students can participate?

Our project focuses on high school students with ASD who receive special education support under an educational or psychiatric diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder (autism, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified, or Asperger syndrome). For each participating student, 2-6 high school peers without disabilities will be invited to take part in a peer support group or peer network.

## What support strategies are we evaluating?

Peer Supports and Peer Networks are part of the project's social competence component. We have combined what we learned from nationwide stakeholder focus groups in the fall of 2012 with research-based strategies to help teachers and paraprofessionals implement peer-mediated social interventions. Peer network strategies, the focus of this manual, involve arranging for one or more peers to provide ongoing social support to their peers with ASD after receiving initial training and ongoing guidance from an adult.

## What improvements do we expect?

We want to learn how the social interactions, friendships, social skills, support needs, and school participation of students with ASD are improved when they receive support from peers. Our prior partnerships with schools have shown these approaches to be very effective and quite feasible. This information will be gathered through observations, interviews, and questionnaires completed by teachers, parents, and students. We also expect the peers who provide support to benefit as well. In addition, we anticipate teachers and paraprofessionals will find the strategies to be feasible to implement and work well within their schools.

## What support will the project provide?

We will provide teachers and paraprofessionals with training on how to implement these strategies, ongoing coaching as they work with students, and generous financial compensation for the time involved in learning the strategies, implementing them with students, and completing assessments. This is a great way to learn support strategies that are both practical and evidence-based!

# Peer Network Arrangements

## What are peer networks?

Peer network arrangements involve one or more peers interacting with a student with a disability in facilitated, regular meetings held outside of instructional time. Two to three peers without disabilities are identified by the classroom teacher, special educator and/or paraprofessional. These peers receive information on how to provide support to a peer with a disability in an initial orientation meeting.  Peers also receive regular guidance and feedback from the facilitator as the students meet together. In addition, the group arranges to interact outside of the meeting time, therefore setting up a social network of sorts for the student with a disability.

## What are the goals of peer network arrangements?

- Increase opportunities for students to meet new people
- Help students to develop new friendships
- Encourage students to be involved together in school or after-school activities
- Have fun together!

## What is your role as the Peer Network Facilitator?

- Develop a social goal(s) and determine how it will be addressed during the meeting
- Identify peers to be network members
- Invite those peers to participate
- Have an initial meeting with the peers to discuss strategies
- Be present during the meetings and facilitate when needed to ensure everyone is included and participating in the activity or conversation
- Communicate with project team
- Check in with the group, answer any questions from members, and encourage members to interact with each other outside of the meetings

# Preparing for Intervention

Prior to implementing the Peer and Social Component (PASC), the facilitator, project coach, and other school staff who have agreed to be involved in the intervention should do some advanced planning to design an intervention that is most likely to address the student's needs. Below, we outline considerations for assessing the student's social-related needs, selecting social goals, and selecting settings in which the intervention will be carried out.

## Assessing Social-Related Needs

To determine a student's social-related needs, the team can use existing assessment information, including IEPs, psychological evaluations, or other reports (from occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, etc.). In addition, team members can conduct informal assessments by observing the student during times when there are opportunities for interactions with peers. When observing, reflect on the following questions:

1. What communication strategies does the student use? _____
   _____
2. What additional communication strategies would enhance interactions with peers?
   _____
3. Does the student initiate with peers or avoid peers? _____
   _____
4. If the student appears to avoid peers, is it because of an active dislike of peer interactions, because the student is fearful that he/she will not be socially successful, or some other reason? _____
   _____
5. How do peers respond to the student in social situations? _____
   _____
6. Does the student interact socially with peers in a way that is unsuccessful? _____
   _____
7. Is the student aware of the reaction of peers? _____
   _____
8. What barriers keep the student from interacting successfully with peers (e.g., lack of opportunity, lack of adult support, school climate, student attitudes regarding students with disabilities, lack of social and communication abilities)? _____
   _____
9. Does the student have friendships? _____
   _____
10. With whom does the student interact in his/her classes?_____
    _____
11. Are there skills he or she should learn that would increase connections with peers?
    _____

Facilitators can also speak with other school staff who are familiar with the student to get a sense of how the student interacts with different people in different settings. Consider the following:

- Does the student interact more successfully with adults than with peers?
- What interaction strategies do adults use with the student that peers might also use (keeping in mind that peer interactions should be "equal-status")?
- Are there particular settings/partners/activities in which the student is more successful than others? What about these situations aid the student in being more successful socially?

## Selecting Social-Related Goals

*Collecting Information*

Next, the facilitator can determine social goals that will enhance peer interactions and could be met through the chosen intervention. These goals will be addressed in the Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) assessment completed throughout the year. Determining appropriate, measureable goals requires:

- Knowing the student's current strengths and areas of concern. This information can be drawn from informal and formal data sources discussed previously.
- Knowing how peers interact with one another at school. It is important that this information is gathered from observation and discussions with peers and general education staff members.
  - In what kinds of social exchanges do the peers regularly participate?
  - What types of activities are appealing to these students?
  - What social skills are important for participating with these peers?

*Determining Goals*

Ideally, the facilitator will already have measurable social-related IEP goals and corresponding data from which to draw. These goals must be aligned with student needs and the chosen intervention/context, which may require an iterative process of choosing a goal, deciding which intervention best fits the student's needs and the school's resources, and revising the goal based on how the intervention is individualized for the student. If goals appropriate for the peer intervention context are not already within the current IEP, they may be developed and added to the current IEP. The facilitator should also meet with the target student early in the process to discuss social goals and possibly identify more, capitalizing on current student motivation and interests. Several meetings may be necessary to more fully develop these goals. The Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) process can be helpful to outline a plan for addressing goals; the CSESA coach will provide more information on that process.

Measurable goals include three crucial components:
1. **Antecedent conditions** that describe when and/or where a particular skill is supposed to be used
2. **Observable behavior or skill** that is clearly defined
3. **Criteria level** that allows staff to measure progress accurately and determine when a student meets a specific goal

| Antecedent | Behavior | Criteria |
|---|---|---|
| ❑ Setting<br>❑ With whom<br>❑ Supports provided<br>❑ High vs. low structure<br>❑ Academic, social, transition, etc. | ❑ Specific<br>❑ Observable<br>❑ Measurable | ❑ # of times<br>❑ Amount of time<br>❑ Percent<br>❑ Consistency<br>❑ Data collection method |
| *"When this event occurs…* | *…the learner will do this behavior(s)…* | *…at this rate or level of proficiency."* |

Some example goals that can potentially be met via social competence interventions are:
- During a peer network activity, Andrew will initiate conversations with at least 2 peers, 4 out of 5 opportunities.
- When presented with a conversational attempt from a peer, Sam will respond and then continue the conversation by asking a follow-up question for 80% of opportunities over 3 consecutive days across 3 different peers.
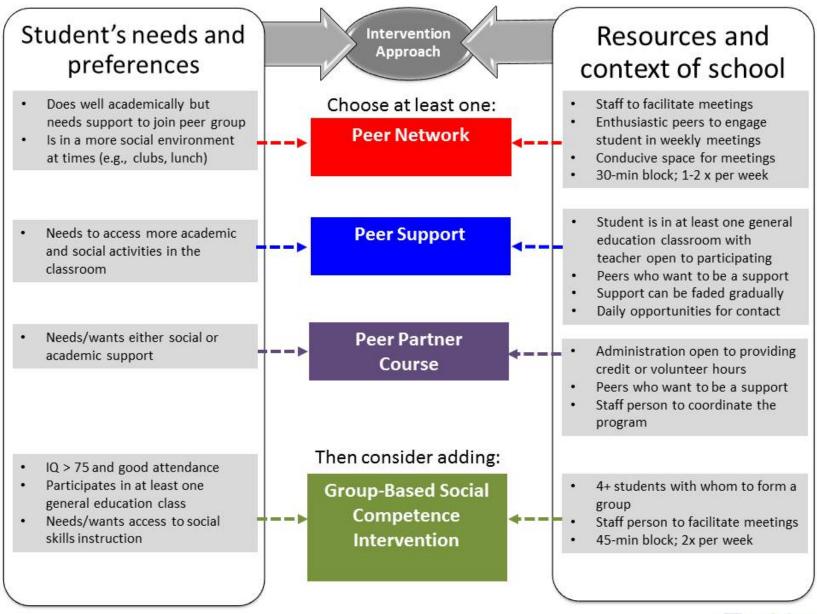
## Selecting Interventions and Contexts
To select the specific intervention that will be a good fit for the student, draw upon formal and informal assessments of a student's needs. Also consider the student's preferences:
- Which intervention is the student most excited about?
- Is the student reluctant to be involved in any of the interventions?
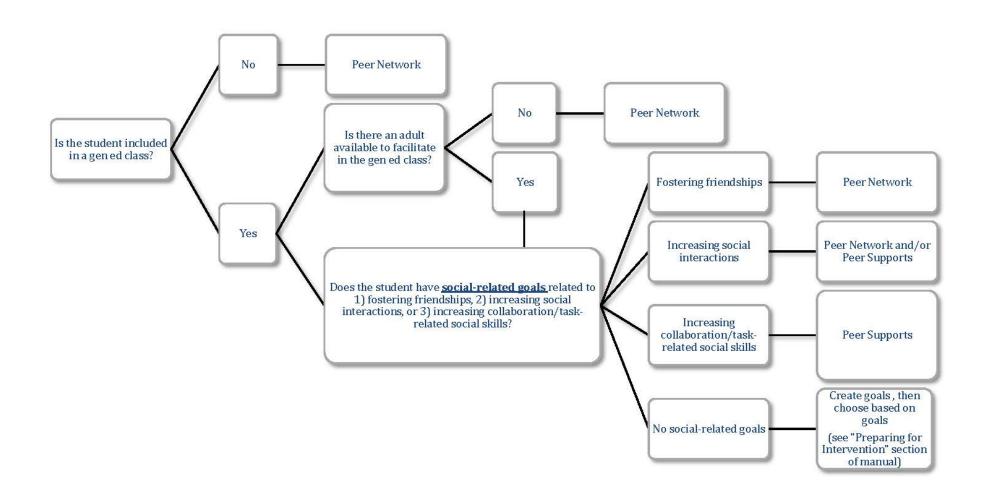- Where are the student's needs the greatest?

Both the peer networks and peer supports should be in place for a minimum of 6 weeks. The group-based social competence intervention should meet for 8 – 10 weeks. Review the graphic on the next page with your coach to determine which intervention approach is most appropriate for your student.

## Student's needs and preferences

- Does well academically but needs support to join peer group
- Is in a more social environment at times (e.g., clubs, lunch)

- Needs to access more academic and social activities in the classroom

- Needs/wants either social or academic support

- IQ > 75 and good attendance
- Participates in at least one general education class
- Needs/wants access to social skills instruction

## Intervention Approach

## Resources and context of school

- Staff to facilitate meetings
- Enthusiastic peers to engage student in weekly meetings
- Conducive space for meetings
- 30-min block; 1-2 x per week

- Student is in at least one general education classroom with teacher open to participating
- Peers who want to be a support
- Support can be faded gradually
- Daily opportunities for contact

- Administration open to providing credit or volunteer hours
- Peers who want to be a support
- Staff person to coordinate the program

- 4+ students with whom to form a group
- Staff person to facilitate meetings
- 45-min block; 2x per week

**Choose at least one:**

**Peer Network**

**Peer Support**

**Peer Partner Course**

**Then consider adding:**

**Group-Based Social Competence Intervention**

CSESA
The Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism

# Peer Network and Peer Support Decision Tree

**Is the student included in a gen ed class?**

- **No** → **Peer Network**

- **Yes** → **Is there an adult available to facilitate in the gen ed class?**
  - **No** → **Peer Network**
  - **Yes** → **Does the student have _social-related goals_ related to 1) fostering friendships, 2) increasing social interactions, or 3) increasing collaboration/task-related social skills?**
    - **Fostering friendships** → **Peer Network**
    - **Increasing social interactions** → **Peer Network and/or Peer Supports**
    - **Increasing collaboration/task-related social skills** → **Peer Supports**
    - **No social-related goals** → **Create goals, then choose based on goals (see "Preparing for Intervention" section of manual)**

CSESA
The Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism

# Identifying Peer Partners

## Guidelines for peer partners:

- Interested and excited to interact with and support the student
- Motivated to develop a social relationship with the student
- A positive peer model for the student
- Likely to stay involved throughout the semester

## The facilitator's role:

- Identify peer partners with help from the focus student, other staff, and possibly peers
- Invite peers to participate
- Answer questions peers might have about peer networks

## Starting points:

- Speak with the student about his or her preferences related to peers
- Discuss with teachers which peers might be a good for the project.
- Use identified interests to recruit peers from clubs and activities
- Find peers who share a lunch or an advisory or study hall with the student

## Important points:

- When recruiting peer partners, it is important to keep an open mind and think creatively. Sometimes a student you would not initially consider can make a great partner. If the student already has relationships with certain peers or shows a preference to a particular peer, start by talking to those students.
- Aim for identifying 3-6 peer partners. Having more than one peer involved minimizes problems with absences and means students can meet regularly. However, having too many students in the group can be disruptive.
- Consider the following questions when identifying peers. Being a peer partner is a choice, so only students who express interest when invited should participate.
    - Which peers already know the student and are considered to be a friend?
    - Who has shown an interest in getting to know the student in the past?
    - Who has consistent attendance?
    - Who seems willing to help other students?
    - Who would model positive behaviors for the student?
    - Who has good interpersonal skills?
    - Which students seem willing to learn?
    - Which students share interests, hobbies, or activities with the student?
- You want peers who will interact with the student as he or she would with other classmates instead of as a teacher.
- Identify potential peers using whatever approaches work best in the school. Ideas listed below are just some of the strategies you might use. Again, think creatively.

*Tip #1: Ask the student: If the student can communicate his or her preferences, ask some of the following questions:*
- Who do you like to talk with at school?
- Are there peers you would like to talk to more often?
- Who do you look forward to seeing?
- Who are your friends at school?
- Who would you like to sit next to?

*Tip #2: Ask teachers for their input:*
- Who does the student already interact with during school?
- Do you know students who might be interested in participating as a peer partner?
- Which students like to help their peers?
- Are there students who would themselves benefit from having an additional role in the school?

*Tip #3: Observe. Watch the student during the day. Consider the following questions:*
- With whom does the student already talk?
- Are there peers who say "hi" to the student?
- Are there peers with whom the student often sits with at lunch?
- Which peers are most helpful?

*Tip #4: Talk to an entire class:  Another idea is to share with the entire class the opportunity to be part of a peer network.  See information below.*

*Tip #5 Recruit peers from extracurricular clubs or other school activities based on common interests.*

## How do I invite peers to participate as peer partners?
- *Talk individually with students*
  If there are students who would be potentially good in this role, you can approach them individually to ask if they would be interested. This conversation can happen between classes, during lunch, at a club meeting, or another time you would typically interact with students.
- *Talk to peers in classes with the student*
  Present the opportunity very generally to a class to see who may be interested. The peer networks should be presented as a general opportunity for students to support another student socially. Let students know they can come to talk to you afterwards to learn more if interested.
- *Ask students who agree to participate if they have recommendations for other peers to be peer partners*

# Peer Training Meeting Guide

## General Guidelines:

- This meeting is *not* a mandatory component of the intervention. Its purpose is to provide more information to the partners on issues that may be awkward to discuss while the student is present.

- One option is to have this meeting *after* the Orientation Meeting so partners have a frame of reference when discussing challenging behaviors or communication difficulties.

- Remember not to discuss any confidential information, such as from the IEP or other sensitive information. This meeting is meant to provide initial support for the partners on how best to interact with the student, while maintaining respect for the student who is not present.

## Topics to Cover:

- First and foremost, remind partners about the student's interests, activities, and strengths (if the partners do not already know the student). Be sure to point out any shared interests the partners might have with the student.

- Describe any unusual behaviors the student may engage in and offer specific suggestions on how to respond. Examples may include:
  - If the student tends to engage in elopement (running away), instruct partners on what they should do if this happens during a group meeting (i.e., it is the adult's responsibility to retrieve the student, ways to involve the student in the group once they return, etc.).
  - If the student engages in stereotypy (repetitive or ritualistic movement, such as hand flapping or rocking), provide partners ways either to address, ignore, or interpret it.
  - If the student is interested in only one topic and refuses to participate in the group appropriately, give the partners ideas about how to redirect him/her.
  - If the student has a behavior support plan, or if teachers and other adults have a standard way of addressing the behavior, encourage partners to respond in consistent ways.

- Discuss the student's goal(s) for participating in the group, and offer specific ways the partners can help him or her work on the goal(s).
  - For example, if the student's goal is: "During interactions with peers, John will sustain interactions by engaging in conversation for more than 2 turns in 3 consecutive opportunities," encourage partners to ask follow-up questions and continue responding to the student.

- If the student's goal is "During lunch, Emma will increase responses to peer initiations by 80% on 3 consecutive days," ask partners to allow ample time for the student to respond, maintain eye contact, and incorporate other strategies to encourage the student's response.

- If the student has complex communication challenges, mention specific strategies for interacting with the student.
  - If the student takes a while to process information and respond, have the partners wait longer after asking the student a question or responding to him/her.
  - If the student uses an augmentative or alternative communication system, describe the system to the partners and familiarize them with how the student will use it during interactions.

- Stress that the partners' role in the group is friendship, not to be peer tutors or "mini-teachers." The topics covered in this meeting are meant to assist the partners with interacting and communicating with the student, not to give the partners the responsibility of addressing these behaviors in the exact manner a teacher, paraprofessional, or tutor would.

- Tell the partners you are available as the group begins meeting and throughout the duration of the group if they have any questions or want to meet privately.

# Peer Network Orientation Meeting Guide

**The purpose of the orientation meeting is for members of the peer network to:**
- Learn more about each other
- Discuss the goals of the peer network
- Ask questions about the network
- Share ideas for increasing interaction with one another
- Determine when interaction could occur elsewhere during the school week
- Establish a regular meeting time during lunch period or another specified time

**In your role as the facilitator, you will:**
- Provide some general information about how the peer network works
- Encourage discussion by asking questions and sharing ideas
- Model how to talk respectfully to the student and with each other
- Answer any student questions
- Help students determine a weekly interaction schedule and regular meeting time
- Keep track of students' social contacts and submit weekly to your coach
- Set a relaxed tone for the meeting and make it fun and enjoyable for students

**To prepare for the meeting:**
- Schedule it during a time convenient for all (or at least most) participants. Anticipate it will take approximately 30 minutes during a lunch or other period.
- Have a copy of each student's schedule, including where he or she is between classes, at lunch, and right before or after school (if appropriate).
- Bring the *Orientation Meeting Quick Guide* and the *Orientation Meeting Checklist* to the meeting.
- Consider meeting with the student with ASD to prepare him or her for what to expect. Look at the student's schedule together to determine possible times for both the network meetings and connections outside of the meetings.
- The more the student shares, the more naturally reinforcing the meeting will be. Consider adding a reinforcer for students not likely to participate significantly.

This guide is presented as a series of topics to cover with all group members. In some instances, examples of what to say are presented, but these are merely examples; it is not necessary to read them verbatim to the group.

## 1. Introductions
Think of a way to introduce the students if they do not already know each other. This can be as simple as asking each student to say his or her name and why he or she decided to become involved in network. Or, consider using icebreaker games such as:
- Two Truths and a Lie: Have each person share three things about themselves (two that are true and one that is a lie). Then the next person guesses which one

was a lie. If the students in the group know each other well already, you can be the person who guesses about each student, and they can guess about you.

- Name Tag Match Maker: Each group member will need a 5" x 7" card for a nametag. Then give students the following directions:
    1) Put your name in the center of your card.
    2) In the upper left corner, write four things that you like to do.
    3) In the upper right corner, write your four favorite singers or groups.
    4) In the lower left corner, write your four favorite movies.
    5) In the lower right corner, write four adjectives that describe you.
    6) When everyone finishes, have them mingle with the group for a few minutes. Without talking, they are to read the upper left corner of the other group members' cards. When time is up, they are to find one or two people who are most like them and visit for a few minutes. When time is up, they mingle again, reading the upper right corner of the other group members' cards. They then find the one or two people most like them and visit. Repeat with the lower left corner and lower right corner.
- Famous Person: Group members write a famous name on a piece of paper and pin it on someone else's back. The person tries to guess what name is pinned on his/her by asking others around the room yes or no questions.
- Websites with additional ideas:
    - http://wilderdom.com/games/Icebreakers.html
    - www.ehow.com/way_5317471_ice-breaking-activities-high-school.html

## 2. Discuss Goals of the Peer Group

Partners should all be on the same page about the goals of the group:
- To have fun together
- To increase opportunities to meet new people
- To help each other develop new friendships
- To encourage each other to be involved together in school or after-school activities

Ask if any of the students have goals they would like to add.  Discuss them and write them down. Consider keeping the goals visible during each meeting.

Talk about how to accomplish these goals:
- Help find ways for everyone to participate in peer network activities
- Pairing up with each other during group projects in class
- Say "hi" to each other between classes
- Eat lunch together even if no network meeting is scheduled
- Attend school assemblies, club meetings, or other school events together
- Give compliments, high fives, or share a joke
- E-mail or communicate on Facebook periodically
- Introduce each other to their other friendship groups

Discuss each member's role in the peer network:
- Look for and talk with each other during school day
- Help include each other in peer network activities
- Attend and participate in these meetings
- Invite other students to get involved

Discuss your role as the adult in the group:
- Help plan and arrange activities
- Help interactions go smoothly
- Help arrange times for you all to get together
- Be available to all group members to answer questions
- Support the group as needed

Talk about benefits of being involved in this group:
- Learn about someone new and develop new friendships
- Become more confident in interacting with peers
- Learn from the strengths of each other
- Help create a more inclusive environment at the school for everyone

## 3. Address the Similarities and Differences Among Group Members
- Meet with the student before the orientation meeting:
  - Ask the student if he/she would be comfortable sharing things about himself/herself that would make it easier for interactions to occur.
  - Offer the student support in sharing this information with the group. This support could include helping the student create a presentation or one-page bio about him or herself beforehand or supporting the students' conversation with verbal prompts during the meeting. Whenever possible, you should support the student to speak for him or herself.
- To address the group's individual differences, stress that for some people it can be difficult to make friends while others are very social and feel comfortable meeting new people.
- Have the group brainstorm ideas on how they can help everyone in the group connect more easily with one another despite these differences. Encourage the group to offer suggestions, and feel free to use the ideas listed below to get the conversation going:
  - Say hello to each other
  - Introduce a group member to friends if he or she does not know them
  - Listen to each other, show respect by making eye contact
  - Don't interrupt while someone is talking

- Next, depending on the student's level of support needs, do one of the following:

If the student is **higher functioning and verbal**:
- If the student is okay with sharing more information about what makes interactions harder or easier for him/her, the student could share that now, with facilitator support as needed. If student is not comfortable with that, continue to #4.

If the student is **nonverbal (and/or not present at the orientation meeting):**
- Explain that the student communicates a little differently than they do.
- Offer specific, individualized examples, like the following: "Even though Jack does not look at you when he talks to you, this does not mean he is not interested or not listening," or "Occasionally, Alexis will keep talking about the same topic. If you want to talk about something else, you can change the topic like you would with any other friend."
- Let the group know that if a conversation with the student seems challenging, they should just think about how they would respond to another friend who was acting similarly and if appropriate, do that!
- If the student uses an augmentative communication device or communication system, briefly make sure the partners understand how it works, and discuss any device-specific protocol (i.e., how much time it will take [student] to respond, only [student] should be operating the device, etc.)

If the student is **verbal, but has limited expressive language**:

- Give specific, individualized suggestions on how to interact with student.
- Let the partners know what the student is able to understand. Be careful not to overly limit the conversations between partners and the student.
- Give the partners some ideas of how to interact with him/her such as saying hi, giving a high-five, or other appropriate social gesture.
- Share the student's interests and hobbies with the partners as a way to start conversations.

After addressing the group's differences, acknowledge similarities by starting a discussion on what they have in common. Examples include clubs, interests, hobbies, television, movies, sports, etc. This can help students begin to get to know each other more. Do not share confidential information with partners, such as information about the student's disability, personal information, or IEP information. Keep information very general.

## 4. Discuss Confidentiality

During the orientation meeting, do not share confidential information about the student. Discuss with the group what information is appropriate or is not appropriate to share with others outside of the group:

- The peer network is meant to be a place for students to share personal information and experiences with one another.
- Not all information shared in a network meeting is appropriate to share with others not involved in the network.
- When other people ask questions about this group, tell the students to consider what they would want shared or not shared about them.
- Students can invite others to participate as partners by simply describing the group as a way to have fun together, meet new people, and develop new friendships
- Information about each student's strengths or interests can be shared in an appropriate social situation.
- Instruct the students to come to you if they are not sure how to answer someone's questions or handle a particular situation.

## 5. Schedule Connections

If student is **higher functioning, verbal, and attending the orientation meeting**:
- Ask students to share their schedules and point out times they are in the same vicinity or hallway and can connect with each other.

If student is **nonverbal (and/or not present for the orientation meeting)**:
- Share the student's weekly schedule with the group and record times each peer network member might be able to interact with the student during the week on the *Peer Network Interaction* Schedule form.

If student is **verbal but has limited language**:
- Support the student in sharing their schedule with the partners, providing prompts as needed. It is important to model appropriate ways to interact with and support the student so the partners can follow your example in their future interactions with the student.

After figuring out when students can connect with one another, offer interaction ideas (Review ideas on Page 2 of this guide). The goals for these interactions are just for the students to introduce themselves to each other or just begin talking more with each other. As the semester continues, the group will work on helping each other become more involved in school activities.

Suggest to the students that they figure out a way to remind themselves to connect with each other throughout the week, such as writing it down in an assignment book or putting a reminder in their cell phone. Let them know they will be asked to share information about the interactions at the next meeting, so they should make a mental note or write down how the social contacts went.

## 6. Schedule Regular Meetings

The success of the group will depend on getting together at least weekly, even when every student cannot make every meeting.

- If a meeting time cannot be determined when everyone in the group can attend, schedule a meeting time in which the majority of the group can attend. Determine when and where the weekly meetings will be held. Be sure you know when and where would be convenient for the student.
- Decide on a main method of communication for you to get in touch with all group members. Text messages, email, or social media may be the easiest ways to get in touch with the group members since students are likely to have very different schedules during the school day. Ask students what method of communication is most convenient for them, and ensure all group members will use it to do things such as schedule meetings or decide on activities.  Depending on the group, this may be the same method that group members will use to get in touch with each other, or it could different.
- If a next meeting time and place cannot be determined at this meeting, use the method of communication you decided on above to schedule it.


Brainstorm some activities the students might like to do together in future groups.  The format of the meetings can be determined by the group. The facilitator will be there to help. Over time, partners should take more responsibility in leading the group meetings.


## 7. Closing and Questions

Give students a chance to share their ideas and questions.

- What are you excited about?
- What are your concerns?
- What do you hope to gain from this experience?
- What questions do you have for me?

# Peer Network Orientation Meeting Quick Guide

**What to bring to this meeting:**
1. This guide, the *Orientation Meeting Checklist*, and a pen
2. Any materials needed for ice-breaker activities
3. Calendar to plan the next meeting time (if not meeting on the same day every week)

**In your role as the facilitator, remember to address the following:**
1. Introductions
   - Have everyone say their name and why they decided to become involved in the social network
   - Possibly do an ice breaker activity
2. Discuss the Goals of the Group
   - To have fun together, to increase opportunities to meet new people, to help each other develop new friendships, and to encourage each other to be involved together in school or after-school activities
   - Mention each member's role and remind them of your role as the facilitator
   - Discuss specific ways students can address and reach these goals
3. Address the Group's Similarities and Differences
   - Explain that everybody has differences in how they communicate and in how social they are
   - Depending on the functioning level of the student, explain any differences in how he/she communicates and how group members can support the student in communicating and interacting
4. Discuss Confidentiality
   - Not all information shared at network meetings is appropriate to share with others not involved in the group
5. Schedule Connections
   - Have students share their schedules and offer suggestions of ways to connect during the school week
6. Schedule Regular Meetings
   - Decide on the most convenient method of communication for all group members and schedule the day, time, and location of the next meeting
7. Closing and Questions

# Peer Network Orientation Meeting Checklist

*(to be completed by the facilitator after the orientation meeting)*

Student:_____          Facilitator:_____
Date:_____          Total number of students at meeting:_____

*Circle Y (yes) or N (no) based on whether the following occurred:*

1. Y  N        Was the student present?

2. Y  N        Were all of the network members in attendance? List names of partners who were present. _____
_____

3. Y  N        Did the partners and student introduce themselves and participate in introductory activities appropriately (if student is mostly nonverbal, did I introduce him or her to the group and give non-confidential background information?)?

4. Y  N        Did students talk about areas of shared interests? If so, what? _____
_____

5. Y  N        Did the group discuss the goals for the group? List any goals suggested by group members. _____
_____

6. Y  N        Did the group discuss ways to work toward the goals of the peer network?

7. Y  N        Did I discuss the importance of confidentiality and respectful language with the group?

8. Y  N        Did the group talk about when social interactions can occur?

9. Y  N        Did I offer specific suggestions on ways to interact socially?

10. Y  N        Did the group schedule regular meetings or discuss the date of the next meeting?

Comments: _____
_____
_____
_____

# Peer Network Interaction Schedule

This is a schedule of times that interactions could possibly occur between network members and the student. Complete this form at the initial meeting and again later if the students' schedules change.

| | |
|---|---|
| Network member:<br>Time:<br>Location:<br>Day(s): | Notes: |
| Network member:<br>Time:<br>Location:<br>Day(s): | Notes: |
| Network member:<br>Time:<br>Location:<br>Day(s): | Notes: |
| Network member:<br>Time:<br>Location:<br>Day(s): | Notes: |
| Network member:<br>Time:<br>Location:<br>Day(s): | Notes: |
| Network member:<br>Time:<br>Location:<br>Day(s): | Notes: |

CSESA
The Center on Secondary Education
for Students with Autism

# Peer Network Weekly Meeting Guide

**In your role as the facilitator, remember to:**
- Develop a social goal(s) and determine how it will be addressed during the meeting
- Ensure an appropriate activity or conversation is planned and assist the network members in planning for future meetings
- Encourage the student and partners to attend meetings
- Be present during meetings and ensure everyone is included and participating
- Check in with the group, answer any questions from members, and encourage members to interact with each other outside of the meetings
- After each meeting, reflect and make adjustments as needed
- Complete the *Peer Network Meeting Checklist* after each meeting and return to the coach
- Provide feedback to the student and partners during and outside of the meeting

**What to Bring to Each Meeting:**
1. The *Peer Network Meeting Quick Guide* and *Peer Network Meeting Checklist*
2. Any materials needed for the activity
3. Calendar to plan the next meeting time (if not meeting on the same day every week)

**Incorporating the Social-related Goal:**

Prior to the initial meeting and in collaboration with the coach, you will have selected at least one social goal for the student. The goal should be (a) a social skill the student has difficulty with, (b) a skill that can be addressed in a naturalistic way while interacting with peers, (c) a skill that will enhance social interaction and engagement, and (d) a skill that is observable. Existing IEP goals might be a starting point. Some examples are:
- During a peer network activity, Andrew will initiate conversations with at least 2 peers, 4 out of 5 meetings
- When presented with a conversational attempt from a peer, Sam will respond and then continue the conversation by asking a follow-up question for 80% of opportunities over 3 consecutive days across 3 different peers.

With the coach, you will develop a strategy for addressing the chosen social goal(s) within the meeting. Keep in mind the goals of the network when choosing an appropriate goal:
- To have fun together
- To increase opportunities to meet new people
- To help each other develop new friendships
- To encourage each other to be involved together in school or after-school activities

The goal should be something that can be addressed naturally while students participate in an activity or conversation. "Working" on the goal should not limit interactions or make

interactions between the student and partners seem artificial. Addressing the goal should help increase the ability of the student and the partners to interact with each other.

## Planning an Appropriate Activity:

Ensure there is an activity or conversation planned for each meeting. The activity/conversation should:
- Be age-appropriate (e.g., instead of coloring cartoons, make posters for events)
- Be interesting to ALL members of the network and can possibly include elements of the focal student's 'perseverative' interests if not inhibiting to interaction
- Have a role for everyone
- Provide multiple opportunities for interaction
- Allow interaction modes that are appropriate for the target student (e.g., a game that is entirely verbal would not be appropriate for a nonverbal student)
- Be practical to implement in the location and amount of time the group meets
- Ideas for activities:
  - Board games (e.g., Jenga, Uno)
  - Making posters/banners for pep rallies or other events
  - Directed conversations about specific topics (e.g., favorite sports, hobbies)
  - Comparing music on iDevices

The goal is for the network members to take over planning activities after the first few meetings. You may need to plan activities in the beginning to get the group going. During or after subsequent meetings, group member feedback should be sought on choosing future activities. If the students are having a difficult time brainstorming activities try some of these strategies to incorporate their input.
- Provide a few options from which the students can choose
- Create a short survey to determine preferred activities or topics
- Put a student in charge of picking an activity each week
- At the orientation meeting, find a shared interest to frame activities/conversations

## Encouraging Students to Attend Meetings:

It is likely students will have other obligations and will not be able to attend every meeting. However, if partners are consistently missing meetings you should talk to the students and find out the cause. Here are a few things you can do to troubleshoot this issue:
- Make sure the meeting time and place is as convenient as possible for partners.
- Make sure partners feel comfortable in the group. This may mean fading your direct support. Or, the group may need to meet in a more private location.
- Have a reliable way to remind students. Ask teachers to remind them the period before the meeting, remind them in the halls, or send a reminder directly using technology (e.g., text, email). Consider setting up a group calendar on Google or other network that will automatically email/text participants on the meeting day.
- Make sure you are giving group members positive feedback and support as needed.
- Evaluate the activities and the conversations in which the group is participating to see if they are fun and appropriate.

## Facilitating During the Meeting:

Your goal during the group is to encourage the involvement of the student with ASD in the conversation and activity with partners. Try to do so in a way that your presence does not hinder relationships among students. In other words, your role is to provide "just enough" support to encourage successful connections among students but not "too much support" that students don't gradually take ownership of the group. When facilitating the group, consider using one or more of the following strategies to encourage interactions:

- **Redirect questions or comments to the group.** Sometimes, students will be unsure of how to interact with one another and may feel more comfortable interacting with an adult. When this happens, refocus their attention on each other. For example, if a partner asks you what the student likes to do, you could suggest he or she ask the student directly. Or, if a student regularly tries to interact with you, try to draw a partner into the interaction and fade back your own involvement.
- **Fill in awkward silences.** It may take the students some time to warm up to each other and feel comfortable. If this occurs, try to keep interaction flowing by bringing up topics everyone might be interested in or suggest ways to engage in the activity. Again, it is important to fill in awkward silences in a way that encourages the entire group to participate in the conversation. Instead of asking one person a specific question, suggest the group discuss what they did over the weekend.
- **Find a role for everyone.** During the activity and conversation, make sure everyone is engaged in a way that reflects their strengths and abilities. Students do not necessarily need to participate in the same way, but each student should have a role that makes a clear contribution to the activity. Validating each of these roles can help partners see the student's contribution to the activity as valuable.
- **Offer support as needed to students in their role in the activity/conversation**. As the activity progresses, students may need support in carrying out their role to keep the activity going. Try to offer just as much support as is needed, and fade back when possible. If partners are able to offer support in a way that does not resemble 'tutoring,' this can be encouraged as well. For example, if the group is playing a game and the student does not understand the instructions, a peer could partner with the student to help explain the rules of the game. However, try to avoid having a partner speak for the student or telling the student what to say.
- **Draw the student into the conversation/activity**. It may take extra encouragement to ensure the student is engaged. If the student seems withdrawn, try to elicit participation by reminding the partner of his/her role in the activity, refocusing the conversation on something that he/she is interested in, or asking a question to spur further conversation. If the student is minimally verbal, try to encourage interactions around the activity or encourage the use of an AAC system.
- **Point out commonalities between the student and partners.** In the beginning, students might not be aware of things they have in common. If you are aware of shared interests or experiences, bringing these up during meetings can be a way to encourage interaction. Students can also be asked to share their interests, either in the orientation meeting or network meetings, and any commonalities should be pointed out and encouraged. Common interests can be taken into consideration when planning activities in which all the students can participate.

- **<u>Provide just the right level of support.</u>** Too little support can result in the student's exclusion, while too much support can inhibit interaction as the adult becomes too central to the conversation or activity. Try to tailor your level of support so that it is just enough to get everyone involved. As meetings progress, it may be the case that very little adult support is required as partners begin to take on more active roles in encouraging participation.

## Example of a Peer Network Meeting Agenda:

**Initial Gathering (3-5 minutes)**
- Students arrive
- This is a good time to ask ALL GROUP MEMBERS if they have interacted with each other outside of the meeting time
- Record this information on your *Peer Network Meeting Checklist*
- If there have been no interactions, record this on the sheet and remind the students of simple ways to connect (e.g., saying hello in the hall, walking together to a class, stopping by the classroom before or after class)

**Group Activity or Conversation (15-20 minutes)**
- Introduce or re-introduce activity or conversational topic
- Pass out supplies (if needed) and facilitate as appropriate, encouraging discussion and interactions
- As students engage in the activity, look for opportunities to facilitate conversation

**Closing and Questions (3-5 minutes)**
- Remember to ask all students if they have any questions/concerns about the group
- Remind students when the next meeting will take place and ask if everyone will be able to attend the next meeting
- Ask for ideas of activities they would like to do during the next meeting

Depending on when and where the meetings take place, the actual meetings may be shorter than the scheduled time. For example, when meeting during lunch it may take partners time to get their lunch before they come to the meeting. When time is limited, you may choose to have students spend the majority of their time participating in the activity and determine a way to communicate feedback and plan activities outside of the meeting time (e.g., social media, email).

## After the Meeting:

- Fill out the facilitator checklist following each meeting. This can be used as a guide for reflection and adjustments.
- Reflect on how the meeting went:
  - Did my facilitation help or hinder interaction?
  - Were the students interested in the activity or conversation?
  - Did everyone enjoy themselves?
  - Did the focal student seem comfortable in his/her role?

- Plan adjustments for the next meeting:
  - Did the students come up with an activity independently? If not, consider ways to encourage their leadership.
  - Do partners need more instruction on how to interact with the student? If so, consider following up with them during the next meeting or another time.
  - Are any materials needed for the next meeting (e.g., a game, topic starters, communication cards for the student)?
- Your coach will arrange some mode of follow-up communication with you. This will be an opportunity for you to share ideas about how to improve the experience for students and for the coach to provide feedback on your use of facilitation strategies.

## Providing Ongoing Support and Training for Students and Partners:

**Provide support during the network meeting**. As the network progresses, you may find students and/or partners need more support and training. If possible, feedback and suggestions should be given during group time in a way that does not single out the student. For example, if the student is talking about a perseverative interest for a long time, you can model how the group might redirect or change the subject. If the group is going well you should try to give positive feedback in a natural way. For example, if the group is carrying on an appropriate conversation by themselves you could let them know they are doing a great job and you are going to step back.

**Provide support to the student outside of the network meeting.** Sometimes, the student may need additional support that is not appropriate to address in front of partners. If this happens, you should address this at a different time or in a nonintrusive way. For example if the student is interrupting people it may be awkward to point that out during the group. Talk to the student after the group and remind him or her to wait for other people to talk before taking a turn to speak. Depending on the student, visual cues may also be helpful and subtler than having an adult interrupt the conversation. If you are using a reinforcement system, make sure it is designed to be natural or given at the end of the network meeting.

**Provide support for the partners outside of the network meeting.** As mentioned before, most of the support and ongoing training for partners can be conducted during the meetings. However, there may be occasions when you want to provide additional support outside of the group. If a partner is not showing up to the group consistently you should arrange a time to meet with the partner and find out why they are not coming. If a partner is struggling to interact with the group or the student, it may be beneficial to pull the partner aside or meet with the partner separately to provide some tips on ways to interact. For example, if the student uses a communication device, give a partner tips on what questions to ask and how to use it may be helpful. Or if a challenging behavior occurs during the meeting, you may need to let the students know what to do when that happens. It is important to give partners praise and point out what they are doing well too. Simply

reminding the partners of the goal of the group--to help students who have a difficult time making friends form friendships--can motivate the partner to be more involved.

## Involve Families

Be sure to involve the family of the student with ASD every step of the way. Some suggestions include:

- Share contact information of peers **(if allowed)** with family to help schedule activities/transportation
- Regular contact about group meeting activities and outcomes

## Fading Support as the Group Progresses:

As the group progresses, the students should gradually take over planning activities and may need very little support during the meeting. You will still need to check in with the group and find out if there has been contact with the student outside of the group. But physically fading your presence can create a more natural environment for students to interact and form friendships.

After the first few meetings, try to fade your active involvement during the meeting. Students can take over:

- Planning activities and conversation.
- Filling in awkward silences. If students are having a hard time keeping a conversation going try helping them choose an activity that will naturally lead to interactions (e.g., Mad Libs, question box).
- Finding a role in the group and making sure everyone else has a role. Choosing an activity/conversation in which everyone is interested can help with this. Students could alternate choosing an activity and then leading the group during meetings.
- Drawing the student into the conversation. If the student is withdrawn or has limited verbal skills, partners may need support on how to ask questions or what the student can enjoy talking about. Continue to model how to interact with the student and encourage the partners to interact with the student.
- Finding ways to interact with each other outside of the group. If they are not, continue to remind students they may say "hi" in the hall, sit with each other at lunch, or invite each other to afterschool events.

Remember that you want to provide just the right level of support during meeting. If you fade your support too soon, the student could be excluded. If you do not fade your support at all, interactions between the students may be inhibited by the adult presence.

# Peer Network Weekly Meeting
# Quick Guide

## What to bring to each meeting:

1. This guide, the *Peer Network Meeting Checklist,* and a pen
2. Any materials needed for the activity
3. Calendar to plan the next meeting time (if the group is not on the same day every week)

## In your role as the facilitator, remember to:

- Incorporate the social-related goal(s) using the strategy determined
- Ensure an appropriate activity or conversation is planned and assist the network members in planning for future meetings
- Encourage the student and partners to attend meetings
- Ensure everyone is included and participating in the activity or conversation during the meeting by:
    - Redirecting questions or comments to the group
    - Filling in awkward silences
    - Finding a role for everyone
    - Offering support as needed to students in their role in the activity/conversation
    - Drawing the student into the conversation and/or activity
    - Pointing out commonalities between the student and partners
    - Providing just the right amount of support
- Check in with the group, answer any questions from members, and encourage members to interact with each other outside of meetings.
- Complete the *Peer Network Meeting Checklist* after each meeting and return to your coach.
- After each meeting, reflect and make adjustments as needed.
- Provide feedback to the student and partners both during and outside of the network meeting.

# Peer Network Weekly Meeting Checklist- Facilitator

Student: _____     Facilitator:_____
Date: _____     Total number of students at meeting: _____
Network Members Present: _____
_____

Circle Y (yes) or N (no) based on whether or not these behaviors occurred during the meeting.

| Y   N |

1. **Are partners and the student interacting during the meeting?**
      Y   N   Did the student stay for the majority of the meeting?
      Y   N   Does the student initiate interactions with partners?
      Y   N   Do partners initiate interactions with the student?
      Y   N   Do students engage in a game or activity together?
      Y   N   Do students engage in conversation together?
      Y   N   Was the targeted social-related goal(s) addressed?

| Y   N |

2. **Are you (facilitator) supporting partners and the student?**
      Y   N   Do you provide structure and facilitate the meetings as needed?
      Y   N   Do you monitor interactions during the meeting?
      Y   N   Do you provide praise and feedback to students during the meeting?
      Y   N   Did you discuss the date of the next meeting? _____
      Y   N   Did you discuss the activity for the next meeting? _____

| Y   N |

3. **Are partners and the student reporting that interactions occurred during the week (outside of the meeting)?**
      Y   N   Does the student ever initiate interactions outside of the meeting?
      Y   N   Do partners initiate interactions outside of the meeting?
      Y   N   Are interactions occurring between more than one partner and the student outside of the meeting?

---

1) How many students report interactions during the week? **# of students: _____**

2) When were interactions reported as occurring (circle all that apply):

    **Before school**        **Between classes**        **In class**

    **Lunch**                **After school**           **Weekend**

---

Additional Notes From Meeting/Weekly Contacts:
_____
_____
_____
_____

CSESA
The Center on Secondary Education
for Students with Autism

# Peer Network Weekly Meeting Checklist- Coach

Student: _____    School: _____
Intervention Facilitator: _____    Coach: _____
Date: _____

Total number of students at meeting (including the focus student): _____

Peer Network Members Present: _____
_____

Targeted social-related goal(s):_____
_____

Circle Y (yes) or N (no) based on whether or not these behaviors occurred during the observation.

| Y   N |

**1.       Are partners and the student interacting during the meeting?**

    Y    N   Did the student **stay for the majority of the meeting**?
    Y    N   Does the **student initiate** interactions with peer partners?
    Y    N   Do **partners initiate** interactions with the focus student?
    Y    N   Do students engage in a **game or activity** together?
    Y    N   Do students engage in **conversation** together?
    Y    N   Was the targeted social-related **goal addressed**?

| Y   N |

**2.  Are you (facilitator) supporting partners and the student?**

    Y    N    Do you provide **structure and facilitate** the meetings as needed?
    Y    N    Do you **monitor** interactions during the meeting?
    Y    N    Do you provide **praise and feedback** to students **during** the meeting?
    Y    N    Did you discuss the **date of the next meeting**? _____
    Y    N    Did you discuss the **activity for the next meeting**? _____

| Y   N |

**3. Are partners and the student reporting that interactions occurred during the week (outside of the meeting)?**

    Y    N   Does the student ever initiate interactions outside of the meeting?
    Y    N   Do partners initiate interactions outside of the meeting?
    Y    N   Are interactions occurring between more than one partner and the student outside of the meeting?

---

3) **How many** students report interactions during the week**? # of students: _____**
4) **When** were interactions reported as occurring (circle all that apply):

**Before school**          **Between classes**      **In class**

**Lunch**                  **After school**          **Weekend**

---

CSESA
The Center on Secondary Education
for Students with Autism

Notes from observation: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____


**Facilitator Check-In Notes**

**Topics Discussed**

_____
_____
_____
_____


Any changes/variations made to intervention:

_____
_____
_____
_____


Feedback/follow up coaching:

_____
_____
_____
_____


Additional notes/comments:

_____
_____
_____
_____