

Creating Connections Workbook



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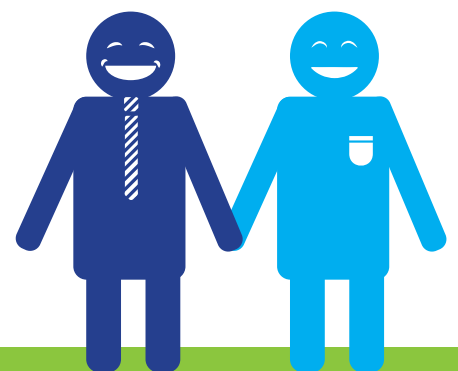
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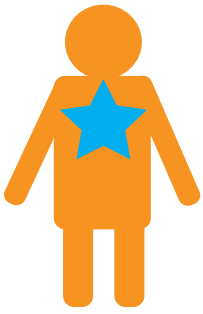
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Introduction

Being connected to people is important. We all crave belonging, whether to our family, friends or greater community. We live happier, healthier, safer lives when we are surrounded by people who care about us. However, relationship building isn't often taught. It can feel daunting to try to meet new people if you are unsure of how to do so.

Many people with disabilities utilize paid staff for support with daily life. While it is great to have supports, relying on others can be limiting when it comes to meeting new people. People with disabilities often have smaller or restricted social networks, since there are limited opportunities to meet new people. This means that many people feel isolated and lonely, even though they have valuable gifts and talents to share with their community.





The purpose of this workbook is to outline steps that can be used and adapted to broaden and expand relationships. You can think of this workbook as a tool to start conversations about what you need and want from your relationships and friendships. Feel free to adjust the directions and activities to work best for you.

Community Connectors





Building a network takes intentional time and action. Some people may choose to have support in this journey. People can elect a 'Community Connector' to encourage and guide them in building relationships and creating an action plan. Throughout the guide, there will be additional notes and directions specifically for those who are supporting you as a 'Community Connector'.



Community Connector Tips

When you see this yellow bar and icon, it means this is a direction for the Community Connector.

Tips for the Person Creating Connections:








-  It's best to go through this workbook in order, and work through it at your own pace. We recommend spending two to three hours a week on this workbook so you can see your progress.
-  Think big! Many of these activities will be asking you what your dreams are. Try to think outside of the box. It's better to think big, especially during brainstorming.
-  There are no wrong answers. This workbook was designed to help YOU. You are the expert here! You know yourself best.
-  Remember that making meaningful friendships will take time and energy. It's important to keep working on them, even if you start to feel like the process is tough.

This workbook is for:

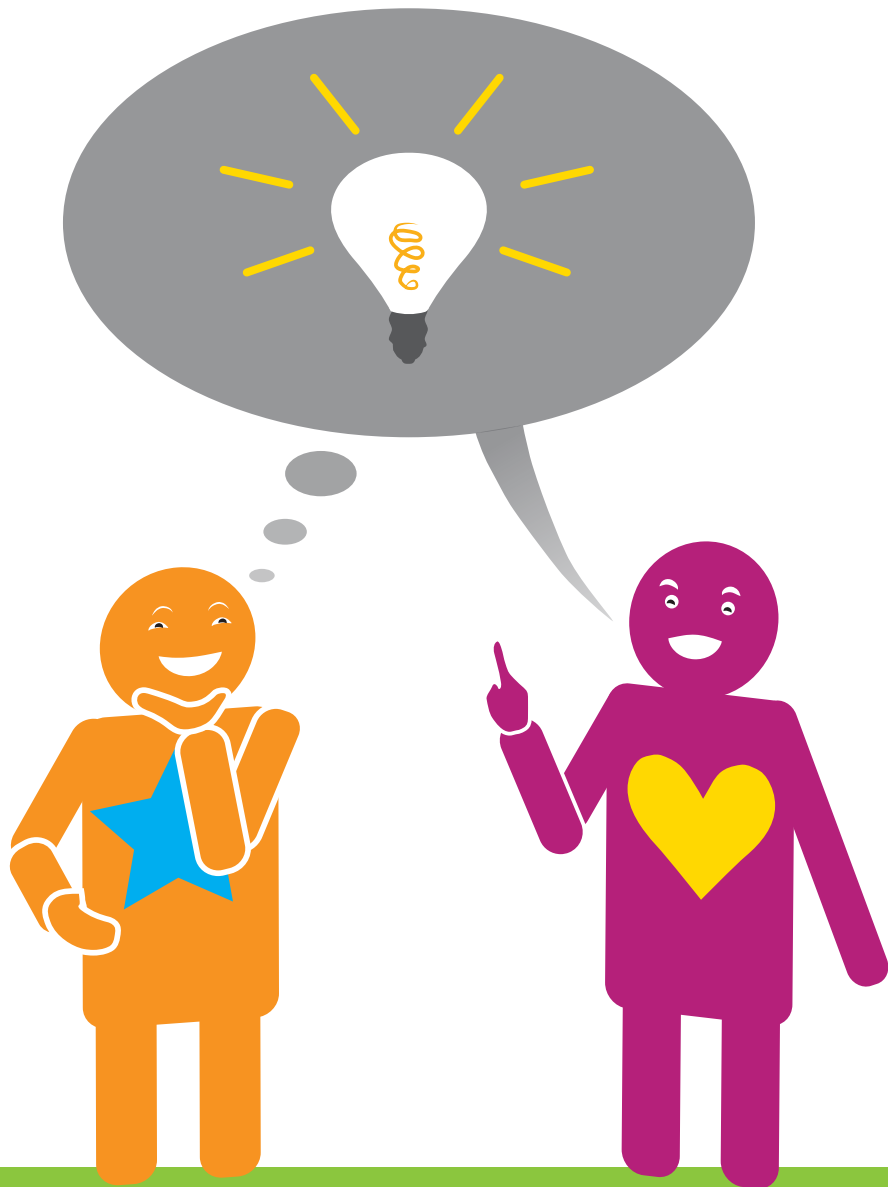
You got this!



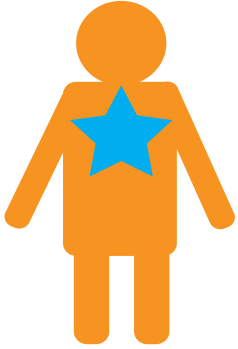
Tips for the Community Connector:

-  Make sure to take plenty of notes so you can share your conversations with the other people in the individual's life.
-  Parents and caregivers have a lot of power to increase or limit the development of relationships, but it's important to make sure that the person who will benefit from this book is actively involved in the process. Everybody should have choice and agency in deciding what their life looks like.
-  Everyone in the individual's life needs to make relationship-building a priority to ensure that progress is being made. Communicate with teachers, staff and caregivers so they can all assist in the friend making process.
-  Think about what your role is to the person in the center of this planning process. As a Community Connector, your responsibility is to help the person build meaningful relationships. This might differ from what your role currently is to the person, so keep that in mind when you're thinking about activities.
-  Think about how you met your friends. How do you like to be introduced when you're meeting new people? Treat the person you are supporting like they're a friend of yours, instead of someone you are working with, particularly when meeting new people.
-  Avoid talking immediately about the disability or diagnosis of the person, especially during introductions to new people. There is a balance between accommodating the needs of someone and drawing unnecessary attention to them.
-  You may be supporting more than one person as a community connector, but remember that this process works best when you use the one person/one situation model. This means that you are thinking specifically about what is best for each individual. There is a tendency, especially when people receive services in a group home with other people with disabilities, to have all housemates go to activities together. While that can be a way to ease into a new situation, it can be hard to make friends if you never have the ability to try new things separately from your housemates.

The Community Connector is:



Section 1: All About You



In this section you are going to think about everything that is special and unique to you. Think about all of your special talents and interests. Nothing is too small or too silly to write down! This list will help you & anyone supporting you to think about places that you might be interested in spending more time, or people that might want to become your friend.



Community Connector Tip:

Your job in this section is to facilitate conversations about what is special and unique about the person you are supporting. Help them think generally about what they are good at and then ask why they think they are good at that. This is your opportunity to get to know them much better, which will help you as a Community Connector. The goal of this section is to discover unique talents and gifts that the person brings to their friendships and to identify areas where they might be able to make new friends, or strengthen current relationships.

About You:

Take some time to think about what you like about yourself. If you get stuck, ask someone who knows you well to help you fill this out!

Things you like about yourself:

Things you are good at:

What talents and skills you have:

What people like about you:

What is special and unique about you?

What is one thing that you wish people knew about you?

Favorite Things:

This is a space for you to make a list of all of your favorite things. The more you can think of, the better! If you think something is missing from this list, add your own category. Don't like something? Cross it out. We often make friends with people because they have things in common with us. Identifying the things that you like can help you to find others who like them too.

Favorite animal: _____ Favorite food: _____

Favorite snack: _____ Favorite drink: _____

Favorite holiday/celebration: _____

Favorite outdoor activity: _____

Favorite indoor activity: _____

Favorite season: _____ Favorite TV show: _____

Favorite movie: _____ Favorite book: _____

Favorite sports & teams to watch: _____

Favorite sports to participate in: _____

Favorite class in school: _____

Favorite creative activity: _____

My dream job is: _____



Community Connector Tip:

Start conversations with the person about the favorites that they seem most excited about. Ask them to explain why they like these activities or things. If you get stuck later on in this workbook, this list is a great way to generate some new ideas.

Activities You Like:

By thinking about the activities that you really like, you can consider places where you might be able to meet people that enjoy the same things.

What activities are important to you?

Why do you like these activities?

Who do you like to do these activities with?

What are some activities you have never done before, and would like to try?

What are some things you have done before, and would like to do again?



Community Connector Tip:

This page will serve as a foundation for future planning activities in this workbook, so this is a great place to spend a lot of time idea generating. Start thinking about what these activities have in common and why the person you are supporting enjoys spending their time doing them. What is important to the person about these activities?

What Doesn't Work for You?

By figuring out what you don't like, you can learn what kinds of activities to avoid. We don't want to spend energy on things that upset us. Identifying what bothers us helps us realize how we do or don't want to spend our time. It can also help others get to know you better as they support you in making meaningful connections.

What kinds of activities bother you?

What kinds of things sound boring?

What is something you have done in the past and did not like?

Why didn't you like it?

What might make it better?



Community Connector Tip:

This is a way for you to start thinking about what activities the person is not interested in. What kinds of things frustrate the person? By understanding what frustrates them, you might be able to avoid activities that spark frustration. You also might be able to find a way to soothe or prevent some of that frustration in activities that they are interested in.

Places You Spend Time:

By thinking about the places where you already spend time, you can start to think about who you might meet at those places. Some common places that people spend time are at work, school or at the gym!

Places:	I go here this often:	When I go here I like to do this:	When I go here I see these people:
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Places You Want to Go:

Now make a list of places you have never been to, and want to visit! It could be a new restaurant you want to try or a place you want to travel to! Next to each place, write down why you think that place sounds like something you would like to try. Who might want to try it with you?

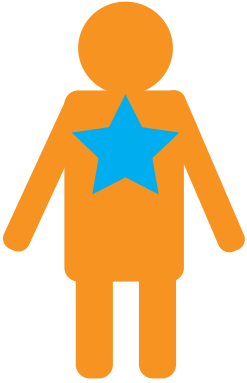
New places:	It's interesting to me because:	I think this person might want to try it with me:
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		



Community Connector Tip:

What kinds of commonalities are you seeing about the places they are interested in trying? Are these places local, or far away? What other places might they enjoy going to, based off of this list of ideas?

Section 2: People in Your Life



This section uses a diagram called a Relationship Map. The purpose of the map is to help you understand who you have good, strong relationships with and who you might want to get to know better. When filling out the Relationship Map, think about all the people you know. It is okay to include friends from social media, or friends you haven't seen in a long time.

Place the people you feel closest to emotionally in the center of the ring. The middle ring of the circle is for your casual friends and the outside ring of the circle is for people you don't know very well.



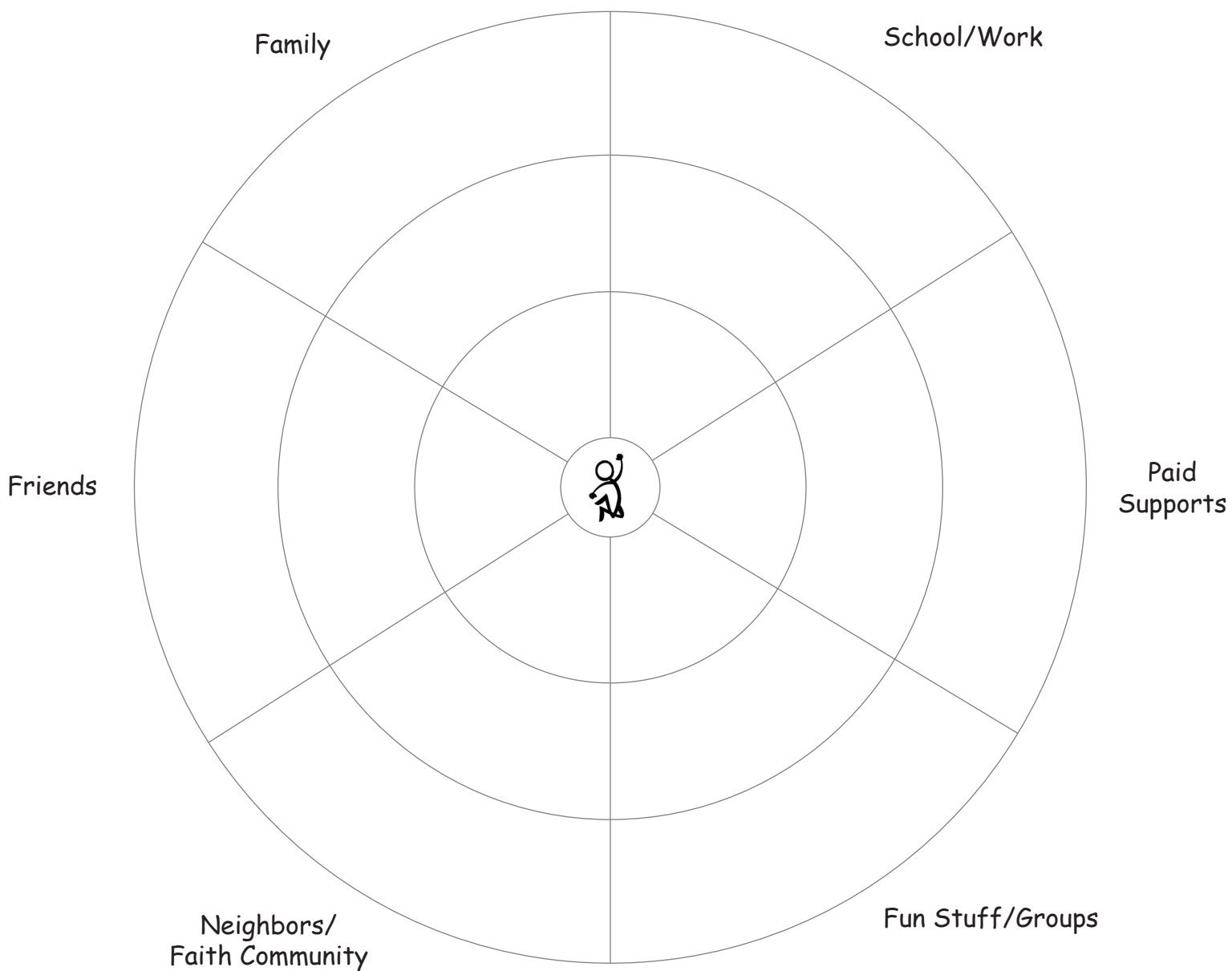
Community Connector Tip:

The Relationship Map is a great tool to use to identify places where people have a lot of support and to identify places where they can expand and deepen their relationships. Have the person you are supporting think about all of the people that they know. Later on in this section, they will work off of the Relationship Map to think about strengthening those connections.

Relationship Map:

Consider adding the following people to your relationship map:

- people you consider close friends and family
- people you'd like to know better
- people you'd like to reconnect with



People You Know:

As you completed the Relationship Map, you identified the people in your life. This is a place for you to list off the people who are important to you and who you want to get to know better.

Who is already an important part of your life?

Family members:	Friends:	Neighbors, community members:	Paid supports:

Who would you like to get to know better?

Family members:	Friends:	Neighbors, community members:	Paid supports:

People Who Are Important to You:

Pick out a few people who are important to you! Start thinking about why they are important to you. Write down all of the things you like about them. If you are feeling a little stuck, ask them what they like about you.

Name:	Who is this person to you?	Why are they important to you?	Where did you meet them?	What do you like about them?	What do they like about you?
1					
2					
3					
4					



Community Connector Tip:

Prompt the person you are supporting to think about why these people are important to them. What themes are you starting to see about what meaningful relationships look like for this person?

Strengthening Relationships:

Looking back at the **People You Know** activity on page 18, think about who you wrote down under the “Who would you like to get to know better?” section. You are going to do some brainstorming about how to build and strengthen those relationships.

Someone I would like to get to know better:	Where did you meet this person?	Why would you like to spend more time with them?
1		
2		
3		
4		

Strengthening Relationships:

What are some things you might have in common?	What are some things you could do to get to know them better?	What has been holding you back from getting to know them?
1		
2		
3		
4		

Section 3: Taking Action

Now that you have established what kinds of activities are important to you, you can start brainstorming how to become better involved in activities that you like.

This section is where you and anyone supporting you will start making a plan.



Community Connector Tip:



The purpose of the next activities are to increase the potential to meet new people by finding places where there are people with similar interests. When thinking about the ways that a person might want to spend their time differently, don't limit the possible activities to just places or activities with other people with disabilities. Full community integration is a great way for a person to feel less isolated and to develop meaningful connections. While there are plenty of awesome groups and organizations out there for people with disabilities, think outside of the box.

For each topic and activity that you listed on pages 10, 11 and 12, try to break it down into all of the possible places and groups that are related to the activity on the Brainstorming page. After you've come up with several ideas of places and activities, work to create an Action Plan. The Action Plan will include the activities you find the most interesting. Have a discussion about the interests listed and which you want to concentrate on first.

DON'T FORGET THE INTERNET! There are plenty of online communities of people that share similar interests as you. Do you want to talk to people about online gaming? Do you want to join a Facebook group to talk about movies? There are plenty of spaces online where one might find friendships. Consider the power of social media for staying in contact with people. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tyze are all online platforms that allow us to connect with others based off shared interests. We will talk about Internet safety later in this workbook, but for now, utilize Google to find some possible communities online.

We have included a sample Brainstorming page and a sample Action Plan page on the next two pages. Here you can see how we did some brainstorming about basketball, decided what activities sounded most interesting and then made a plan to do those activities.

We also provided you with multiple copies of the Brainstorming page and the Action Plan page so you can work on planning out your ideas for multiple topics that you are interested in.

Example: Brainstorming

Topic: Basketball

Activities related to the topic:

- + I could sign up to play or coach with a community education/intramural basketball team.
- + I could visit a local sports store that specializes in trading cards and memorabilia.
- + I can play on the nearby outdoor basketball court when the weather is nice.

Spaces to talk about the topic with other people:

- + I want to get more involved with March Madness. I want to find a group of people that I can work on a bracket with and talk to about games.
- + I can look online to find a group of people nearby who like basketball, so I could get together with them and watch games.

Finding other people to do activities with:

- + I enjoy spending time at restaurants. I want to go to a local sports bar on a big game night to be surrounded by other people who like basketball.
- + I really enjoy middle school, high school or college basketball. I could find out when some of the local schools are having games. I could attend and enjoy supporting my community.
- + There is a professional basketball team close to me. I want to find a way to attend a Lynx game.



Example: Action Plan

Topic: Basketball

Activities I am interested in relating to this topic:

- + Going to sports bars to watch games on big game nights.
- + My coworkers all like March Madness, so I am going to join their bracket pool with them.
- + There is a group of people at the YMCA that play basketball every Wednesday.
- + My nephew plays for his high school's basketball team, I want to go to some of their home games.

Who else do I know that likes this activity?

- + My brother loves basketball.
- + My coworkers like basketball.

Activity	What needs to be done?	Who can help me?	When will it be done?
Going to a sports bar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - find a sports bar that is close to my house - find out what nights they show NBA games - save \$20 so I can buy some chicken wings when I go to watch the game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ask my brother if he would want to drive me & go with me to watch a game - my staff can help me budget \$20 from my next paycheck 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payday is Friday 1/5/18, I'll save \$20 then NBA game showing is on Wednesday 1/10/18
March Madness bracket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do some research on the March Madness teams - talk to my coworkers about making a bracket 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ask my coworkers to help me make a bracket 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First week of March, I will have my bracket done
Basketball at the YMCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - go to the YMCA on Wednesdays to play pick-up basketball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - my staff, Andrew, can drive me there, stay with me and then drive me home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every Wednesday starting 1/17/18
Going to watch my nephew's BB games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - find out when the home games are - find out how much they cost - make a cool sign to hold up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I can ride with my brother & my nephew to the games - if there is a cost, then talk to my staff about budgeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saturday mornings during February and March

Brainstorming:

Topic: _____

Activities related to the topic:



Spaces to talk about the topic with other people:



Finding other people to do activities with:



Brainstorming:

Topic: _____

Activities related to the topic:



Spaces to talk about the topic with other people:



Finding other people to do activities with:



Brainstorming:

Topic: _____

Activities related to the topic:



Spaces to talk about the topic with other people:



Finding other people to do activities with:



Action Plan:

Topic: _____

Activities I am interested in relating to this topic:



Who else do I know that likes these activities?



Activity	What needs to be done?	Who can help me?	When will it be done?

Action Plan:

Topic: _____

Activities I am interested in relating to this topic:



Who else do I know that likes these activities?



Activity	What needs to be done?	Who can help me?	When will it be done?

Action Plan:

Topic: _____

Activities I am interested in relating to this topic:



Who else do I know that likes these activities?



Activity	What needs to be done?	Who can help me?	When will it be done?

Supports:

Everybody needs support, and the type of supports needed are different for each person. This is a place for you to create a list of all of the supports you want and need. Think about your Action Plan. If you are going to try one of the ideas you listed, what kind of assistance might you need? If you don't need any support in an area, feel free to write down that you have that covered.

Transportation: How will you get to this activity? Do staff transport you or do you prefer using Metro Mobility?

Getting Around: Will you be able to get around in various public spaces by yourself? What kind of mobility supports do you usually use?

Budgeting: How much will this activity cost you? What kind of help do you appreciate in managing money?

Medication: Will you need to take any medication while you are at this activity? What kind of help do you need with that?

Communication: How do you prefer to communicate? Do you use a communication device or is helpful to have someone else present to support you?

Social interactions and meeting people: Are you nervous about anything? How do you feel about meeting new people? How could a Community Connector support you?

Staying motivated: Making meaningful relationships can take a lot of time and energy. How can people best support you if you start to feel frustrated or you want to quit?

Safety:

Safety concerns can cause people to be nervous about making friends. It is important to make sure that the people you are spending time with have your best interests in mind. Safety can be related to making sure you are physically safe in a space, and also that the people around you aren't taking advantage of you.

Some safety concerns that I have are:

Some safety concerns that other people have for me are:

What are some ways to address those safety concerns?

What can you do to keep yourself safe out in the community?

The internet is a great way to stay connected with friends, but it is important to keep yourself safe when using it. What are some ways you can stay safe on the internet?



Community Connector Tip:

Talk with the person about how they would prefer to be supported as they are making friends.

Section 4: Making Friends and Keeping Them

Once you have made connections with people, it's important to think about ways to keep those connections strong. In this section you are going to think about how you can show people that they are an important part of your life and that you like having them around. You are going to think about how to set some boundaries with your friends, so that your relationships are healthy and strong.



Community Connector Tip:

As a Community Connector, you have the important job of helping someone identify qualities of harmful relationships. As this conversation progresses, people will feel more confident in understanding the various aspects of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Qualities of a Good Friend:

It's important to think about what qualities you want in a friend. This section will help you think about ways to recognize good qualities. Consider specific characteristics and traits that make someone a good friend.

What are some qualities that are important for you to have in a friend?

What makes someone a good friend?

What makes you a good friend?

How do you show people that they are important to you?



Community Connector Tip:

How do the qualities that are brought out here match up with the reasons they gave about their relationships in the 'People who are important to you' activity? If they start to get stuck on this page, refer back to page 19 and talk about why they like the people who are important to them.

Qualities of a Bad Friend :

Sometimes we meet people and we just don't have a good connection with them. That is okay! You do not have to like everyone that you meet. This section is a way to start thinking about how to recognize when you might not want to be friends with someone.

What does it look like when you aren't getting along with someone?

What should you do if you feel like you don't want to be friends with someone anymore? Who can you talk to about this? _____



Community Connector Tip:

It is important not to force relationships between people who just aren't a good fit. This is a place to start having conversations about what it might look like if the person you are supporting doesn't get along with someone.

Bad friends are people who do not have our best interests in mind. It is important to be able to recognize the characteristics of a bad friend.

Have you ever had a bad friend? How did it make you feel to have a bad friend? _____

What are some qualities of a bad friend? _____

What can you do if you feel like you have a bad friend? Who can you talk to about this? _____



Community Connector Tip:

Think about how you can best support someone if they are ever stuck in a situation where they are friends with someone who is treating them poorly. In some cases, you may be able to help the person problem solve how to address the situation.

If you suspect a person has experienced abuse or exploitation, report it immediately.

Boundaries:

“Boundaries” are rules or limits that we set to keep ourselves comfortable and safe. By figuring out what your boundaries are, you can communicate this to friends before you feel uncomfortable. It’s good to talk about boundaries because it helps keep you and your friends safe!

What are some behaviors that make you uncomfortable? Some examples of behaviors that might make someone uncomfortable include: hand holding, hugging, standing very close to you or anything else you can think of.

If someone does these behaviors around you, how might you react?

What can you do in situations where you feel uncomfortable? Who can you talk to about this? _____



Community Connector Tip:

What kinds of things seem important to discuss with a person about boundaries? This is a time where you can discuss how boundaries might vary based on the other person involved. For example, you may feel comfortable hugging your mom, but you might prefer to high-five someone you just met.

Dating:

Sometimes when we get to know people better, we start developing feelings for them that go beyond friendship. This is a space for you to think about what dating might look like for you, if you are interested in it.

What words come to mind when you think about dating? _____

What traits make someone a good partner? _____

What are some benefits to dating or having a partner? _____

If you had a partner, what are some things you might want to do with them?

How might you tell someone that you are interested in dating them?

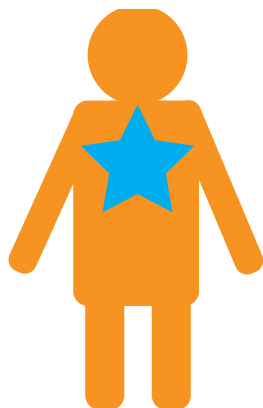
What makes you nervous about dating? _____



Community Connector Tip:

Dating is a part of life for many people. However, many people with disabilities don't feel that dating is an option for them. This section is intended to support discussion about what dating might look like for the person you are supporting.

Section 5: Conclusions and Take-Aways



Great job making it through the workbook! By spending time on this workbook, you have started the process of meaningful relationship building. Having conversations about friendships is a great way to set expectations for yourself and others about what happy relationships look like for you. One way to continue your progress is to share this information with the people in your life. By communicating what you want, the people around you can continue to support you as you become more involved in your community.



Community Connector Tip:

Thank you for supporting the person through this planning process! Now that you have completed these activities, think about how you are going to ensure that progress continues to be made. Think about all of the resources in the person's life. Who can help the person continue this progress?

Important Messages:

This workbook has a lot of information in it, but we've made a list of the items that we feel are most important for you to keep in mind. We also provided you with space to write down the things that you feel like anyone who reads this book should know about you. What are the most important things you and your Community Connector talked about?

Important points:

- + Relationship building takes a lot of effort, and it is worth it!
- + Sometimes we make friends in places we never expected. Think outside of the box when thinking about places to meet people.
- + You are in charge of your relationships and friendships! You get to decide who you want to have in your life.
- + You aren't going to like everyone and you don't have to.
- + One of the best ways to make friends is to be a good friend yourself.



Community Connector Tip:

We have provided you with some space below to come up with a list of the most important things that you have learned about the person through this planning process. It might help, when thinking about what was important, to re-visit some of the sections in this workbook. If they really enjoyed working on a section, that might indicate that it is important information to share with other people.



What should someone know about you after reading through this workbook?



What should someone know about the person you supported after reading through this workbook?

Resources:

+ Social Media Platforms

■ Social media sites are a great way to keep in touch with friends and to join groups with people who have common interests.

■ Facebook, Twitter, Tyze

+ Meet Up

■ www.meetup.com

■ This online network connects people from all walks of life through shared interests.

+ Robert Waldinger, What Makes a Good Life? Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness

■ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KkKuTCFvzI>

+ Introduction to Person-Centered

■ <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-6803-ENG>

■ Developed by the Minnesota Disability Linkage Line (DLL). Describes person-centered thinking in plain language.

+ Listen to Me, Person-Centered Planning Workbook

■ <http://www.learningcommunity.us/documents/ListenToMe.pdf>

■ Developed by USARC/PACE and Allen, Shea & Associates in collaboration with Michael Smull, Steve Sweet, Claudia Bolton and Pam Lopez Greene. Includes resources and activities to help people move toward the life they want to lead.

+ Listen to Me, Person-Centered Planning Workbook

■ <https://rtc.umn.edu/friends/>

■ Developed by the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota. Contains activities and worksheets to support growing friendships and community connections.



You did it!