



# Case study - relationships

My son is in year 10 of a mainstream secondary school. His difficulty in making and maintaining friendships has been totally ignored by the school, with the response being "we can't make students be friends with someone" which is a common response from schools, along with "it's not in our remit".

My son has Down syndrome with associated speech and language disorder, and he needs support with every day social communication which he receives as part of his SALT provision within his EHCP. This support does not go beyond the direct therapy he receives at school. I am told that my son runs around on his own during break times and has lunch with his TA or passing teacher.

As part of the Annual Review view process, in addition to a recent Educational Psychology report highlighting the need for more social communication and friendship support, the intervention Circle of Friends was added to his EHCP. This 8-week intervention was put into place by the school with student volunteers agreeing to take part to be part. When questioned as to how this intervention would be continued and how my sons' friendships would be supported going forward, this was dismissed as the reported intervention had finished.

I feel it's quite late in his school career to be supporting friendships and is something which should have been in place in year 7. Although this school did run a successful week-long 'summer school' for vulnerable students, my son was placed in a tutor group with no one he knew despite there being a very large cohort of children from his primary school starting at the same time.

I run the local Down syndrome support group, and having spoken to secondary school parents about friendships at school, we recommend best practice should include-

1. placing students in tutor groups with established friends where possible
2. an ongoing buddy/mentor scheme of willing older students
3. an ongoing intervention like Circle of Friends with active follow up
4. social communication provision from a Down syndrome specialist SALT within the ECHP

Lu, Parent of child with Down syndrome

<https://inclusive-solutions.com/circles/circle-of-friends/>

[http://www.complexneeds.org.uk/modules/Module-3.4-Emotional-well-being-and-mental-](http://www.complexneeds.org.uk/modules/Module-3.4-Emotional-well-being-and-mental-health/All/downloads/m12p050c/the_circle_of_friends_approach.pdf)

[health/All/downloads/m12p050c/the\\_circle\\_of\\_friends\\_approach.pdf](http://www.complexneeds.org.uk/modules/Module-3.4-Emotional-well-being-and-mental-health/All/downloads/m12p050c/the_circle_of_friends_approach.pdf) <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-c-6948-new-circle-of-friends-pack>