Growing Peer Support

A reflection for making sure peer support changes as children, friendships and social needs change.

Peer support can create familiarity, confidence and opportunities for connection.

Over time, children may begin to understand each other's communication, discover shared interests and build relationships that extend beyond the original arrangement.

The question is not only whether peer support is working — but what it is helping to grow.



Peer support can help connection begin.

What matters is what grows from it.

WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT CREATING?

FAMILIARITY	Are peers becoming more comfortable with disability, communication and different ways of participating?
UNDERSTANDING	Are they learning how to communicate and spend time together without everything being explained by adults?
SHARED INTERESTS	Are they discovering things they genuinely enjoy together?
CONFIDENCE	Is the child becoming more socially confident beyond the structured arrangement?
CONNECTION	Are interactions beginning to happen because the children choose them?
KNOWING THE PERSON	Are children getting to know each other beyond the roles of "helper" and "supported child"?

LOOK BEYOND THE ARRANGEMENT

Are the children getting to know each other — or mainly getting to know their roles?

Good peer support creates possibilities for connection beyond the structure that helped it begin.

Has the Relationship Outgrown the Arrangement?

What worked at one age may not be what the relationship needs now.

Children change.
Friendships change.

Peer support should be allowed to change too.

WOULD WE DESIGN IT THE SAME WAY TODAY?

01 LOOK AT THE CHILDREN NOW

- Have their social needs changed?
- Are they wanting greater freedom with peers?
- Have their interests or friendship groups changed?
- Has one or both children become more confident?
- Does the arrangement still suit their age and stage?

Support designed for a younger child should not automatically follow them unchanged.

02 LOOK AT THE RELATIONSHIP NOW

- Has a genuine friendship developed?
- Do they spend time together without adults arranging it?
- Are both children choosing the relationship?
- Is the assigned role still useful?
- Could the role now be making the friendship feel different from other friendships?

Sometimes structure helps a relationship begin. Later, less structure may help it grow.

STRUCTURED SUPPORT → FAMILIARITY → CONNECTION → CHOICE → NATURAL RELATIONSHIP

Not every peer arrangement will become a friendship — and it does not need to.

IF WE STARTED TODAY...

If we designed this peer-support arrangement for these children today, would we design it the same way?

If not, what is telling us that something needs to change?

Grow the Support With the Children

Review peer support because children are growing — not only because something has gone wrong.



The goal is not to remove support.

It is to make sure support still fits.

CONNECTION

What has the arrangement helped build?

Consider familiarity, trust, confidence, shared interests and genuine connection.

CHOICE

Are both children still choosing how they participate?

Can they say yes, no, spend time with other people, or allow the relationship to change?

FREEDOM

What could adults loosen?

Could some adult planning, prompting or assigned interaction now step back?

CHANGE

What needs to work differently now?

Does formal support need to take over something? Has the peer role changed? Does the arrangement still need to exist?

GROW THE ARRANGEMENT

KEEP

What is still helping connection?

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LOOSEN

What no longer needs as much adult structure?

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CHANGE

What needs to work differently as the children grow?

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PROVIDE

What should adults or the support system now take responsibility for?

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Peer support shouldn't only be reviewed when something goes wrong.

It should change because children are growing.

Good peer support makes room for relationships to grow beyond the arrangement that helped them begin.