

Circles meet regularly to plan outings and activities and to discuss the things they have learned about themselves and others. Just as real friendships grow, evolve and change, teachers have found that the composition and personality of friendship circles change over time. This fluidity is expected and allowed. Teachers involved in successful friendship circles are aware of the natural ebb and flow of affection, attention and activity. They note, however, that a core of students usually stays together for long periods of time, which attests to the permanence and mutuality of the friendships created.

AVOIDING PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

Teachers and parents voice their concern that, despite in-school successes, a young person with a disability usually does not have "real friends". As one high school teacher summarized:

For all that Doug is involved in the life and activities of the school, with all the friends and acquaintances he has here, after school he goes home and sits in front of the TV ... rarely does he go out; rarely does anyone call. (Young, 1990)

Both parents and teachers express dismay that outside school hours their children and young people spend long inactive periods of time without seeing anyone outside their immediate families or the paid professionals in their lives. Isolation, loneliness and boredom are still realities for many. When people with disabilities talk about their lives and what is missing, they repeatedly point to the difficulty of building and maintaining lasting friendships. They talk about the need to feel that their lives touch others in important ways, and the need to know that their existence makes a positive difference. The physical and social barriers imposed by society, which for years separated and devalued people with disabilities, are