

almost become unnaturally intrusive in their lives.
(Brown et al, 1989)

If a group of peers does not include a child with a disability in their relationships, adults usually take responsibility for replacing the peer group. But adults are inappropriate role models. What is work for adults is normal activity for children.

The regular classroom is an important place for healthy, inclusive peer relationships to develop. Children who are disabled need support in developing relationships, and non-disabled children need support in accepting their peers who have disabilities. Teachers can play a key role in ensuring that these relationships develop.

Involving the Children

There is a reawakening interest in using students as a positive influence on the behaviour or learning of their peers. Adults are usually surprised to discover that children are capable of performing many functions that were once thought to be the exclusive province of adults. Giving youth more responsibility in our schools is an untapped resource that offers great potential for innovation. Research on instructional strategies such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring has demonstrated the advantages of making students more responsible for mutual learning.

Another means of facilitating peer interdependence and responsibility is to have students, as a group, intentionally make a commitment to help a peer with special needs. This recently developed form of structured peer involvement has come to be known as a peer support group or "circle of friends" (Perske and Perske, 1988).