



SPECIAL FRIENDS

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INTRODUCTION

Special Friends is a self-study workbook designed to be used in training volunteers for one-to-one companionship programs with children, such as Big Brother-Big Sister programs. Since these require volunteers to work with children needing special attention on an individual basis and usually with minimal support and guidance from a formal agency, these volunteers need to be carefully selected and especially well-trained. The skills needed by these volunteers, such as compassion, patience, and dependability, are not easily taught, however. Therefore, this manual is not so much a text as it is a guide to help these volunteers to know themselves better: to understand why they wish to be a special friend to a child as well as what it means to be a special friend.

Special Friends can also serve as a screening tool. It may assist the volunteers to determine for themselves whether they can fulfill the program's expectations of a special friend. It also allows program representatives to know each volunteer better. Program representatives may, therefore, make better decisions in selecting special friends, as well as in matching them with specific children.

Becoming a special friend to a child is not easy, nor is it terribly difficult. It does require special qualities, however. Special Friends can help in finding these.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOURSELF?

To become a special friend to a child, you must be in touch with the feelings of others. But to do this, you must first understand yourself. Describe yourself using the following scale.

distant	1	2	3	4	5	6	close
unfriendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	friendly
neutral	1	2	3	4	5	6	biased
tolerant	1	2	3	4	5	6	intolerant
cooperative	1	2	3	4	5	6	uncooperative
judgmental	1	2	3	4	5	6	nonjudgmental
rigid	1	2	3	4	5	6	flexible
creative	1	2	3	4	5	6	not creative
controlled	1	2	3	4	5	6	impulsive
impatient	1	2	3	4	5	6	patient
tense	1	2	3	4	5	6	relaxed
trusting	1	2	3	4	5	6	suspicious
calm	1	2	3	4	5	6	excitable
prejudiced	1	2	3	4	5	6	understanding
thoughtless	1	2	3	4	5	6	thoughtful
selfless	1	2	3	4	5	6	self-indulgent
soft	1	2	3	4	5	6	hard
permissive	1	2	3	4	5	6	restrictive
dependable	1	2	3	4	5	6	undependable
authoritarian	1	2	3	4	5	6	non-authoritarian
objective	1	2	3	4	5	6	involved
committed	1	2	3	4	5	6	noncommittal
gossipy	1	2	3	4	5	6	confidential
open	1	2	3	4	5	6	guarded
hesitant	1	2	3	4	5	6	self-assured
supportive	1	2	3	4	5	6	hostile

BETH

"I called Beth's mother to introduce myself and then talked with Beth to set a date for our first meeting. The next week, I went to see her for the first time. Beth greeted me at the door and proceeded to give me a tour of her neighborhood, introducing me to all of her friends. She took me to her room and showed me her special things. I visited with Mrs. Jones before leaving and made plans for our next meeting.

"Since then, Beth and I have done many things. We have gone to the library to take out some children's books, gone for a ride on the village bus, done some window shopping, and walked barefoot in the mud. Beth has enjoyed everything we've done and talks a mile-a-minute whenever we're together. Recently, Beth has started calling me every day to chat.

"Beth has visited my home several times during the last two months. She joins in on chores that need to be done as well as family discussions. She has really become a part of our family.

"I am trying to teach Beth several things. I'd like her to see a good family life where everyone shares their work, their possessions, and their ups and downs. I'd also like to instill a desire to do things well, not only in her schoolwork and chores, but in every aspect of her life. Beth and I have grown to love one another; in fact it is hard now to remember when Beth wasn't my friend."

DAVID

"I talked with the Department of Social Services caseworker before I met David. She explained that David's father had walked out two years ago and his mother isn't able to control him very well. David is in the eighth grade at St. Michael's and is big for his age. His grades are poor since he frequently skips school and is a behavior problem when he does attend. David has few friends his own age. Instead, he always hangs around with a group of older kids, some of them drop-outs. David's mother works and isn't at home very much. When she is home, her boyfriend is usually there and so she doesn't show much interest in David or his schoolwork. According to the caseworker, the boyfriend has been unemployed for a year. David told the caseworker that the boyfriend has hit him when David makes too much noise and wakes him up.

"When I met David for the first time, he didn't seem to care that I was there. The boyfriend was not there and I spent most of my time talking with David's mother, who continues to vie for my attention each time I visit. On my third visit, David and I went to the park to play basketball. He still didn't talk very much but really got into the one-on-one competition. Three days later, his mother called me. The police had picked up David and several other kids for vandalism. No charges were pressed, but she was very upset. We made plans then for my next visit. I talked to David to tell him when I would be coming. When I arrived the next day, David was not home."

WHAT IS A SPECIAL FRIEND?

A Special Friend can be many different things. Some of them might be:

enricher	friend	advisor	sounding board
mentor	builder	resource	reinforcer
advocate	companion	teacher	socializer
laugher	player	limit setter	leader
peer	stimulator	change agent	
vehicle	talker	actualizer	
listener	hugger	provocateur	
crier	helper	model	
carer	proponent	family member	
tutor	controller	morale builder	
singer	promoter	confidante	
guide	counselor	skill trainer	
thinker	supporter	interpreter	
sister	brother	...YOU!!!	



What other roles might a Special Friend carry out in his relationship with the child?

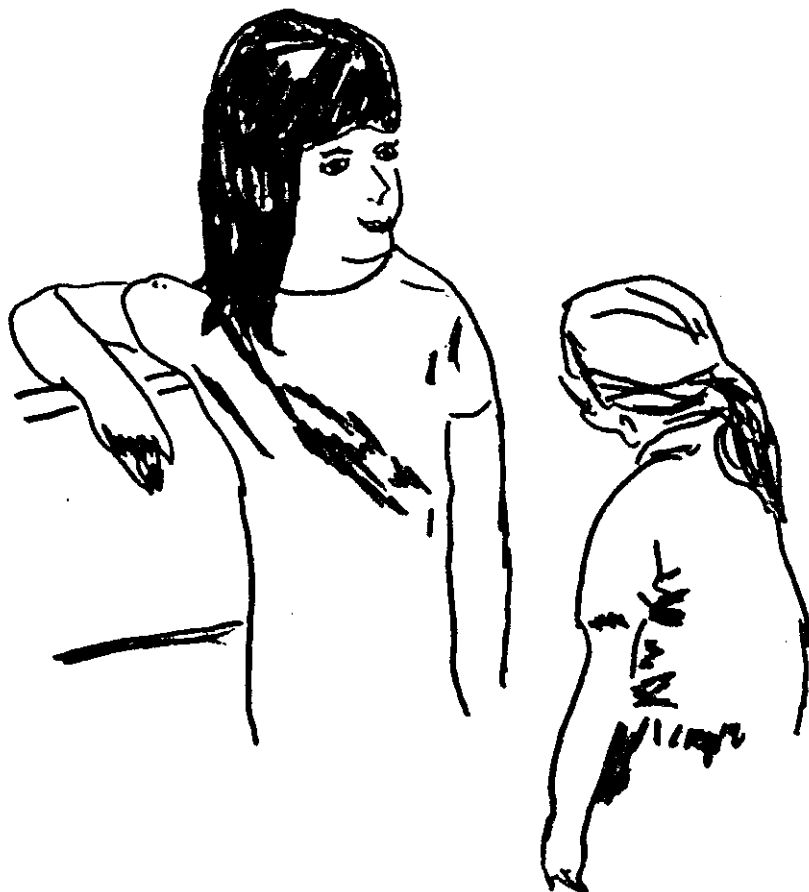
Circle the roles listed above which you view as the most important.

Cross out any roles you see as unimportant.

How do you feel about the roles of discipliner, punisher?

Whose rules of behavior should you follow?

YOUR FIRST MEETING



Your first meeting with the child and family will be very important. It will set the tone for your relationship. Here are some suggestions to help you get over that first hurdle.

1. Think about the meeting before you go. Think over what you will say and do when meeting the child and family.
2. Before you go to visit the child for the first time, know as much about him or her as you can. If possible, have a caseworker or other professional working with the family introduce you.
3. Call first, if possible, to set a time.
4. Make the first meeting brief.
5. Introduce yourself and meet the child, parents and other members of the family.
6. Tell about yourself...where you are from, what you do in school, your family, your hobbies and other interests.
7. Tell why you are interested in being a Special Friend to their child.
8. Try to direct your conversation to the child as much as possible from the start. Let the child know right away that you are his or her friend...that s/he's your primary interest in that home.
9. Try to determine common interests.
10. Be prepared with ideas for an activity for the next visit. Discuss plans with the child and obtain permission from the child's parents.
11. Set a specific day, time, and meeting place for your next visit.

Do not get discouraged if the child does not talk to you or if the parents seem hesitant or suspicious. They may have had many bad experiences in the past...it takes time to build trust.

..... GUIDELINES GUIDELINES GUIDELINES

Becoming a Special Friend is an important responsibility. In carrying out this function, there are some important guidelines which you should follow.

1. Contact the child every week. Plan to see the child for at least two to three hours every week. If you know you will be unable to do an activity with your friend one week, at least call the child, stop by to say "hi" or write the child a letter. Don't let weeks go by without any contact between you.
2. Consider your relationship confidential. Information about your child, the family, their economic status, etc., should not be given to others unless authorized by the parents. Program representatives, caseworkers, doctors, school or court officials can be given information.
3. Be dependable. Part of the volunteer's job is to be a reliable person on whom the child can depend. To build trust, you must try very hard to make all scheduled meetings with your child. If you must cancel or be late, phone the child if at all possible.
4. Seek advice when problems arise. If you or the child are having problems, ask for help. Don't try to handle everything yourself. Who can you go to for help? The parents, program representatives, and staff from the referring agency are the usual people to see.
5. Avoid material traps. Avoid spending money on the child on a regular basis. Christmas and birthday gifts should be within reason. You cannot buy friendship. The child should not learn to associate you with gifts and money, but rather as a reliable friend.
6. Set limits. Let your child know the limits of conduct you will accept. You may want to ask the parents to help in outlining the limits for the child. Enforce these consistently.
7. Get the child out of the home as much as possible. This will make it easier for the child to talk to you and also will expose the child to new things. The expansion of the cultural and environmental horizons of the child is an important function of a Special Friend.
8. Respect the parents' authority. Be courteous and tactful when speaking with the parents. Inform the parents where you will be taking the child and when you expect to return. Ask permission for special activities or to approach agencies to get further information on the child.

..... GUIDELINES GUIDELINES GUIDELINES

..... GUIDELINES. CONTINUED

..... GUIDELINES. CONTINUED

9. Set a good example. Remember that you are under the scrutiny of the child and family. Everything that you do is noted, analyzed and sometimes imitated. Be casual in appearance, but neat and clean.
10. Don't impose your values system on your child or his or her family. Do not make value judgments about their lifestyle.
11. Keep a journal. Keep a record of your experiences. Occasionally go over what you have done. Evaluate it. Are there things you should do but aren't...Are there things you are doing but shouldn't be? This journal should be shown to your program representatives regularly and turned over to the next Special Friend should you have to leave. The journal will help him or her see where you have already been in the relationship.
12. Attend group meetings held for Special Friends. These meetings will provide you with training in helpful skills and give you an opportunity to talk with other volunteers about your experiences.
13. Inform the child, family and program when you must end the relationship. If you are graduating, transferring, or quitting for other reasons, be fair to the child and family by preparing them for this. Inform representatives of the Special Friend Program, also. After you leave the area, feel free to continue your relationship through letters if you would like.

Here are some tips which, hopefully, should help you to form a better relationship with your child.

1. Concentrate. Give all your attention to the child. The child must know that your only interest is him or her. Do not allow other members of the family to intrude on your special time together. After you have formed a strong relationship, you may involve friends or relatives in some of your activities.
2. Be a good listener and offer neutral ground. Listen to what the child says even if it sounds silly to you. Question the child about what s/he tells you. This gives what s/he says importance and lets him or her know you are listening. The child should not be scolded. The child should come to trust you as someone who will listen to problems and thoughts without chastizing him or her.
3. Try to let the child make his or her own decisions. Talk things out on a question and answer basis. Do not give advice too freely.
4. Be yourself. Don't play a role. Your relationship must be spontaneous and real. A child can usually spot a phony with no problem.
5. Help the child with homework but don't become a tutor. Your relationship is much more than that. Too much concentration on schoolwork can hinder your relationship.
6. Do not take sides in family disputes.
7. Do not plan unrealistic activities with your child that you will not be able to carry through.
8. Build confidence. Find out what the child does well and do it. Reinforce the child's strong points and skills. Gradually introduce areas in which the child does not do well and try to improve his skill. This must be done slowly and selectively and with control to assure success. Be free with praise but not so lavish as to make it meaningless. Avoid making the child think he is better than he is: competition will easily prove you wrong.
9. Know when to leave and how to.
10. Plan ahead. Plan activities before you go to visit the child each time, but be flexible enough to change with the child's mood.
11. Be cool. Don't get upset over problems the child presents to you or statements s/he makes.

GETTING IT ALL TOGETHER

1. Why do you want to be a Special Friend to a child?
2. What do you expect to gain for yourself from this relationship?
3. For what type of child do you hope to become a Special Friend?
4. What child behaviors would you not be able to tolerate? How would you deal with these if they occurred?
5. What kind of relationship do you expect to develop?
6. What would you do if you were David's Special Friend?
7. How will you deal with inquiries from schools, psychiatrists, family court, caseworkers, parents, or others about your child?
8. What does confidentiality mean and how important is it?

WHAT SHOULD A SPECIAL FRIEND BE?

You have now read several things about the Special Friend Program. In your view, what should a good Special Friend be like?

distant	1	2	3	4	5	6	close
unfriendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	friendly
neutral	1	2	3	4	5	6	biased
tolerant	1	2	3	4	5	6	intolerant
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tense	1	2	3	4	5	6	relaxed
trusting	1	2	3	4	5	6	suspicious
calm	1	2	3	4	5	6	excitable
prejudiced	1	2	3	4	5	6	understanding
thoughtless	1	2	3	4	5	6	thoughtful
selfless	1	2	3	4	5	6	self-indulgent
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committed	1	2	3	4	5	6	noncommittal
gossipy	1	2	3	4	5	6	confidential
open	1	2	3	4	5	6	guarded
hesitant	1	2	3	4	5	6	self-assured
supportive	1	2	3	4	5	6	hostile

AVOIDING FRUSTRATION

Being a Special Friend can be very frustrating. You visit a child once a week for a year and at the end you may ask, "What have we accomplished?" Changes usually occur very slowly and gradually, so you may not notice the progress even though you may have accomplished a great deal.



How can you tell how well things are going? Do you have to rely simply on that gut feeling of "rightness"?

No. That gut feeling is useful, but alone, it isn't enough. In order to see small, gradual progress, you must first know what you are looking for. This means selecting a behavior, attitude, etc., that concerns you and then determining how large a change is possible and in what time period.

Goals have three parts:

Behavior	Rate	Time Limit
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Here's an example:

"Chris is a very quiet child. Her mother worried about her because she just doesn't talk to people very much. She often answers questions with a shrug, grunt, or nod, and rarely ever initiates a conversation herself. Her mother says she is very shy and she would like me to help her to get over her shyness. Mrs. Smith has talked with Chris' teacher, who says that Chris has no speech problem and should be encouraged to be less shy."

Write a goal for Chris. Remember the three parts.

Behavior	Rate	Time Limit

A good example of a goal for Chris might be:

Behavior	Rate	Time Limit
Chris will initiate conversations with me	at least 3 times during a 2 hour visit	by the end of the semester.

Another might be:

Behavior	Rate	Time Limit
Chris will answer questions using words or phrases rather than shrugs, etc	at least half of the times I ask her questions during a 2 hour visit	by midway through the semester.

How did you do?

Notice that the behaviors given are easily observable and measurable. "Shyness" per se is difficult to measure, but talking, or answering questions is much easier to measure.

Not all problems can as easily be put into goals such as these, but with a little thought you should be able to figure it out. If you are having trouble coming up with a measurable behavior since you are stuck on words like "shy," "troublemaker," "withdrawn," "bossy"...ask yourself these questions:

1. What does the child do that causes the parents, teacher, or me to call him or her _____?
2. How would s/he have to act in order to not be called _____?

If you can answer these questions, you can determine a goal for your child. Once you have determined the behavior, estimate (or measure) how often the child does this now and keep a record of it. Then determine a reasonable change and target date.

Try this one:

"Bobby is very possessive of his toys. He has few toys and will not share them with his friends. Even when he and his Special Friend are together, Bobby puts his toys away in his room where no one can get to them."

Write a goal for Bobby:

Behavior	Rate	Time Limit

How Do You Select A Goal?

Talk with the child and his or her parents about what they hope the child will gain from his relationship with you. With the parent's permission, talk with the child's teacher, caseworker, or other professional involved with the family. Find out what they think is important. Then set a goal that you care about and that is within reach. Revise goals as necessary...add new goals when you achieve old ones.

How Do You Measure Progress?

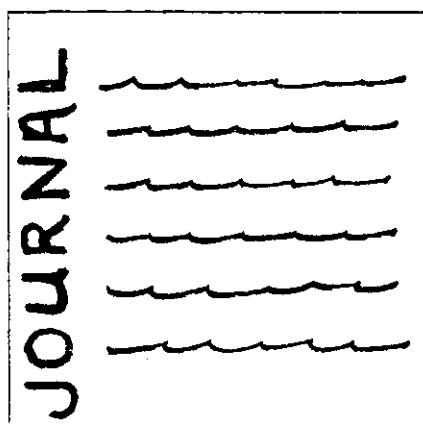
There are many ways to measure progress towards a goal. The one you use will depend greatly on your goal. Some examples:

<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Measure</u>
1. Cuts classes	1. Ask child, teacher or parent each week how many times the child cut.
2. Initiate conversations	2. Carry marbles, paper clips, or other small objects in one pocket. Move one into another pocket each time the child starts a conversation. Count and record at the end of your visit.
3. Attention span-changes games every 5 minutes	3. Watch clock and note time spent on each activity.

Not everything can be counted or measured as easily as these, however. So how else could you see progress?

One very important way, which is recommended for every Special Friend, is to keep a journal. This journal should be added to after each visit with your child. Include such things as:

- ...length of visit
- ...activity
- ...child's reactions to activity
- ...parent comments
- ...important conversation topics
- ...problems, needs, or changes
- ...hugs and kisses
- ...your feelings

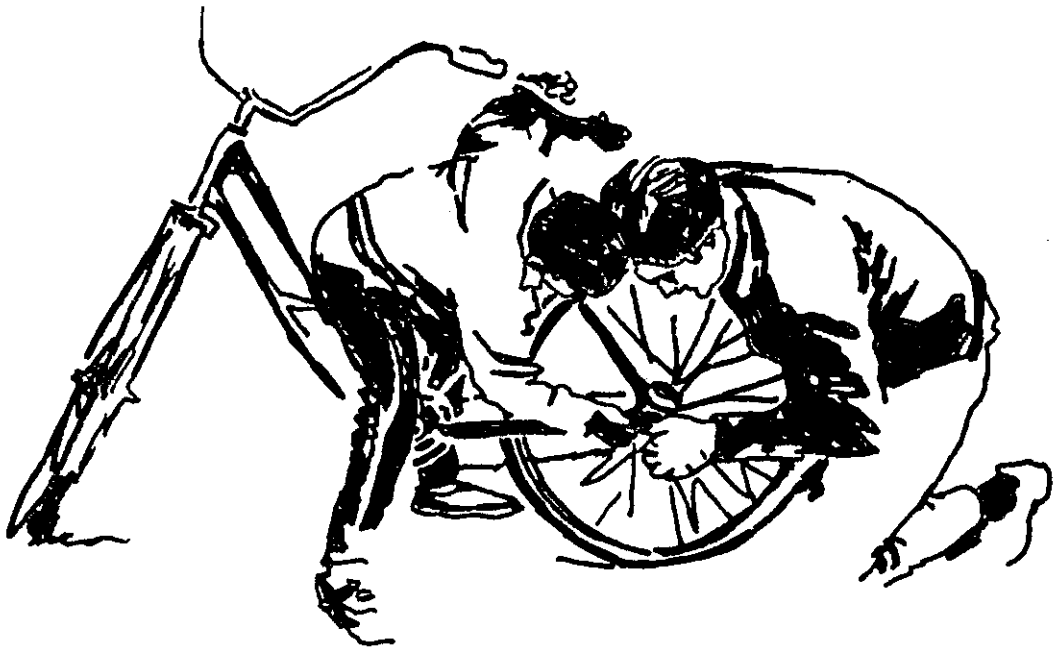


...anything that is important in your growing relationship with your friend. Occasionally look back at earlier entries in your

journal and be surprised at how much things have changed. It is hard to remember in February just exactly what your relationship was like in September. A journal can help.

What If Things Aren't Going Well?

A journal is not only important for helping you to see progress...it can also help to point out lack of progress or even when you are losing ground. This will help you to know when you need to seek advice or assistance. Be sure to get help when you need it!



THE SHIELD EXERCISE

The diagram is a shield shape divided into four equal quadrants by a vertical line and a horizontal line. Each quadrant contains a numbered prompt:

1. <u>My Goals</u>	2. <u>How will I see progress?</u>
3. <u>Child's Goals</u>	4. <u>How will I see progress?</u>

Complete the shield above as follows:

Section #1: List the goals you have for yourself as a result of participating in this program. How do you expect to change or grow?

Section #3: If you haven't been assigned a child yet, leave this blank for now. When you do have a child, list here the goals you, the child and the parents have agreed upon. How do you or the parents want the child to change as a result of this program?

Sections #2 & 4: List your method for measuring progress. How will you know when these goals have been attained?

Save this as a record of your goals and refer back to it periodically to see how you are doing.

CAN YOU.....?

Below is a list of some activities which you might be able to do with your friend. Read the list carefully and check (✓) each of those which you actually have the skills and resources to carry out.

go to basketball, hockey games, etc.

ride the bus three times around town

mark a trail, use a compass

collect things: stamps, coins, leaves

ride on a hay wagon

plant and care for flowers, garden

play an instrument

go to a museum

ride every elevator on campus

put on make-up

write a story, poem, play, or song

write a letter

go to art shows

watch a movie

teach knitting, crocheting

sail a boat in a mud puddle

go to the planetarium

take books out of the library

build something out of wood

keep a journal

teach a new dance

copy hands on a xerox machine

build a city out of empty boxes

look at fashions in magazines

teach a foreign language

read maps

ride a bike

go swimming

go to concerts

draw a picture

fly a kite

make a necklace

do homework

sunbathe

go sledding

make popsicles

study nature

go hiking

make puppets

ice skate

go canoeing

make a collage

roller skate

have a picnic

do yoga

bake a cake

build a model

do somersaults

make paper dolls

make a scrapbook

HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW?

You are nearly at the end of the training workbook for becoming a Special Friend. How do you feel about yourself and the Special Friend Program? Circle all those that apply.

warm	disappointed	committed	apprehensive
proud	enthusiastic	proud	suspicious
uneasy	significant	neutral	thoughtful
hopeful	obligated		dedicated
snooping	impatient		worried
uplifted	hostile		friendly
moral	happy		worthy
trustworthy			serious
defenseless			helpful
unworthy			ridiculous
good			aggressive
supportive			important
religious			clear
hazy			concerned
competent	destructive		bizarre
bored	weird	critical	knowledgable
sad	suspicious	cooperative	appreciative



Complete these statements:

1. My biggest question right now is _____

2. I am worried that _____

3. I am looking forward to _____

QUIZ

1. How much time will it take to be a Special Friend?
2. What do you plan to happen at your first meeting? How long will it last?
3. Do Special Friends need to keep journals and attend periodic meetings? Why?
4. Why do you need to turn in reports regularly?
5. Whose decision is it to end the relationship?
6. What should you do about your relationship during midterms, finals, college breaks, and summer?
7. What would you do if you had problems with your young friend or if you didn't like each other?
8. What should you tell the child's parents each time you go out?

NOTES

QUESTIONS?
THOUGHTS

COMMENTS



WORDS