

Ten things you can do to help your family member make community connections

Some of these ideas require more time and effort than others, or may not appeal or be suitable. They are simply ideas that may be a useful starting point.

1. Be the inviting, welcoming, supportive and embracing community member you hope others will be for your family. Is your home open to guests and visitors? Can people just drop by for 'a cuppa'? Could you plan social events that enable people to mix, mingle and meet your family member?
2. Practice being neighbourly and become well known in your own neighbourhood. Support your family member to help with odd jobs, dog-walking, watering gardens, tool lending, mail collection and general gardening tasks at the front of the house where conversations could be started with passersby, etc. Plan a street party, have the neighbours for a barbeque and/or have a garage sale.
3. Explore, brainstorm and map all the possible interests your son or daughter could pursue and might engage with people of similar interests. Invite others who know them to give suggestions about what they know or observe as their interests and gifts.
4. Think about and ask other people what are the typical interests, pursuits, clothing and language of people of a similar age of your family member. Ask brothers and/or sisters what's relevant, age related and appropriate, regarding their sister or brother's image, interests, leisure and recreation. If not available, ask other people of a similar age.
5. Check out community papers and local news for clubs, associations and groups that also share your son or daughter's interests. There are possibly as many groups as there are interests and leisure activities. The internet is also a good means for locating local interest groups and events that bring people together with similar interests.
6. Visit and trial a number of groups, clubs groups or associations and determine which ones your family member really enjoys and wants to go back to. Attend a group long

enough to determine if the setting and/ or group dynamic is welcoming, communicative and accepting.

7. Support your family member to be a frequent and regular member of a group that they genuinely enjoy and has the potential to assist in their participation and contribution to the group. Be prepared to guide people in the group around how to facilitate this, which may include explaining how your family member communicates and what things help to make them comfortable in a social setting.
8. Be open and ready to accept offers of natural support from others. For example, if a trusted person offers to pick up and/or take home your family member, or invites them to join them in other social gatherings or events associated with a shared interest. Natural support is an outcome of relationship and can help to deepen connections.
9. Explore all the possible roles and elements within a role of the interests of your family member. If your family member is part of the local drumming group, learning to play different types of drums may be the main activity but maybe they could also help with set-up/and or packing up, letter boxing the community about performances, help with refreshments, support the group at performances or be a performer themselves. Finding ways to contribute to a group will often encourage acceptance and belonging within it.
10. Be open to your son or daughter wanting to find and try new interests. This can also be an opportunity for them to develop new skills and meet new people. They may enjoy the drumming group now but may not want to keep it up all their adult life. Be mindful if your son or daughter seems to be losing interest in the group, it may be time to move on and try something new.



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