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## Who is my friend? Resources for Teaching Media Literacy in Special Education

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# Who is my friend?

## *Resources for Teaching Media Literacy in Special Education*

**By the Partnership for Media Literacy for Exceptional Populations**

**Abstract:** Possible characteristics of autism or intellectual disabilities include vulnerability or gullibility in social situations. Therefore, some teens or adults with autism or intellectual disabilities may struggle to discern who is a true friend. In the context of media literacy, such challenges can lead to confusion in social media friend requests or related safe behaviors in using social media. This media literacy team intends for this resource to support teachers of special education or adult education to teach teens or adults with intellectual disabilities or autism about discerning friendships in the context of media literacy. A sample lesson is included.

**Keywords:** Media Literacy, Autism, Intellectual Disability, Special Education



Cover art by Karen Ennis @bleedingheartsworkshop

## Media Literacy Resources for Teaching Special Education

### Volume 1, Issue 1: Who is my Friend?

#### About Media Literacy Resources for Teaching Special Education

This publication is a collaborative product of the **Partnership for Media Literacy for Exceptional Populations**. This project is specifically about supporting the teaching of media literacy skills to teens or adults with autism or intellectual disabilities. Each issue focuses upon a specific narrow knowledge or skill that may be particularly challenging for individuals with common characteristics of those disabilities. Though created for a specific population and age range, each may be refined to work for individual needs or for learners with other disabilities.

#### Published by the Partnership for Media Literacy for Exceptional Populations

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## **Who is my Friend?**

Finding true friends can be challenging for anyone. Add to that a disability which makes one more gullible or which complicates discernment, and judging a true friend becomes a challenging puzzle. When navigating relationships through social media, we lack some of the face-to-face clues that help us discern attitudes or intent, further complicating knowing who is a true friend. Even for and especially for individuals with autism or intellectual disabilities, social interactions with peers are vitally important to developing a sense of belonging, and teachers can build structures to teach and give practice in social skills with peers with and without disabilities (Ziegler, et al., 2020). Such skills can and should extend to use of social media.

Among the core principles of the National Association for Media Literacy Education, one specifically addresses "...that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization" (NAMLE, 2007). Researchers have demonstrated benefits of social media skills and support in use of social media for teens with autism and/or intellectual disabilities. Specifically for teens with autism, van Schalkwyk, et al. (2017) found that those teens rated the quality of their friendships as stronger when they used social media more frequently and with greater skill (p. 2809). Furthermore, these researchers found that social media helped mitigate the social anxieties of teens with autism, possibly compensating for unique communication characteristics of the autism (p. 2812). Studying social media use of teens with intellectual disabilities, Wright (2017) demonstrated that experiences of cyber victimization correlated with experiences of depression. She further demonstrated that support from parents and teachers actually protected those individuals from experiences of cyber victimization and the related depression. Given such study results, special educators of teens and young adults with autism or intellectual disabilities should explicitly teach skills for navigating social relationships using social media, including skills to avoid victimization.

Social skills, even using social media, involve a range of complex interactions including understanding social norms and interpreting attitudes or intent. Biggs and Carter (2017) identify four types of barriers that limit social interactions: 1) “student-focused barriers”, those within the skill set of the individual; 2) “peer-focused barriers”, those related to “attitudes and intentions” of peers; 3) “support-focused barriers”; and 4) “opportunity barriers” (p. 249). Friesem (2017) proposed an *Inclusive Framework of Media Literacy Education* to extend the core principles of the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) to meet media literacy needs of students with disabilities. His recommendations include two practices relevant to peer-focused barriers, asking critical questions about power relationships, and examining bias (p. 10).

For these reasons, we designed a lesson to address both the student-focused skill of categorizing a friend including the question of power in a relationship, and the peer-focused barrier of discerning the intentions of a peer (peer-focused) possibly including discernment of bias. This issue focuses specifically upon discerning who IS a friend. In a future issue, we will address media literacy specific skills for discerning who is NOT a friend.

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## Who is my Friend? Lesson Outline

By Melinda Burchard

<b>Narrow Skill Focus of this Lesson</b>	Discerning who is a friend—from whom to accept friend requests, who to trust as a friend in social media.
<b>Requires these Skills or Background Knowledge</b>	Ability to look up definitions of “friend”, “stranger”, “acquaintance”. Some familiarity with any one platform for social media. Extensions require ability to discuss perceptions of power and bias.
<b>Lesson Objective</b>	Learners will classify individuals as doctors, teachers, friends, acquaintances, or strangers. Learners will discuss clues to power and bias in such relationships.
<b>Helpful Resources</b>	Inclusive Framework of Media Literacy Education Friesem, Y. (2017). Beyond accessibility: How media literacy education addresses issues of disabilities. <i>Journal of media literacy education</i> , 9(2), 1-16 <a href="https://doe.org/10.23860/JMLE-2019-09-02-01">https://doe.org/10.23860/JMLE-2019-09-02-01</a>
<b>Materials Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualized for each student, 15 photos printed: 1 of their doctor, 1 of a teacher, 3 of their close family members, 3 of their close friends, 3 of acquaintances (cashier, barber, etc.), 2 of celebrities, and 2 of complete strangers. (Ideally, individualize the choice of celebrities used.)</li> <li>• Per student, 4 index cards each with one of these words/phrases written in large font: “friend”, “stranger”, “acquaintance”, “most trusted”.</li> <li>• 1 adult sized hoola hoop per student</li> <li>• 1 hat</li> <li>• 1 digital camera (or phone with camera)</li> <li>• Access to a dictionary or on-line dictionary.</li> <li>• Per student, two papers labeled “accept” or “decline”. OR if possible, an interactive digital sorting activity using varied digital teaching platforms.</li> <li>• An interest appropriate book about friendship, or a picture book with no words that works across grade levels, such as: Kerascoët. (2018). <i>I Walk With Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness</i>. New York: Schwartz and Wade Books.</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-Instruction</b>	<p><b>Prior to the lesson</b>, print and cut out a set of photos for each learner (set of 15 individualized for each student, described in materials above).</p> <p><b>Gain Attention/ Activate Prior Knowledge:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Can anyone tell me who is a friend?”</li> <li>• “Can you give an example?”</li> <li>• “Can anyone tell me who is a stranger?”</li> <li>• “Can you give an example?”</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompt for on-topic responses.</li> <li>• Use dictionaries or on-line dictionaries to look up definitions if needed.</li> </ul> <p><b>Reinforce Prior Knowledge:</b> Define friend, repeating one example shared by a student as a good example of a friend. Define stranger, repeating one example shared by a student as a good example of a stranger.</p> <p><b>Build Expectancy:</b> Over the next few lessons, we will be learning about who we can trust when we use social media like Facebook or Twitter (add other media platforms used by your students).</p>
<b>Instruction</b>	<p>This lesson may take place across different days. Adjust pace to fit your specific learners.</p> <p><b>Stage 1: Identifying Friends in a Story.</b>  <b>Read</b> a chapter of an age-appropriate book with a clear act of friendship or read a wordless picture book emphasizing friendship. Example: Kerascoët. (2018). <i>I Walk With Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness</i>. New York: Schwartz and Wade Books.</p> <p><b>Discuss:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeat your definition of a friend.</li> <li>• “In our story, who was a friend?”</li> <li>• “What made them a friend?”</li> <li>• “How has someone been a friend in your own life?”</li> <li>• Allow time for each student to connect with the story, directing on-topic discussions about what makes someone a friend.</li> </ul> <p><b>Stage 2: Using Hoola Hoops to Understand Intimacy Levels in Relationships.</b>  <b>Demonstrate:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask for a volunteer co-teacher or a volunteer student who is comfortable with relationships.</li> <li>• You stand inside one adult sized hoola hoop.</li> <li>• Explain that everyone has what some call a “body space bubble” and that different people may feel comfortable with different levels of privacy.</li> <li>• Explain that you will first use the hoola hoop to show a body space bubble.</li> </ul> <p><b>Most Friends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the volunteer to stand just outside my hoola hoop.</li> <li>• “Let’s pretend that [volunteer’s name] is my friend.”</li> </ul>



- “If we want to sit beside each other on the bleachers, or if we want talk more privately, we could get a little closer.”
- Move so you are still inside your hoola hoop and the volunteer is still outside your hoola hoop but you are standing beside each other.
- “Most of the time, we have a little space between us while we talk and hang out.”
- Move so you are inside your hoola hoop and the volunteer is outside the hoola hoop. Ask the volunteer to walk with you like you’re walking and talking.
- “So with most friends, I’m still in control of how close I want to stand and how much private information I share.”

**Very Close Friend/ Family Member/ sometimes Doctor or Teacher**

- “What if [volunteer’s name] was my husband?”
- (Do not ask the volunteer to stand inside the hoola hoop.)
- “Right! Our body space bubble would be smaller. We might sit right beside each other on the couch. We might get closer to tell more secrets. We might even kiss.”
- Allow responses. To be silly, maybe wrap your arms around yourself and pretend to be kissing someone.
- “In our lives, not many people will be this close to us. We might tell our most private secrets to our parent, a brother or sister, our boyfriend or girlfriend, our husband or wife. Sometimes when we need help, we might also tell private things to our teacher or a doctor. Still, that’s not so many people that get this close to us or who learn our most private stories.”

**Acquaintances**

- Now ask the volunteer to move to stand about 3 feet away.
- “Let’s pretend that [volunteer’s name] is my barber. I see him every time I get my hair cut, so he is familiar to me. When he’s cutting my hair, he has to stand close, but when I see him in the grocery store, I’m going to say hello. I might even comment about the fresh fruit we’re standing near. I’m not going to hug him though. He’s my acquaintance. He’s not really my friend, but he’s also not a complete stranger.”
- “Can we name some other people who are acquaintances?”
- Prompt responses such as: neighbor, bus driver, mailman, librarian, cashier, etc.
- Ask the volunteer to move closer to you, bumping your body space bubble.

- “If my barber moved closer to me, I might adjust my position so my invisible body space bubble still gives us a little space between us.”
- Move so you are standing inside one side of your hoola hoop, and the volunteer is standing outside the opposite side.
- “My barber sometimes gets close enough to cut my hair, but some of my acquaintances never get that close.”

### **Strangers**

- “What’s our definition of stranger?” (Prompt for correct definition.)
- Ask your volunteer to put on the hat and stand about three feet away.
- “Some people are strangers. I don’t know them at all.”
- “Now, out in the community, I’m not going to wave at a stranger like I know them. I might nod or say hi when we walk past each other on the sidewalk. If we’re in the grocery store, I’m going to let a stranger finish choosing their lettuce before I reach for a head of lettuce. I’m going to give them more space.”
- Ask, “When are some times I might sit or stand near a stranger?”
- Prompt for standing in line, sitting in a crowded theater or concert, etc.
- Clarify that if a theater is not crowded, choose a seat that gives more space.

### **Stage 3: Sorting Photos by Intimacy Levels.**

- Review definitions of friend, stranger, and acquaintance.
- Each student should spread out around the room and lay their hoola hoop down on the floor or table. If you don’t have enough hoola hoops, OK to use Carpenter’s tape or a circle drawn on a flip chart, one large circle per learner.
- Give each student their stack of index cards.
- Ask them to put find the one that says “most trusted” and put that at the very center of the circle; find “friend” and put that just outside the circle but touching the circle; find “acquaintance an put that a little bit further away and find “stranger” and put that a little farther away.
- Next give each student their individualized stack of photos.
- Prompt to find photos of close family, doctor and teacher, and to put those at most trusted spot in the center of their hoola hoop.
- Prompt them to find photos of friend, putting them with the friend card near the edge of the hoola hoop.
- Repeat directions for acquaintance, and strangers.

- Anticipate that some will need prompting to acknowledge that a celebrity is still a stranger, or that a very smiley gorgeous person is still a stranger.
- Prompt corrections as needed.
- *Extensions: Prompt discussion of power in a relationship with a doctor or teacher, who one might trust but with whom a relationship may not be equal.*
- Let each learner take turns explaining to someone else how they sorted the photos.
- Take a digital photo of each student's completed organizer.

**Stage 4: Applying Relationship Friend Requests in Social Media.**

- Review definitions of friend, stranger, acquaintance, and who can be most trusted.
- Provide each person with a digital copy or printed copy of their photo from their completed hoola hoop organizer.
- “Sometimes when we use social media like Facebook or Twitter or Instagram..., we get requests from people who want us to be their friends. Friends on Facebook ... may not be the same as friends in school or the community. When someone asks to be your friend on Facebook... and they are your friend in real life, what would you probably decide, ‘accept’ or ‘decline’?”
- Prompt responses. Clarify as needed.
- “When someone asks to be your friend on Facebook... and they are a stranger in real life, what would you probably decide, ‘accept’ or ‘decline’?”
- Prompt responses. Clarify as needed.
- “What about acquaintances?”
- Discuss reasoning of whether to accept friend requests from neighbors, or other acquaintances.
- *Extension: Discuss reasoning of whether to accept friend requests from an individual with a clear bias as evidenced by a political stand or a social position.*
- Prompt responses. Clarify as needed.
- “Now the really tricky one is ‘most trusted’. I’m likely to accept friend requests from my parent or brother or boyfriend, but probably not from my doctor.”
- Discuss why. (Discuss power relationships as appropriate.)
- Prompt responses. Clarify as needed.
- Give each student two papers, one labeled “accept” and one labeled “decline”. OR use an interactive software for digital sorting of the photos.
- Each student can reference their organizer for this activity.
- “Imagine you get a friend request today from each of these 15 people. Sort them onto the paper for ‘accept’ if you would accept

	<p>their friend request. Sort them instead onto ‘decline’ if you would decline their friend request.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Let’s practice one together.”</li> <li>• Have each student choose one photo, and explain whether they would “accept” or “decline” the friend request.</li> <li>• Continue, providing supportive prompts and corrective feedback as needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Post-Instruction</b>	<p><b>Reinforce:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When all are completed correctly, take another digital photo and provide student with that for reference as well.</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<p><b>Assess Maintenance and Applied Mastery:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess mastery a few days delayed with the same “accept” “decline activity with selected photos.</li> <li>• After mastery, consider “testing” authentic application of learning by asking a volunteer “stranger” to send test friend requests. This should be another trusted special educator who will report responses and delete inappropriately accepted friend requests.</li> <li>• Review as appropriate with students who accept friend requests from the “test stranger”.</li> </ul>
<b>Possible Extensions</b>	<p><b>Extend practice with “power” and “bias”:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For students who reach mastery, extend practice with an acquaintance with very strong “bias” about a political party or social movement. To be fair, choose one at each extreme. Include evaluation of social media posts indicating that any who disagree are wrong.</li> <li>• For students who reach mastery, extend discussion about varied “power” relationships specific to the use of social media.</li> </ul>