

BEHAVIOR · GRADES 1–6

Buddy System Setup

Peer support that works

When buddy systems help

A well-set-up buddy system can be transformative for:

- A child who struggles with unstructured time (break, lunch)
- A child who has trouble making friends naturally
- A new arrival who needs orientation
- A child whose anxiety is reduced by company
- A child who needs gentle modelling of expected behavior

It's NOT a fix for serious behavior issues. It IS a way to scaffold social experiences for children who need a hand.

Choosing a buddy

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| <p>Not your most able child</p> <p>The 'top of the class' child is often academically focused and may resent the role. Choose for kindness, not academic performance.</p> | <p>Not the most popular child</p> <p>Popular children may be over-stretched socially. Choose someone with capacity AND empathy.</p> |
| <p>Choose for kindness</p> <p>The child who gives others a chance. Who notices the quieter children. Who isn't competitive about friendship.</p> | <p>Consider gender carefully</p> <p>By Y3+, gender becomes salient in friendship dynamics. A buddy of the same gender often works better, but it's not absolute.</p> |
| <p>Ask the buddy</p> <p>Don't assign without checking. 'I think you'd be brilliant at helping Sam settle in. Would you be up for it?' Genuine choice.</p> | <p>Don't pick best friend</p> <p>Existing best friends muddy the relational dynamic. Choose someone friendly but not already in a strong friendship pair.</p> |

What the buddy does — and doesn't



| Buddy DOES | Buddy DOESN'T |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Sit with them at carpet / lessons | Become their teacher |
| Walk with them to lunch / break | Manage their behavior |
| Include them in playtime | Police what they do |
| Show them where things are | Discipline them |
| Be friendly | Have to be best friends |
| Tell an adult if there's a problem | Solve serious problems alone |
| Take a break if they need to | Be on duty all day every day |

Briefing the buddy

Sit with the buddy privately. Explain: 1. WHY. 'Sam is finding things hard right now. He could really do with a friend.' Honesty within reason. 2. WHAT'S YOUR JOB. Be specific. 'Sit with him at carpet. Walk with him to lunch. Include him at break. That's it.' 3. WHAT'S NOT YOUR JOB. 'You're not in charge of his behavior. If something goes wrong, tell me.' 4. YOU CAN STOP. 'If it gets too much, tell me. We can change things.' 5. THANKS. Recognise the work. Privately and publicly (with their permission). Don't ask the buddy to keep secrets. They shouldn't be told 'don't tell anyone you're his buddy.' Visible, valued role.

Supporting the buddy

1. CHECK IN WEEKLY. 5 minutes. 'How's it going? Anything you need?' Not just to monitor, also to value the work. 2. SPOT-PRAISE. When you see the buddy doing well, name it. 'Thank you for including Sam at break — that meant a lot.' 3. PROTECT THEIR OWN TIME. If the buddy wants to play with other friends sometimes, that's fine. The buddy isn't a 24/7 role. 4. ROTATE PERIODICALLY. Half-termly is reasonable. Avoid burnout. Other children also benefit from being chosen. 5. END THE ROLE EVENTUALLY. The goal is for Sam to make his own friends. As that happens, the buddy steps back.

When buddy systems go wrong

Watch for: • THE BUDDY GETTING USED. The supported child constantly seeking the buddy, exclusively. Encourage broader friendships. • THE BUDDY EXHAUSTED. They look stressed, withdraw, complain quietly. Pull them out kindly, find a replacement. • OTHER CHILDREN FEELING LEFT OUT. Why is Sam getting special attention? Frame the buddy role as a leadership role, available to others over time. • THE SUPPORTED CHILD FEELING SINGLED OUT. 'Why do I need a buddy?' Answer honestly: 'Because you're new / things have been hard /



we're being thoughtful.' • THE BUDDY BECOMING PARENTAL. 8-year-olds don't need to manage another 8-year-old's behavior. If that starts happening, recalibrate the brief.

