



# PARENT HANDBOOK

# FRIENDS @ HOME PROGRAM

## ***Preface:***

As we begin providing companionship and mentoring for your child, we'd like to take this opportunity to review the basics of the Friends at Home program. The Friendship Circle staff work hard to ensure that Friends at Home meets your child's needs for friendship and informal interaction with appropriate companions. Continuous feedback from parents is vital to ensure that the program is meeting your needs, while providing the ideal experience for the teen volunteers who are visiting your child.

## ***Our Mission Statement:***

Based on the foundation of V'Ahavta L'Reacha Kamocha - Love your fellow as yourself, it is the Friendship Circle's mission to:

- Engage children and teens with special needs through a full range of experiences.
- Provide parents and families of children and teens with special needs with much needed respite and support.

- Enrich, inspire and motivate teenagers through sharing of themselves with others.
- Create a sense of responsibility and connection to the Jewish community for teenagers through educational and social opportunities.

### ***Benefits of the Program:***

Through the Friends at Home program, a teenage volunteer will visit your child with special needs at your home on a regular basis. Your child will be engaged in a variety of activities based on their preferences. Over time, a friendship will develop from the mutual respect and understanding of these new friends.

This relationship benefits each participant in many unique ways. For your child with special needs, these visits provide an opportunity to connect with a friend in a social setting. For you, the parents, it is a chance to proudly watch your child develop a friendship. Often, these visits also offer you the possibility of attending to housework, spending time

with your other children, or taking a few moments for yourself. For the teenage volunteer, these visits are a source of inspiration, motivating them to share their time and talents with others.

### ***Communication is the Key to Success:***

As in any relationship, proper communication with your child's new friend is the key to helping build a successful friendship. Taking time at the end of each visit to schedule or confirm future visits will help establish mutual expectations and eliminate confusion over the timing of visits.

Since you know your child better than anyone else, please assist your child's volunteer in determining how to maximize this experience for the benefit of your child. Depending on age and ability, your child may not be able to effectively communicate their favorite activities with their new teen friend, but you can help by making suggestions, so the visits are enjoyable for your child. We recommend that you discuss your child's likes and dislikes and go over some of your child's favorite activities with your child's volunteer in preparation for their first visit. Also, if there are any activities

that your child finds stressful or cannot partake in due to health limitations, please advise your volunteer.

### ***Keeping Friendship Circle Staff Informed:***

Communicating with the Friendship Circle staff will help maximize this experience for all involved. If you anticipate upcoming changes in your child's routine (e.g. a new school, medical procedures, etc.) please inform the Friendship Circle staff. Prior to participating in this program, each volunteer receives extensive training by our staff, or other professionals, and we maintain communication with them after each visit. By keeping us aware of your child's situation we can coach the volunteer in how to help your child through the transition period.

In the event that a Friends at Home match does not seem to be working out, notifying the Friendship Circle staff will enable us to assess the situation and either provide further coaching for the volunteer or find a more suitable match for your child.

We will be sending you evaluation emails approximately every three months to gather your feedback, but we urge you not to wait until then to communicate any questions or concerns. We are available at any time, and place great emphasis on addressing your concerns promptly and effectively. Your cooperation and feedback assists us not only in providing you with optimal service but also in making improvements that benefit all participants of this program.

In addition, throughout the year the Friendship Circle will send packages in connection with the Jewish holidays and provide special activities for your child to enjoy during the Friends at Home visits.

If your child will be celebrating a specific milestone, such as a birthday or graduation, please let us know ahead of time so we, along with your child's volunteer, can celebrate with your child.

## ***Making the Most of the Volunteer Visit:***

As mentioned above, the Friendship Circle volunteers are there to provide your child with companionship and a meaningful play date. Therefore, we recommend that you and the volunteer plan activities that are interactive (as opposed to watching TV). Prior to the first visit, we will provide both you and your child's volunteer with an activity book containing hundreds of different ideas of fun things for them to do with their new friends. Please take some time to select the activities that are most appropriate for your child and share them with your child's volunteer. Remember that the volunteers want to cater this experience to your child's needs.

The volunteer is also there to provide you with a respite and allow you to attend to chores around the house or spend time with your other children. You do not need to transport the volunteer to and from your house nor should you worry about providing food or anything special for the volunteer.

The goal of Friends at Home is to make this an easy and stress-free time for you!

***However, your presence in the house is required at all times during the visit.***

Friends at Home is meant to take place in your residence.

***If you, and the volunteer's parents, mutually decide to partake in activities outside the home, this is something beyond the scope of the Friends at Home program.***

Should you require a babysitter, and find your Friendship Circle volunteer to be an ideal candidate, please arrange this with the volunteer, and his or her parents, on your own. This is not connected with the Friendship Circle and should not take place during a Friends at Home visit. The Friendship Circle cannot be held accountable for these visits.

### ***Timing of the Program:***

Friends at Home is designed to run during the course of the school year. Due to the many Jewish holidays celebrated at the beginning of the school year, we ask that you be patient as it may take us some time to get the program setup immediately after the Holidays.

Throughout the year, your child and their volunteer will build a strong relationship and may wish to stay in contact during the summer. Though communication may not be officially organized through Friends at Home during this part of the year, this communication is encouraged! **Please be aware however, that Friendship Circle is not responsible for visits arranged outside the Friends @ Home program.**

## ***Privacy Policy***

Every family, child, and volunteer is entitled to complete confidentiality. We, at the Friendship Circle, are committed to providing this privacy and we request that you do the same. All information supplied to the Friendship Circle, including medical information and information given to therapists, will remain classified.

**The Friendship Circle is happy to be able to connect your child with a new friend and we hope that this program will be helpful to you and your family, and enjoyed by your child!!**

