

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

When Your Adult Has No Friends: Practical Steps for Connection

Friendship is not a count. Connection is what the post is about. Why the social-skills-training era over-counted, what supported social opportunities actually deliver, and what to measure instead of friend totals.

BY JIM PALASTY · OASIS FOR AUTISM · 9 MIN READ

1

REAL CONNECTION

One real connection outweighs ten polite acquaintances. The goal is the relationship the adult chooses to maintain.

How it works

THREE STEPS

Match to genuine interest

Friendships form around shared interests. Coaching the interest is coaching the friendship. Not what we wish they cared about.



Choose forgiving spaces

Hobby groups, faith communities, gaming circles. Lower social tax. Higher signal-to-noise. Mistakes are normal.



Caregiver as logistics

Drop off. Step back. Pick up. Repeat. The caregiver's job is transportation, not facilitation.

Where connection forms

Hobby groups	Model trains, board games, photography, gardening, ham radio
Faith communities	Bible study, choir, volunteer corps, mentorship pairs
Gaming	Magic the Gathering, D&D groups, video game clubs, tabletop nights
Sports	Special Olympics, Unified Sports, walking clubs
Volunteer	Library, food pantry, animal shelter, environmental cleanup
Online	Discord servers, forums, fan communities (with safety routine)
Workplace	Job site coworkers, regulars at recurring shifts

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

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He has one friend. His name is Trevor. They met at the model train club at the library three years ago. They talk about Lionel trains for forty-five minutes every other Tuesday. They never see each other socially outside of the club. Trevor has never been to our house. My son has never been to Trevor's. They are friends. The fact that there is only one of him is not a problem. The problem was assuming we needed more.

FRANK, ESCANABA

What matters, at a glance

Friend count is the wrong metric

Counting "friends" produces miserable adults with twelve polite acquaintances and zero real connections. Pick a different metric. Count chosen returns, not headcount.

Interest precedes social skill

The shared interest is the magnet. Social skills are the surface. Coach the interest and the surface usually follows. Coach the surface alone and the relationships rarely form.

Forgiving environments

Spaces where mistakes are normal, expectations are clear, and conversation centers on the shared interest, not the people. Hobby groups outperform "social skills groups" almost every time.

Connection takes time

Real connections form over six to twelve months of recurring contact. The first three months can look like nothing is happening. Stay through them.

Caregiver as logistics

Drop off, step back, pick up. Stay nearby for the first few visits, then fade out. Resist real-time facilitation. Connections form when the caregiver is not in the room.

Measure what matters

Did the adult initiate contact this week? Did they choose to return? Did they describe the interaction positively? Those are real signals. "How many friends do you have" is not.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

- | | |
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| ☐ Interest inventory (real, not aspirational) | ☐ Three candidate groups identified |
| ☐ First visits scheduled | ☐ Six-month commitment to one group |
| ☐ Caregiver-as-logistics rule in place | ☐ Monthly signal tracking (initiation, return, description) |
| ☐ Online safety routine (if applicable) | |

YOUR MOVE

Building connection over six months

- 1 Identify three specific interests the adult genuinely cares about (not aspirational).
- 2 Find one recurring group for each. Visit each once over three weeks.
- 3 Choose the most workable group. Commit to attending for three months.
- 4 Drop off, step back, pick up. Resist real-time facilitation.
- 5 At month three, check the signal: initiation, return, positive description.

Friendship is one of the harder things to engineer and one of the easier things to obstruct. Engineer it carefully. Obstruct it never.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

oasisforautism.com · <https://oasisforautism.com>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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