

What Is It?

Peer support arrangements involve teaching one or more peers to provide targeted academic, social, or behavioral supports to a classmate. This can be especially helpful in large classroom settings where it can be difficult for teachers or paraprofessionals to provide students with individualized academic and social supports.

When to Use It

- Peer support arrangements can be implemented when a student requires additional academic and social supports--particularly in inclusive classroom settings.
- Peer support arrangements help students to stay engaged, and complete tasks and assignments through peer modeling and encouragement.

Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

	1. Prepare and plan for peer supports. Determine how students will work together during the targeted activity. Typically, there are multiple peers who can rotate to support one student. Clearly define the role of the peers, the paraprofessional (if applicable), and the teacher. Determine what the participation goals are for the peers and the focal student.
	2. Recruit two to three peers; consider student preferences and individual strengths. Orient peers to their roles in the support process. Describe why peer support strategies benefit all students. Identify the primary goals of the peer support arrangement for the focal student (promote peer interactions, support the use of a specific academic skill, etc.).
	3. Prior to instruction, provide each peer support group with a clear explanation of the tasks to be completed. Modify assignment criteria based on an individual student's needs.
	4. Facilitate the groups' completion of tasks as well as the support of the focal student's goal. Check in with groups and monitor progress.
	5. Reinforce task completion as well as progress or achievement of the focal student's goal (verbal praise, stickers, checkmarks, etc.).
	6. Provide support peers an opportunity to reflect on the impact of their support for the focal student. Encourage and provide opportunities for extending peer interactions and socialization beyond the classroom (cafeteria, extracurricular activities).

Example

Kelly is a kind and thoughtful 4th grade elementary student. However, Kelly's teacher, Mr. Roberts, notices that she has difficulty completing assignments and often becomes agitated during in-class work time. When given an assignment to complete, Kelly often cries and pushes her books and materials to the floor. Kelly tells Mr. Roberts that the work is too hard, and he notices that she has trouble following assignment directions. Because she is one of 24 students in her class, Mr. Roberts and the classroom paraprofessional

have a difficult time providing individual attention and additional academic support in class.

Mr. Roberts requests help and the behavior team conducts an FBA. After reviewing the results of the FBA, the team determines that Kelly has difficulty understanding assignment directions, and as a result cries and pushes materials away in order to escape having to complete assignments in class.

A peer support arrangement is chosen as one aspect of the behavior intervention plan. Mr. Roberts determines that the peers will help Kelly understand and move through the steps of the assignments. The paraprofessional will support all students in the targeted math activity.

Mr. Roberts also arranges the room so that Kelly is seated next to two support peers. Mr. Roberts selects these students because they often sit with Kelly during lunch and assemblies. Before class one day, Mr. Roberts meets briefly with the students to discuss ways they can provide support to Kelly.

Mr. Roberts also creates an activity checklist with tasks and steps for the group to complete during in-class work time. Mr. Roberts and the classroom paraprofessional facilitate step and task completion. They provide stamps for each completed step on the checklist. At the end of each day Mr. Roberts meets with the group to debrief and discuss progress ("Great job. How many stamps did you earn on your chart today?"). Mr. Roberts collects percentages of Kelly's work completion and monitors her progress. Mr. Roberts also makes sure that the lunch monitors know the support peers, and he provides additional opportunities, encouragement, and reinforcement for Kelly to sit and talk with her peers.

How to Increase Effectiveness

- Use structured small groups of one to two support peers. Limit groups to no more than three students.
- Proactively select peers based on individual needing the peer supports and peer characteristics.
- Create a visual support that lists the instructional tasks, the steps to complete the assignments, or the expectations for the peer supports.
- Encourage peers to remain on-task through modeling and encouragement.
- Encourage peers to self-monitor progress, and support and track work completion.
- Be aware of the potential for students to become overly dependent, and remind all group members not to simply copy answers.

Resources

Carter, E. W., Cushing L. S., Clark, N. M., & Kennedy, C. H. (2005). Effects of peer support interventions on student's access to the general education curriculum and social interactions. *Research and Practice for Person's with Severe Disabilities*, 30(1), 15-25.

Carter, E. W., Asmus, J., Moss, C. K., Biggs, E. E., Bolt, D. M., Born, T. L. ...& Weir, K. (2016). Randomized evaluation of peer support arrangements to support the inclusion of high school students with severe disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 82(2), 209-233.