



Building Peer Relationships

for Youth and Young Adults in the Child Welfare System

“Healing of trauma occurs in the context of relationship; It cannot occur in isolation.”

(Herman, 1992; Abrams and Shapiro, 2014)

We created this guide to help anyone navigating trauma feel less alone. Here’s how you can safely begin to seek community.

1. Know you are worthy

Before you can find your community, you must know you are capable of having the relationships you desire. Be confident, and always affirm yourself. It sounds both simple and hard — but you have to believe in yourself. From there, you can cultivate a circle that best matches your authentic qualities.

2. Define your circle

What qualities are important to you in a friendship and supportive community? Knowing your needs and what types of friendships you value will help you identify when you’ve found the right community.

3. Say “yes”

Building your friend circle means stepping outside of your comfort zone. Be open to meeting new people, trying new things and exploring new conversations. A simple “yes” can lead to new possibilities and experiences.

4. Get started

There are multiple ways you can get started to build your circle.

- Start by doing what you love: joining a club, group, or meet-up around a topic, interest or skill you are passionate about is a great way to meet new people. If the club doesn’t exist, find like-minded people and create it!
- Start by doing what you care about: volunteering in your community for causes and people you care about is a great way to develop relationships with caring, compassionate and supportive people like you.
- Start where you are most comfortable: joining online chat forums, virtual support groups and online classes is a great way to build empowering and fun relationships with new people digitally. Remember to be careful—remain in safe online spaces, and do not share personal information online.

5. Keep going

Building healthy relationships takes time and effort. It’s okay to feel discouraged sometimes; just don’t give up. All connections take time. If you need a little extra support, try counseling and/or peer-to-peer support.