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.