

This learning guide is designed for use by Professional Learning Communities, learning coaches and teacher leaders or as a self-paced study to enhance the use of natural supports to increase the engagement of students with significant disabilities with the school community.

Natural Supports: *In Conversation with Dr. Erik Carter*

This guide is intended to facilitate conversation



General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter discusses what natural supports are and why they are important for all students, including those with significant disabilities.

Key understandings

- Every student in the school, regardless of whether or not they have a disability, needs supports to be successful.
- Natural supports are those which already exist in the classroom for any student, such as the teacher or peers.
- Peers can be a natural support to each other in the school. For a number of reasons, this type of natural support is not always extended to students with significant disabilities.

Questions for discussion

- What statements in this video caught your attention? Why?
- What natural supports for students currently exist in your school?
- What barriers might students with significant disabilities experience accessing natural supports in the classroom and within school?
- How could you ensure students with significant disabilities in your school connect with the natural supports that exist in your school community?

For more information

- For resources and training materials for mentoring, see: Alberta Mentoring Partnership website <http://www.albertamentors.ca/>
- For an overview of the research on peer mentors for students with significant disabilities, see: Carter, E. (2011). Supporting peer relationships. In M. Snell & F. Brown (Eds.), *Instruction of students with severe disabilities* (pp. 431–460). Boston: Pearson.
- For practical information on peer buddies, see: Carter, E. (2008). *Peer buddy programs for successful school inclusion*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- For an overview of peer support techniques, see: Carter, E. (2008). Promoting rigor, relevance, and relationships through peer support interventions. *TASH Connections*, March/April, pp. 20–23. http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/naturalsupports/pdfs/Peer_Supports_TASH_Connections_2008.pdf
- For examples of activities and materials related to natural supports, see: Natural Supports Project, University of Wisconsin-Madison <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/naturalsupports/resources.php>

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