

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.

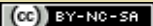
Questions for discussion

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

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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter explains why peer mentors have great potential for providing natural supports to students with significant disabilities.

Key understandings

- Peers are the most available and natural sources of support in any school.
- Peers are generally willing to provide some of the social and academic support needed by their classmates with significant disabilities.

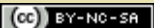
Questions for discussion

- How might peer mentors provide **social support** for classmates with significant disabilities?
- How might peer mentors provide **academic support** for classmates with significant disabilities?

For more information

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



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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter describes how the role of the educational assistant in the classroom could shift to more actively facilitating positive peer interactions.

Key understandings

- The role of the educational assistant can shift from supporting individual students to supporting all students in a classroom.
- Other roles for educational assistants could be to facilitate peer interactions and model support strategies that students can use with their peers.

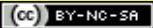
Questions for discussion

- How might educational assistants work differently in your school?
- What kind of training and support will educational assistants and teachers need to work differently?

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- Giangreco, M. F., Doyle, M. B. & Suter, J. C. (2012). Constructively responding to requests for paraprofessionals: We keep asking the wrong questions. *Remedial and Special Education*, 33(6), 362–373. [http://www.vasonline.org/RASE12%2033\(6\)%20362-373.pdf](http://www.vasonline.org/RASE12%2033(6)%20362-373.pdf)
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Natural Supports: *In Conversation with Dr. Erik Carter*

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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter discusses the differences between peer supports and adult-delivered supports.

Key understandings

- Students' academic engagement, class participation and social connections in the class may be hindered when they receive all of their support from adults.
- Students receiving adult-delivered support tend to have fewer interactions with classmates.

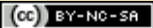
Questions for discussion

- How is support from one's peers different from the kinds of support a student would receive from adults?
- What are some benefits a student might gain from being supported by a peer instead of an adult?

For more information

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

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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter discusses considering other forms of support before arranging individualized one-to-one adult-delivered support.

Key understandings

- Consider the student’s abilities and needs before deciding on a form of support.
- Consider whether assistive technology or some additional instruction might help the student to participate more actively and/or independently in class activities.
- For some situations, peer support can be more effective and more enjoyable for the student than adult support.

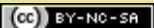
Questions for discussion

- What other types of supports could help students with significant disabilities participate more independently in school?
- What are some strategies for determining the “just right” amount of support for an individual student?
- What are the benefits of providing “just enough” support?

For more information

- For resources and training materials for mentoring, see: Alberta Mentoring Partnership website: <http://www.albertamentors.ca/>
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Natural Supports: *In Conversation with Dr. Erik Carter*

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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter discusses some signs that may indicate too much adult support is being provided to a student.

Key understandings

- Providing too much adult support can be a barrier to participating in social situations and learning activities in the classroom.
- It is also possible to provide too much peer support.
- It is important to provide just enough adult support to promote success but not so much that it interferes with independence and participation.

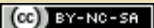
Questions for discussion

- What questions could you ask to determine if a student with significant disabilities is receiving the right amount of support?
- What are some strategies that adults can use to fade the amount of support they provide?
- What are some challenges involved in fading support?

For more information

- For resources and training materials for mentoring, see: Alberta Mentoring Partnership website: <http://www.albertamentors.ca/>
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Natural Supports: *In Conversation with Dr. Erik Carter*



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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter explains what is meant by a valued role and offers some questions to consider when determining if students with significant disabilities are being given valued roles.

Key understandings

- Healthy relationships are characterized by a sense of reciprocity, of both giving and receiving.
- Students with significant disabilities are often designated as receivers only.
- Students with significant disabilities need authentic opportunities to share their talents and strengths with peers.

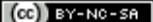
Questions for discussion

- What are some factors to consider when determining if a role is a valued role?
- What are some benefits of giving valued roles to students with significant disabilities?
- Give some examples from your own experience of how students with significant disabilities have taken on valued roles within the school community.

For more information

- For resources and training materials for mentoring, see: Alberta Mentoring Partnership website: <http://www.albertamentors.ca/>
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Natural Supports: *In Conversation with Dr. Erik Carter*

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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter discusses some of the benefits that students without disabilities gain from working with their peers with significant disabilities.

Key understandings

- Students with significant disabilities learn a range of social, academic and self-determination skills when they have opportunities to learn alongside their peers without disabilities.
- Students without disabilities acquire greater appreciation of diversity, and of their classmates and themselves from learning alongside their peers with significant disabilities.

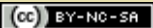
Questions for discussion

- What statements in this video clip caught your attention? Why?
- What are some benefits that students without disabilities in your school might gain from learning with peers with significant disabilities?
- Give some examples of how students in your school have advocated for their peers with disabilities.

For more information

- For resources and training materials for mentoring, see: Alberta Mentoring Partnership website: <http://www.albertamentors.ca/>
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Natural Supports: *In Conversation with Dr. Erik Carter*

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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter talks about guidelines and information to share with peer mentors before they begin supporting students with significant disabilities.

Key understandings

- Peer mentors benefit from initial training and targeted orientation before providing support to a peer with significant disabilities.
- It is important to explain to the peer mentor how and why his or her support is beneficial for the student with disabilities.
- The student's diagnosis and other personal information are confidential and should not be shared with peer mentors.
- Sharing some of the learning goals that the student with significant disabilities is working on can help the peer mentor to know what kinds of supports to provide.

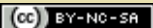
Questions for discussion

- What training is provided in your school to peer mentors?
- What new information might you give peer mentors after viewing this video clip?

For more information

- For resources and training materials for mentoring, see: Alberta Mentoring Partnership website: <http://www.albertamentors.ca/>
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Natural Supports: *In Conversation with Dr. Erik Carter*

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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter discusses activities and supports that peer mentors should not provide.

Key understandings

- Peer mentors should support students with significant disabilities in tasks the mentors would naturally support any peer with.
- Behaviour management issues should be addressed by an adult and not a peer.
- Support in some personal tasks, such as grooming or feeding, should be assumed by an adult and not a peer.

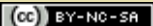
Questions for discussion

- Are there some other types of supports that peer mentors should not provide?
- What happens to the relationship between peers when one of them assumes a role usually filled by an adult?

For more information

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

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General synopsis

In this short video clip, Dr. Erik Carter offers some tips on how to begin setting up natural peer mentoring arrangements in your school.

Key understandings

- Start small—one student, one class at a time—build success and then expand to more students and/or classes.
- Identify one or two priority areas where you could have a significant impact and focus on these priorities for a year.

Questions for discussion

- How are students with significant disabilities currently being supported in your school?
- Identify one or two opportunities in your school where a peer mentor might make a positive impact for students with significant disabilities.
- What will motivate students to become peer mentors?

For more information

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