

A Circle of Friends



The Power of Peer Support

by Bill Dupes

Growing up is tough enough even under normal circumstances. In the transition from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, youths are forced to deal with a variety of issues, such as puberty, acne, grades, dating, learning to drive, and peer pressure, just to name a few. Now imagine trying to handle these problems on top of coping with the loss of an arm or a leg.

Living with a limb difference affects everyone who experiences it, as well as his or her family and friends. Adjustment can take a long time; as a parent, you too may have unanswered questions and concerns about your child's needs or your own feelings and may not know anyone in a similar situation. Although family, friends and professionals can be great sources of support, no one can really understand your child's situation like another amputee. So where do you turn?

- **Peer visits** – Peers can help new amputees adjust to a new life by sharing information, by offering emotional and practical support, and by serving as models of success, helping them learn from their mistakes as well as their victories. Although peer support is ideally conducted through personal visitation, it can also take place in the form of a phone conversation or through regular mail.

- **Special events** – Some organizations, such as the Amputee Coalition of America (ACA), coordinate and host summer camps or special events throughout the year to bring young amputees and their families together to interact, relax, have fun, and learn from one another.

- **Online support** – If your child doesn't

feel ready yet to face someone in a one-on-one setting, or if transportation or accessibility is an issue, you can find the same benefits of peer support through the Internet without leaving the comfort of your home. Supervised chat rooms, e-mail or instant messages can provide a safe, confidential forum to share thoughts, feelings, wisdom, fears and triumphs. And who knows? You or your child might have something to share that would be of use to others. Sometimes, even old dogs can learn new tricks!

No matter which path you take, the important thing to remember is that peer support is most successful when it happens on its own. No matter how tempted you may be, you can't force it to happen, any more than you could expect your child to like someone just "because you said so." The best thing you can do is create the opportunity without making peer support the focal point; then step back and let it happen.

And it will happen. All of us, young and old, want to be liked by our peers. We are social creatures by nature and tend to crave the satisfaction of gaining others' acceptance, approval, affection and love, and giving these things back in return.

Interacting with others serves as a mirror; how we see ourselves is largely

based on how we think others see us, and our self-esteem, confidence and ability to communicate with others are closely linked with how we view ourselves. As your child learns to recognize and accept his or her strengths as well as weaknesses, your child will feel more positive and confident.

RESOURCES

Ability Online

866/650-6207

www.abilityonline.org

Brave Kids

800/568-1008

www.bravekids.org

Children With Diabetes

www.childrenwithdiabetes.com

Cyberteens

www.cyberteens.com

Disability Central

www.disabilitycentral.com

Everyday Warriors

www.everydaywarriors.com

KidsHealth

kidshealth.org

Kidsurfer

www.kidsurfer.org

PatchWorx

www.patchworx.org

Teen Advice Online

www.teenadviceonline.org

Teensurfer

www.teensurfer.com

Winners on Wheels

800/WOWTALK

www.wowusa.com

YAZ (ACA's youth e-Zine)

www.amputee-coalition.org