

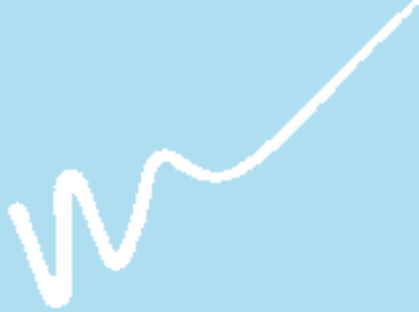


# Setting up peer support program in schools

## A Step-by-Step Guide



THE MANNERHEIM LEAGUE  
FOR CHILD WELFARE

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The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL) is a Finnish NGO that has worked towards the implementation of children's rights in Finland since 1920. MLL works towards improving the wellbeing of children, young people and families with the aim of building a more child-friendly society in Finland.

MLL is an expert in the lives of families with children, and offers a variety of support functions, volunteer work opportunities and opportunities for participation and advocacy for people in different life situations.

Every year:

- Around 11,000 MLL peer support students volunteer in local secondary schools.
- The child and youth helpline receives about 17,000 calls.
- The parent's helpline receives about 1,800 calls.
- The YouthNet (Nuortennetti) has over 500 000 visitors. Young, volunteer YouthNet Editors and Online peer supporters on the YouthNet and its social media channels.
- 900 childcare workers who have received training through MLL work in 3,500 families
- 2,600 support persons, trained by MLL, offer much needed services and assistance to families and children
- MLL maintains nearly 700 Family Cafes that are visited over 300,000 times every year.
- MLL operates over 300 peer support groups for parents that receive 26,000 visits.
- MLL operates 1,200 children's clubs that are frequented over 300,000 times per year.
- At the start of the school year, MLL implements the "Good Start to School" and "Good Start to Secondary School" -campaigns which reach around 50,000 parents of first graders and 50,000 parents of seventh graders (incoming secondary school students)

MLL offers an opportunity for people of all ages to participate in the organisation's work to improve the wellbeing of children. Local volunteer work forms the foundation of MLL's activities.

More information:

**ml.fi/en**



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# Information for peer support instructors

**P**eer student program provides a framework for carrying out various positive activities in schools. Peer students are involved in organising events and set an everyday example of friendly behaviour. Peer student program includes practising emotional and social skills, facilitating group formation among other pupils and arranging many fun events. Peer students are peer-to-peer instructors who can also facilitate discussions about friendship skills, health skills and media education, among other themes. Peer student program supports the objectives of the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education.

Peer students should be invited to attend the lessons of younger pupils. They can also e.g. help with the pupils' group formation at various points during the school year. Activities should be planned yearly together with the peer students and the collective pupil welfare services. Consider together how well peer student programs work in your school. What thoughts or concerns do you have?

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL) provides training for peer support instructors and peer students and produces materials for peer student programs.

This guide contains instructions for examining the basic elements of peer student programs. New ideas for development have been added to the guide and the traditions of peer support program have been updated. Previous versions of this guide have been published in 1997, 2003 and 2011. A key change has been made to the basic training course, which now consists of 12 lessons instead of 16. The new guide also emphasises the importance of small everyday actions, in addition to lessons and events. We hope that you will use this guide by applying its ideas to the needs of your school and its work to promote well-being.

Over the years, the program has been developed on the basis of good ideas and practices from peer support instructors and the principals of schools. Key comments and ideas have also come from peer students, the Youth Work Coordinators of MLL and those responsible for the peer support program at the MLL Central Office and district organisations. Thank you to everyone who is and has been involved over the decades!

*The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare*

**"Our peer support instructors discuss with us. They're interested in how we're doing. The instructor has ideas and asks us about our ideas."**

**These are some of the things that young people value when describing their cooperation with their peer support instructors and other coordinating teachers. Thank you for helping to provide these experiences to them!**

# MLL as a partner for peer support program



initiated the peer support program work in Finland in 1972. The original idea behind this activity was to

offer guidance and peer support aimed at young people. In the beginning, peer supporters also carried out substance abuse prevention. Since the beginning of the 1980s, there has been an emphasis on the sense of community and building students' social skills. Today, the guiding themes of peer support programs are, for example, prevention of bullying and loneliness, and media education.

Peer support programs are implemented in about 90% of schools that have secondary education class levels (levels 7 through 9 in the Finnish educational system). The peer support program network has over 700 peer support program instructors that work in schools, 40 peer support program trainers, and 11,000 peer supporters every year. MLL's local association, district organisations and the central organisation offer support to all of the participants in the peer support program.

MLL develops its peer support program on a national level, working together with schools, Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations and the National Board of Education. MLL also engages in international partnerships, deepens its expertise and understanding around topics relevant to peer support programs through different materials and trainings, and improves the monitoring and evaluation processes of the peer support programs.

MLL produces materials for peer support programs, trains peer support instructors, other teachers and students, updates quality recommendations, monitors the reach of this activity in Finland and maintains Nuortennetti (YouthNet), a web forum geared towards children and young people, which also includes the national communications channel for all peer support students. Nuortennetti hosts online assignments and tests that are meant to support peer support programs and offer additional resources for schools.

**i** The nearest MLL district organisation provides trainers and support for the local schools running the peer support program.  
→ [mll.fi/kouluyhteistyö](https://mll.fi/kouluyhteistyö)

## MLL materials for peer support program

This basic guide for peer support programs includes practical instructions on how to get a peer support program started and organised in a school.

In English, you can find the following publication on the website for peer support programs:

- Peer Support Student Workbook (printable).  
→ [mll.fi/kouluille](https://mll.fi/kouluille)
- Peer Support Student Workbook (paper version)  
→ [mll.fi/kauppa](https://mll.fi/kauppa)

In Finnish:

- Exercise cards that include individual exercises.  
With the help of search terms you can find a suitable exercise for each situation and topic.  
→ [mll.fi/tehtavakortit](https://mll.fi/tehtavakortit)
- Lesson materials related to, for example: prevention of bullying, media education, equality, promoting wellbeing, supporting emotional and interaction skills and substance abuse prevention.  
→ [mll.fi/kouluille](https://mll.fi/kouluille)

# The goals and values of peer support program

The goals of peer support programs are different for each school, and they can be modified and adjusted annually. MLL has defined the broad general goals for peer support programs, which are in line with the Basic Education Act (1998, 2. §) which states that “The purpose of education referred to in this Act is to support pupils’ growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with knowledge and skills needed in life.”

The goals are also related to National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, wellbeing and sustainable way of living. In this context, the peer support program is viewed as a part of school democracy and participatory actions. (National Core Curriculum for basic Education 2014, 23, 26).

Peer support programs are founded on the idea that peer support between young people has a crucial

role to play in promoting wellbeing and preventing problems. For example, in the prevention of bullying, the meaningful, accepting and encouraging work of peer supporters raises the threshold for others to treat their fellow students in a discriminatory manner. When young people have the opportunity to influence how their schools function, they learn about democracy and gain the ability to consider things from various perspectives. Peer support programs increase collaboration between the adults and students in a school. When there is an agreement in the school that peer support students tell the adults in the school when they notice a student being alone frequently or being the subject of bullying, the information about the need for intervention reaches adults faster.





## General goals and principles of MLL peer support program

### 1. Promoting behavior that takes others into account, e.g.

- Improving wellbeing in schools so that everyone can feel a part of the school community.
- Creating a fair and encouraging atmosphere.
- Increasing positive interactions and respectful encounters.
- Supporting the understanding of principles of equality, and planning and implementing activities in accordance with these principles.
- Supporting the positive atmosphere in study groups through team building activities.

### 2. Promoting student participation in schools, e.g.

- Building a participatory culture of doing things yourself, ideation, participating in planning and implementation processes.
- Ensuring that students have opportunities for advocacy and influencing: student's voice and expertise should be valued when deciding on school's daily functions.
- Encouraging collaboration and interactions between the students and the school staff.

### 3. Individual growth, e.g.

- Practicing the courage to bring issues up and being a part of creating solutions.
- Practicing social skills, for example empathy and the ability to function responsibly in the school environment and online.
- Practicing taking responsibility and being an active citizen.
- Practicing planning and organisational skills and teamwork.

### 4. Preventing problems in the school environment, e.g.

- Preventing bullying by addressing discriminatory behavior immediately when it is identified.
- Agreeing that peer supporters will always come tell the school staff when noticing someone being left outside of the group or treated in a hurtful way.
- Preventing loneliness through conscious grouping of students, through small acts like greeting, through participatory assignments and by creating opportunities for student interaction. Creating a positive atmosphere where everyone is included.

## General values

**Equality** means appreciating every single individual as they are. Peer support programs strengthen students' ability to accept themselves and others as unique and equal individuals. The peer supporters' responsibility is to promote and spread the value and idea of equality within the school community.

**Voluntarism.** Peer support programs are founded on the principle of voluntarism. The peer supporters demonstrate their commitment to volunteer work through their willingness to take on responsibilities and work for the benefit of the entire school community. Everyone's inputs and efforts are valued.

**Joy and an action-based approach** to peer support work is another founding principle of peer support programs. The joy of doing things together, experimenting on funny ideas and engaging in cheerful activities help create a positive atmosphere in schools.

**Confidentiality.** A peer supporter is obligated to maintain confidentiality with students. In serious matters, the peer supporter is expected to bring up the issue with an adult, and these discussions between peer supporters and adults in the school environment are also expected to remain confidential.

**Appreciation of youth.** Youth is an important phase in our lives. Young people know how to offer each other peer support, and they have a lot to offer when it comes to further developing and improving collaboration in schools.

**Participation.** The voices and ideas of young people need to be given proper attention and taken into account in the school's activities. Young people are active partners in planning, implementation and evaluation of school activities. There are many participatory student groups. It would be beneficial for these groups to function together, engaging and encouraging all the students to participate in advocacy work in the school.





# Organising peer support program in your school

When a school decides to start implementing a peer support program, the program is incorporated into the school's annual curriculum. Peer support programs should be included in the municipality's and school's curriculum either as an optional subject, club activity, or in some other similar manner. It is also important to determine the compensation the peer support instructors

receive for their work as well as general goals identified the peer support program in the school in question.

The school staff will agree amongst themselves how the school will start implementing the peer support program. The peer support instructor and their work partner will be in charge of the activities, but the support of the whole school community is needed to implement this program.

## 12 steps to get started

**1. Launch event.** The leadership and staff of the school familiarise themselves with the basic principles of peer support programs: what does it entail, and why do these programs exist. The MLL district office can provide a staff member to give a presentation about peer support programs to school staff.

**2. Incorporating peer support programs in the school's existing wellbeing structures.** It is important that peer support students work together with the existing wellbeing structures. How will the peer supporters collaborate with the other groups that are functioning in the school environment (for example, the student association or student mediator groups)? What will collaboration look like between peer supporters and the student welfare working group? How will the peer support program be incorporated in the school's existing student welfare plan?

**3. Long term goals.** What are the things that need to be reinforced/improved in the school's atmosphere? Are the 7th, 8th and 9th graders in need of grouping, or perhaps all classes could benefit from that? How does the school welcome students who transfer in the school mid-year? The long term goals of the peer support program are agreed upon through a discussion and an analysis of the aforementioned topics.

**4. Structures.** Is the peer support program considered an optional subject, club activity or student association activity? This step also includes agreeing on the compensation for the peer support instructors.

**5. Guiding peer supporters.** This step includes selecting the peer support instructor and picking their work partner. The work partner can be, for example, a teacher, guidance instructor or youth worker who is assigned to be a peer support instructor as well.

**6. Orientation and support for peer support instructor(s).** The instructor will take part in a training by MLL and

will be provided with all the materials related to peer support programs. If the school has organised peer support programs before, it is advisable to interview the previous instructor to gain insights into what has been done before.

**7. Selection of peer supporters. (p. x)**

**8. Training of peer supporters.** The school can request support for the training from the MLL district office, or the instructor can do the training with the help of this guide.

**9. Drafting an action plan for the school year.** The peer supporters and the peer support instructor will draft an action plan for the academic year, taking into account the existing school curriculum and school action plan. (p. x and annex 1).

**10. Clarifying all practical issues related to the expectations for peer supporters.** When and where will peer supporters gather and meet? Under what conditions is a peer supporter allowed to miss their own classes? Who is the person that the peer supporter needs to consult about missing a class, will they have to make up for missed classes, and how will peer supporters be able to make up for missed classes?

**11. Informing and communications.** When a peer support program is launched, it is important to inform the entire school community, including parents. Who are the peer supporters? What do they do? In what kind of situations can students turn to them for help?

**12. Evaluation.** Peer supporters, instructors and the leadership of the school will carry out an evaluation of the first year of a peer support program. A questionnaire can be implemented with other students, which can be used to gain insights and information about the students' experiences of the peer support program. The results of the evaluation will be taken into account when planning for the next academic year.

## Collaboration with student welfare services

Most schools also have other student participation groups, like the student association, peer mediation, and KiVa Koulu ("Kind School") activity. It is advisable for these groups to divide the work they are taking on and to implement joint projects to improve the school atmosphere. It is also advisable to include peer supporters in any school welfare initiatives and in groups that include student representation.

Peer supporter activity is not meant to handle serious issues or problems - those are under the purview of school welfare work. In the peer supporter training, peer supporters learn to listen to others, to notice when someone is lonely and left out, and to approach peers and ask if they need help. Peer supporters should be encouraged to bring up any issues they may notice in the school environment with the school's adults. Peer support programs are most useful for the welfare of the school when the peer support instructor actively participates in the planning of the school's annual themes and is aware of and involved in the school's student welfare work.

Peer support students should be involved in defining the annual goals of their work. According to the evaluation studies conducted by MLL on peer support programs, in some schools the school staff draft and decide on these goals without engaging the students. In other schools, the activities are just decided upon based on whatever are the traditions and customs in the school - without giving much thought to the goals at all. It is important to ensure that peer support programs are continuously developed to remain current, and so that peer support programs properly meet the existing needs of students.

## Examples of preparing a write up of a peer support program

"Peer supporters are selected and trained during the spring semester of 7th grade. The peer support program will be implemented as an optional class during 8th grade. The length of the course will be xx hours, which will include the 12 hour long basic training in accordance with the MLL peer support program guide.

During the course peer supporters will participate in grouping of 7th graders, organise two events during the school year, and implement grouping activities among their "Buddy Class"<sup>1</sup> which will be selected among 5th, 6th and 7th grades in the school.

The peer support instructor will teach in the optional subject class and will be provided with compensation for instructing 9th grade peer support students for one weekly lesson per year.

8th through 9th graders will be offered annual continued training on a theme jointly selected by the peer supporters and the peer support instructor (for example: media education, human interaction or equality).

Peer supporters will collaborate with student welfare services. This collaboration should also include a meeting between the school guidance counsellor and the peer supporters twice per year. Peer supporters will present their work to school staff semesterly."

1 A "Buddy Class" (in Finnish "kummiluokka") refers to a specific 5th, 6th or 7th grade class that has been assigned to a particular peer support student pair or group. That peer support student pair will organise activities and engage this particular class throughout the year.

## For further discussion:

- Does your school currently have any ongoing processes that could benefit from peer supporter participation?
- Is the school functioning in a temporary physical space, and would it be beneficial to have inspirational activities as part of the school's daily functions?
- Are the school's different units functioning separate from each other, and in need of better communication and collaboration?
- In comprehensive schools would it be beneficial to increase the joint activities and collaboration between the primary and secondary grades.
- Should phenomenon-based learning include grouping exercises that the peer support students could instruct?
- Would it be possible to improve interactions between students by including the peer supporters in organising joint events and activities? Should there be a "Meet and Greet Week"?

## Annual planning of peer support program

The peer supporters and the peer support instructor will draft an action plan on what the peer supporters are expected to accomplish within a school year. The plan will include daily activities, for example greeting other students, welcoming new incoming students and paying attention to events that require preparations. When the peer supporters plan their own activities and, in the process, gain an experience of collaboration, they will be more eager to commit to implementing those plans. Here are some tips:

- Familiarising with the **school's curriculum and existing annual plans** together. What ideas could be combined with activities and thematic weeks that are part of the school's annual plans to begin with? How could peer supporters join forces with existing school welfare activities and plans?
- **Annual calendar:** it is advisable to draft the annual plans in the form of an annual calendar. When events and plans are written down for each month in the calendar, it makes it easier to evaluate whether the planned activities are proportional to the number of peer supporters and the time that is available. A sample of an annual clock planning model is included in Annex 2.
- **Planning and execution of an individual idea:** Who will participate in the planning and preparation? Who is in charge of what? How will communications and informing the school community about the activity be handled? Etc.
- **Notes from previous years.** We recommend that the peer support instructor keeps notes about the activities and events that are carried out. These notes will facilitate planning in future years, especially if there happens to be a change in instructor. It is advisable to create and maintain a shared online folder that includes information about activities and events. Draft forms can also be very helpful.
- **More ideas** can be found in the Peer support student workbook.

In the chapter about peer supporter basic training model and in annex 1, you will find a sample form for drafting an annual plan. For example, the 9th grade peer support students can be invited to participate in training new peer supporters. You can also put together a folder about the peer support program, which can be passed to the new peer support student group once the current one finishes basic education and moves on (see section 4).

## Tips for identifying funding sources

It is possible to implement a peer support program with almost a zero budget. Some expenses can occur, however, from organising events and from the materials that are needed. Many schools include the expenses occurring from the peer support program in their overall budget. In addition, schools fund peer support programs through, for example:

- Organising peer support activities as an optional subject.
- By organising an account for peer support students to collect money made from events, bake sales, etc.
- By collaborating with the local MLL association. Many local MLL associations will support peer support programs through helping with organising the peer support training, or for example purchasing t-shirts for peer support students. In return, peer support students help the MLL associations by organising events for children or collecting donations for MLL.
- By asking for non-monetary support for their activities. For example, many youth coalitions or congregations are happy to offer a space that can be used free of charge, and some stores might be happy to sponsor food and drinks for events.
- By collaborating with the parents' associations or other local organisations.
- By maintaining a kiosk in the teacher's lounge, profits of which would go towards the peer support program.

In the beginning of annual planning, it can be smart to organise a brainstorming session and gauge the wishes and ideas of all students and peer students.

# Evaluation of peer support program

**P**eer support program can be evaluated through getting feedback from peer support students and other students. Have we reached our goals? What kind of changes did we achieve?

What needs further improvement and development? The evaluation can be carried out through administering a simple questionnaire.

The evaluation can be included in the goal-oriented planning of activities in the following manner:

1. Carry out a welfare mapping for students
2. Analyse and talk about the results of the mapping together with the students
3. Share your analysis and your conclusions with the school staff
4. Draft a development plan that includes assignments for adults, peer support students, and other groups that function in the school
5. Implement the actions that have been outlined in the development plan
6. Evaluate how well the implementation succeeded

Another part of the evaluation process is to think about the processes of reporting. How are we reporting about our activities, and to whom? What kind of tracking data and information would be useful for the school?

It is advisable to agree together how to gather feedback about peer support lessons and events from

students and staff, decide what questions should be asked, and how the feedback will be handled and processed between peer support students and the respondents.

In conjunction with the evaluation it is also important to decide how the peer support program will be improved and further developed based on the feedback. A natural point for doing an overview of the evaluation is usually at the end of the school year, and this can be done by the peer support instructor, principal, peer support students and other individuals that have been involved in the peer support program. It is advisable to also look back to evaluations from previous years, and also agree on the goals of future activities. In case of a change in peer support students, it is important to ensure that all the information about evaluations is included in shared folders that are accessible to the new peer support instructor and, for example, the school principal.

## Quality criteria

Based on evaluations that have been carried out in previous years, MLL has created a quality criteria for peer support programs. MLL has found that peer support programs are usually most successful and long-lasting in schools where these programs are implemented in accordance with the quality criteria.





As a quick evaluation of the program, you can evaluate whether these criteria are met in your own school at the moment. Mark each criterion with a number from 1 to 3 based on how well you think the criteria is met.

1 = criteria not met 2 = criteria almost met 3 = criteria fully met

### Peer support students...

1. Are provided with a basic training that is minimum 12 hours long .....	1	2	3
2. Draft a plan of action for the entire school year .....	1	2	3
3. Meet regularly to plan their activities and agree on division of work together with the peer support instructor .....	1	2	3
4. Carry out activities throughout the entire school year .....	1	2	3
5. Support and help younger students when needed .....	1	2	3

### Peer support instructor

1. A peer support instructor is working in the school and has at least one work partner that supports them with guiding the peer support students .....	1	2	3
2. Uses at least one hour per week on peer support program activities .....	1	2	3
3. Has completed the MLL peer support instructor basic training .....	1	2	3
4. Participates in the continuous trainings, seminars and meetings for peer support instructors organised by MLL .....	1	2	3
5. Has subscribed to the MLL newsletter and utilises the MLL materials for peer support programs .....	1	2	3

### The status of peer support program in the school

1. The peer support program has been included in the school's annual plan and/or student welfare plan .....	1	2	3
2. The adults in the school have clear action plans for how to prevent, stop and address bullying, which in turn helps to establish a clear role for the peer support program in the school environment .....	1	2	3
3. The school staff and students know who the peer support students are .....	1	2	3
4. The peer support program receives sufficient support from school management .....	1	2	3
5. The school works in collaboration with the local youth associations, congregation, MLL local association and other relevant actors to strengthen the peer support student training .....	1	2	3

### Tools for evaluation

- MLL School Registry gathers national data and information about peer support programs to maintain up to date statistics about the progress and growth of these programs in Finland, in Finnish. [mll.fi/koulurekisteri](http://mll.fi/koulurekisteri)
- A questionnaire for peer support students (p. xxx).
- A self-evaluation form for peer support students (in the Peer Support Student Workbook).
- The activities included in this guidebook: "What is our peer support group like?", and "Evaluating peer support programs".

### **i** MLL School Registry (in Finnish)

Finnish schools: remember to update your school information in the MLL School Registry at least once a year. We need your school's contact information in order to send you free materials. Knowing the name of the peer support instructor is an important piece of information for us, so that we can send invitations to trainings and other relevant information to the correct person.

The school registry also helps us to monitor which schools have organised basic trainings for peer support students, what kinds of activities peer support students are implementing, and what MLL trainings peer support instructors have participated in.

→ [mll.fi/koulurekisteri](http://mll.fi/koulurekisteri)

# The role of the peer support instructor

A person who is fitting to be a peer support instructor is an adult who is interested in guiding and supporting young people and in improving and developing the school atmosphere. It is also beneficial if the instructor comes from the school environment and is familiar with the school's policies. The instructor should actively participate in the school's planning activities, so that the peer support program can be built into the broader goals of the school.

## Things to consider when selecting a new peer support instructor

1. The peer support instructor term can be limited (for example two years) or the instructor can be elected for the time being.
2. A peer support instructor can be a teacher, a guidance counselor, a youth worker, a school nurse, special needs assistant, or a youth worker from the municipality.
3. MLL will provide an orientation for the peer support instructor, as well as provide them with training and materials and assist with initiating the peer support program in the school.
4. The previous peer support instructor will provide the new instructor an orientation into how the peer support program has been previously implemented in the school. It would be good if the school gathers annual information and materials about the activities in shared folders that the new peer support instructor will be provided access to.
5. The peer support instructor should be assigned a work partner. There can be two peer support instructors, or the work partner can be a guidance counselor, school youth worker, or a teacher.
6. The peer support instructor should receive some form of payment for the work they do, for example in terms of weekly lessons per year, or the peer support program can be implemented in the form of an optional subject of school club activity.

The role of a peer support instructor requires project management and facilitation skills: it involves planning, organising work activities, getting supplies, guiding young people, implementing activities together, and evaluating the work. The instructor teaches the peer support students teamwork, collaboration, empathy, and instills in them the joy of doing things together.

Many peer support instructors particularly enjoy the free form and action-based nature of peer support programs. With the help of the annual plan, the peer

support instructor can manage the amount of activities, because each school can incorporate their own events and activities in their plans in addition to the basics.

The peer support program is a part of the school's other activities and student welfare work. It is essentially a participatory and communal form of activity, and therefore it is advisable to have at least two adults who participate in implementing the program. Brainstorming is also often more fun when done together. It is fine to be flexible in the division of labor and responsibilities depending on which person can allocate more time to them. This is important, because during the school year all teachers will go through periods that are particularly busy and hectic. With a work partner, it is possible to change and alter the tasks and responsibilities based on each person's interests, strengths and life situation. You can also exchange ideas and thoughts

## The basic tasks of a peer support instructor

- Selecting the new peer support students jointly with the current peer support students.
- Guiding the peer support program activities and maintaining in regular contact with the peer support students.
- Grouping of peer support students.
- Training the peer support students, or organising the training jointly with MLL.
- Drafting an action plan for each school year together with peer support students and incorporating it in the school's broader plan and curriculum.
- Informing students and the adults of the school about the peer support program and its activities together with the peer support students.
- Ensuring that peer support students are visible and engaged in the planning of the school's activities. When the school identifies areas of improvement, how can the peer support students be involved? (For example improving recess time and participating in organising events at the school.)
- Encouraging and inspiring the peer support students, providing them with positive and constructive feedback and rewarding them.
- Handing out diplomas for students who participated in the peer support program.



with your work partner and think about how to fit different ideas into the school's existing plans and activities. A work partner is particularly essential during trainings, camps, and theme weeks.

A peer support instructor will promote and encourage student participation. Activities are at their best when they have been planned, executed and evaluated by the students themselves. Participatory nature of the activities can be encouraged by allowing peer support students to influence when and where they meet, and what their meetings entail. Peer support students can also influence what kind of activities they want to implement. Ask them to consider what kind of activities they think the school and its students would benefit from, and what they think the students would wish for.

The peer support instructor is also in charge of setting parameters for the peer support program. There will be moments during the school year that will be particularly draining for students, and it is important to take this into account when planning the activities for the year. You

should encourage the peer support students to carry out and finish the tasks and responsibilities they have taken on, but also ensure that the group does not take on too much. Responsibilities should be evenly and fairly divided between peer support students, so that the same students aren't always assigned to most of the tasks.

It is common that the students who are interested in participating in a peer support program are students who are already active and engaged in many hobbies and activities. The peer support instructor should make sure that the student is ready and able to take on peer support student responsibilities in addition to everything else they may have going on. The school can also have a general agreement that one student can be engaged in just one school-related extracurricular activity at a time. In addition, it can be agreed that a peer support student can take a break from the peer support program, if that student's life becomes too draining and hectic due to other responsibilities or because of a particularly demanding life phase.

# Recruiting peer support students

Different schools take different approaches to choosing their peer support students. The total number of peer support students also varies from school to school. The first step is usually to decide which grades will form the “Buddy Classes” for the peer support students, as these classes will then be grouped throughout the school year.

The normal number of peer support students per Buddy Class is 2–4. Usually, the 7th grade classrooms are chosen to be the Buddy Class because they are the newest classes in school, but other grades will also benefit from grouping. In many schools, the peer support students’ Buddy Classes are selected among 6th through 9th grades.

It is advisable to select and train the peer support students during the spring semester of 7th or 8th grade. That way they will be ready to meet and greet the new classes in August, or even during the orientation sessions in the spring. In some schools the training will continue through the entire school year. This can happen when, for example, the peer support program has been incorporated in the school’s curriculum as an optional subject. In this case, the peer support students can organise events and Buddy Class lessons as part of their training.

There are many different practices that can be applied to selecting the peer support students. Here are some examples:

- **Application and interview:** An interested student will fill and submit an application to become a peer support student. Each individual will get an equal chance to share why they are interested in becoming a peer support student in their own words. The peer support instructor will then interview each applicant together with the former peer support students. The interview is important, because many students can be great candidates for becoming peer support students even if writing a compelling application might be challenging for them. Some students might feel nervous in an interview situation, in which case the written application provides them with the opportunity to demonstrate their interest and motivation. The peer support instructor and current peer support students will then select the new peer support students together.
- **Optional subject:** If the peer support program has been assigned as an optional subject in the school, the general approach is to enroll as many interested students in the class as possible. Usually, a part of that original class will then remain for the actual

peer support student program. During the course, the instructor has the opportunity to talk with the students about their motivation to function as a peer support student after the course is finished, and interview those who are interested in continuing.

- **Student vote:** Sometimes peer support students are selected through a vote, similarly to choosing your class representatives. It is beneficial to combine the voting process with an interview to avoid having a student who is not really interested chosen as a joke. Then again, someone who is genuinely interested in becoming involved could also be left out in a voting process.

There is a need for all kinds of peer students and different strengths are an advantage. If one is outgoing and articulate, another may inspire confidence with their calm manner, and while one may be sporty and lively, another may be cheerful by nature. Peer supporters do not have to be straight-A students, but ordinary young people who are ready to get to know their peers at school and help them if needed.

The peer support students will be trained either by the peer support instructor, or an MLL trainer and the instructor jointly. The recommended length of the basic training is 12 lesson hours. Additional trainings can also be arranged to further develop peer support students’ skill sets.

## A peer support student is a fair player

A peer support student is expected to behave in a friendly and accepting manner. In some cases, a peer support student may end up continuously disrupting the class. It is good to set ground rules on how these kinds of situations will be handled. In most cases, adults will have a serious conversation with the peer support student, and the peer support student will be given an opportunity to correct their behavior. Small infractions and mistakes can be handled, but in a situation where there is continuous misbehavior or bullying, it might be necessary to relieve the peer support student of their role. See more about the role of the peer support student on page 14.



## Interview questions for peer support student applicants

1. Introduce yourself briefly.
2. Why do you want to become a peer support student?
3. How would you describe a successful peer support student?
4. What kind of activities would you like to do as a peer support student in this school?
5. What are the things/tasks that your friends and other people trust you with?
6. How do you give positive feedback to others?
7. What kind of things make you angry, and how do you process those emotions?
8. If you were a peer support student, in what kinds of situations would you pay particular attention to your own behavior?
9. Is there something about the peer support program that gives you pause? Do you have any questions about it?

Source: Modified from the interview structure used at the Jussinpekan School.



Meet all the students who will be attending the peer support student basic training at least once before the training takes place. Get to know each other and engage in a few ice breakers.



# Basic training model for peer support program

The basic training for peer support programs provides participants with skills to act as a peer supporter in their school.

12 lessons

## The goals for the participants are:

1. Becoming familiar with the roles and responsibilities of peer support students and understanding what the goals of the peer support program are.
2. Grouping with other peer support students.
3. Becoming excited about being a peer support student.
4. Strengthening social skills.
5. Gaining skills to lead groups.

The goal of the peer support student group in the training is to plan for their future activities and think about how the peer support program will be visible in the day-to-day life in the school for other students. What kind of actions would help create a positive atmosphere and prevent loneliness, and how will the other students and teachers gain information about the peer support students.

The basic training model for peer support students is 12 lessons. It has been designed with a two-day training model in mind. In an optional subject course, teachers can expand the training with peer support student training materials developed by MLL.

The 12 lessons are divided into four sections of 3 hours each. Each of these sessions will include a warm up exercise, 5–7 proper assignments and wrap-up. There won't be time to complete all the assignments, and the students will be able to choose what they want to complete in each

session. The person carrying out the training can choose the assignments that best fit with that particular group or choose from additional assignments and exercises from MLL materials. If time is running out, it is advisable to focus on the final assignment/wrap up of each session. The purpose of these is to bring together all the skills and lessons that the session has provided so far.

## Training modules

1. The purpose and goals of the peer support program and the role of the peer support student
2. Reinforcing a positive atmosphere
3. Functioning as a group and guiding a group
4. Planning of activities

You can train the peer support students yourself, or you can request for a trainer from the MLL district organisation. Many schools request a trainer for six hours, and the instructor will then handle the remaining 6 hours of training. In many schools, the peer support program has been assigned as an optional subject. When the course has been assigned several lessons, in addition to the basic training it is possible to also organise events, grouping classes in the Buddy Classes or continuous training on different topics, such as media training or interaction and emotional skills. You can also utilise the Peer Support Student Workbook as lesson material during optional classes.

The training can be carried out at your own school. The benefit of organising the training outside of the school is keeping the peer support group together throughout the day, instead of having them disperse during recess. Doing the training elsewhere also gives students a break from the school environment. An overnight training in a camp center is also great for grouping purposes.

In addition to the basic training, different follow-up trainings and guidance will also be provided for the peer support students. This will help maintain their enthusiasm and commitment throughout the year. It also helps the peer support students to be able to provide support to other students with issues like media skills, wellbeing, and interaction and emotional skills.

## A checklist for the trainer

- Familiarise yourself with the training structure and learning goals
- Organise the sessions and assignments in proper order, depending on the length of each planned session
- Improvise and mold the training structure to best fit with your particular group. The MLL materials have several different exercises, if some of the exercises in the guide book are not suitable for your group.
- Confirm all the logistical and practical arrangements (the space for the training, food, materials, transportation, etc).

### **i** You can also use the Peer Support Student Workbook in the training.

- Peer Support Student Workbook (printable)  
→ [mll.fi/koululle](http://mll.fi/koululle)
- Peer Support Student Workbook (paper version)  
→ [mll.fi/kauppa](http://mll.fi/kauppa)

## Exercises and experiential learning

The training consists mostly of participatory exercises and discussion assignments. Changing up the style of the assignments helps keep the students engaged and interested. The idea is that the peer support students get to experience what it feels like to participate in these games and exercises, which they will in turn be implementing with other students. The peer support students will share their experiences during discussions and jointly discuss what kinds of things are important to consider when implementing these exercises. You should always explain to the peer support students what the purpose of each exercise is and what the goals are. For example, not just “playing for the sake of play”, but for the purposes of grouping and getting to know each other.

Tell the students that all the exercises include both a thematic goal and an emotional goal. The thematic goal can be, for example, understanding the concept of empathy, and the emotional goal can be to gain an emotional experience of the difference between empathetic listening and indifferent listening. Each exercise is marked with a goal, the materials that are required to implement it, and an estimate of the time needed to complete the exercise. The exercises have been designed with a group of approximately 20 students in mind. In a smaller group, the exercises can be completed in a shorter amount of time. How talkative the groups are will also impact how long the exercises will take. Many of these exercises can also be implemented by the peer support students in their Buddy Class.

## Setting a pace for the training

How the training will be implemented in practice will vary. The 12 hour length can be divided up to two days, or to several shorter sections. This is why the basic training has not been strictly divided in any specific order or rigid structure.

When planning the training, first familiarise yourself with how the lesson plans are designed, how breaks and time for lunch/snack fits in with the schedule, and in which order the different sections should be implemented.

## Follow-up training for peer support students

Many schools will also arrange follow-up training for peer support students. This can be implemented as a full day training or divided into several shorter sections.

MLL has produced lots of different materials for follow-up trainings in Finnish. These can be used as additional material for an optional class or implemented as part of the peer support program throughout the school year. Themes and topics: preventing bullying, supporting interpersonal skills, group work, multiculturalism, equality, alcohol and drug education, wellbeing, healthy life skills, interaction and emotional skills, media education, respectful interaction, and empathy skills online.

The PDF-files for these materials can be accessed at  
→ [mll.fi/tukioppilastoiminta](https://mll.fi/tukioppilastoiminta)



# Part 1. The goals of the peer support program and the role of a peer supporter (3 x 45 minutes)

## The goal is for the peer support students to:

- Get to know their peer support student group
- Get to know the values and goals of a peer support program, and adjust these to fit their school
- Familiarise themselves with the different roles and responsibilities of a peer support student.

The training begins with warm-up exercise. The students will be paired up to discuss and think about the values of a peer support program. There will be a broader discussion about the goals of the program, and the students will build pyramids of the most important skills of a peer support student. In the end, the group will familiarise themselves with the “peer support program tree”, which demonstrates what the peer support program is all about and who are the people and entities that will be collaborating with the peer support students.

In the first section, it is very crucial that you demonstrate your enthusiasm of having exactly these particular students as part of your peer support student group. Share why you are excited about the peer support program, what you find rewarding about being a part of it, and what benefits you have observed for other students and the school community as a whole. Remember to share that each action taken by a peer support student makes a difference, and that small acts of kindness can create a big change in the school atmosphere. Use plenty of time for everyone to get to know each other and properly group among each other - this will be beneficial later in the training.

**There is a role for all kinds of people as peer support students.** There is a role and a space for all kinds of peer support students, and different strengths are a positive thing. One student can be social and talkative, while the other one will gain people's trust through their calm demeanor. One peer support student will be athletic and outgoing, and the next one positive and upbeat. A peer support student does not need to be a student who only gets perfect scores in their classes, but a regular young

person who is ready and willing to get to know their peers and offer a helping hand when needed.

**The assignments can be divided up.** All peer support students don't need to do the same things or participate in all the different activities. The assignments and activities can be divided up among the peer support students based on their personal interests. All this can be planned and agreed upon during the training, together. The basic idea of a peer support program is that the young people plan and implement their activities themselves, and through this become active participants in building and improving their school community. The joint goals for peer support programs provided by MLL can be used to support this process. The school community will decide the individual goals and actions that will support reaching the broader joining goals. A school can, for example, decide on 1 to 3 shared goals that the community works towards in a given academic year.

**It is important for a peer support student to understand what is expected of them.** A peer support student has two main jobs: creating and supporting a positive atmosphere in the school community and student groups and preventing loneliness and bullying.

A positive atmosphere can be created through, for example, Buddy Classes, recess and during events. A peer support student's work towards preventing bullying is based upon preventative actions and strengthening the overall wellbeing of the school community. It is the responsibility of the adults in the school to step in when bullying is happening, but the peer support students can show their support to the students who are left out or treated badly by others.

Students who have experienced bullying have said that support from other students was crucial for their wellbeing. This can be shown in the form of just sitting next to someone, greeting them, or asking how they are doing (Markkanen & Repo 2016). Peer support program is grounded on the premise that no level of discrimination, bullying or excluding others is acceptable in a school environment.

**Provide feedback.** Young people need lots of positive feedback. One of your own personal goals can be providing constructive and positive feedback. Assignments that include providing positive feedback have also been incorporated in the basic training materials, and



you should set aside enough time for these exercises. Here are a few tips for giving positive feedback:

- The feedback should be about the action, not about the individual.
- Focus on solutions.
- Help the person getting the feedback on identifying their own strengths.
- Give concrete feedback and provide reasons for the feedback.
- Not too much “constructive” feedback at once.
- Consider whether the feedback should be given publicly in a group setting or perhaps one-to-one.
- Give ideas and information, provide guidance.
- Choose the right time and place for giving the feedback.
- Confirm that the person received and understood the feedback correctly by asking follow-up questions.

## The basic principles of being a peer support student

### School work

Being a peer support student can be a lot of fun, but the first priority is always taking responsibility for your own schoolwork. Sometimes, a peer support student has to miss their own class. In these situations, it is important to ensure that the student is aware of any homework that has been given and that the student completes the homework in accordance with the teacher’s instructions.

### Confidentiality and collaboration

A peer support student lives up to their word, and peer support students work together. No one should experience fatigue or burnout because of being a peer support student. The peer support instructor will be there to support the peer support students and ensure that no one is taking on too many tasks or responsibilities.

### The boundaries of the peer support student role

When and where is a peer support student in this particular role, and when are they “off duty”? A friendly and positive demeanor is an important part of being a peer support student, when the student is in the school, at events organised by the school, or at events organised by partners. It is important to discuss and decide what the appropriate action is, if a peer support student is behaving in a disruptive or unfriendly manner during their own time, in hobbies or on social media. It is not realistic to expect a peer support student to be on their absolute best

### The values of a peer support program

Equality, voluntarism, joy, confidentiality, participation and listening to the voices of young people, appreciating youth.

### General goals of a peer support program

Promoting behavior that takes other people into consideration in school, increasing student participation, preventing and foreseeing problems, growing as an individual.

behavior at all times outside of the school environment, but it is still important to remind peer support students about appropriate behavior.

### Support from adults in a bullying situation

Peer support students are not expected to interfere with serious instances of bullying. It is, however, the responsibility of a peer support student to bring it to the attention of adults if they become aware of bullying or someone being singled out. After that, it is the responsibility of the adults in the school to step in and solve such situations.

In Finland, MLL develops its peer support program activities nationwide. If your school works in Finland, ask the students what they know about MLL. Share the following information briefly:

- Nuortennetti (YouthNet) is a website for young people, including Youth and child helpline and chat.
- Each peer support student group is a part of a nationwide group of about 11 000 peer support students. Similar activities and programs are also implemented in schools in many other countries. We are a part of a very important mission to create a more positive and tolerant school environment.
- Anyone can become a member of MLL, and it is also free for anyone under the age of 18. Most people become members in the local MLL association closest to where they live. Peer support students collaborate with the local MLL associations in many different ways, for example through organising events together.

## Getting to know your classmate

**Goal:** Getting to know each other

**Exercise:** Interview your partner

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 15–20 minutes

Ask the students to pair up. The pairs will interview each other. Ask that the pairs greet each other with a handshake and by looking each other in the eye. Agree which questions the interviewer will ask first. For example: What is your name? Which class are you in? What is your favorite color? What are your hobbies? What skills or knowledge do you have that could be useful for a peer support student?

## Five things about me

**Goal:** Getting to know each other

**Exercise:** Dialogue

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Paper and pen

Each participant will write five things about themselves that they wish to share with others on a piece of paper. These facts can be about school, family, hobbies, or personal skills. Describe these facts with 1–2 words. For example, if a student wants to share that they saw a good movie over the weekend, they would write “movie”, or if they learned to do a handstand they could write “new skill”. When everyone has written down five facts, the students will move around the classroom and pair up. They will introduce themselves to their pair, exchange their notes, and each person gets to pick one of those five things and ask more details about it.

For example, “what do you mean by ‘movie’?”. Both get to ask the other person more details about one of the five facts. After this, the student will take back their own paper, and find a new pair. When the instructor thinks that enough time has been spent on this exercise, students return to their seats. Then everyone gets a turn to share their name and pick one thing to share with the whole group from their list of five things.

**Background:** In a new group, it is smart to start with having the students pair up first, and then move towards working and sharing in a larger group. In this exercise, no one has to say or share anything that they don’t want, and no one has to be worried about not knowing the right answer. It also provides students with the opportunity to talk about a topic that they know best: themselves. This exercise can also be implemented with a Buddy Class.

## Wish list for the training

**Goal:** A student who is motivated about the training

**Exercise:** Thinking about your personal wishes for the training

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** A flip chart or powerpoint, pens, paper

**Time:** 15 minutes

Ask the students what they wish to gain from the training. You can divide the students into pairs and ask them to discuss what would be their personal wish list from the peer support student basic training. Ask the pairs to write their wishes on a piece of paper or on post-it notes. Then gather all the student’s wishes on the flip chart or in a powerpoint. Group similar wishes together. Agree jointly that you will return to these wishes at the end of the training and discuss whether these wishes were met. Then briefly introduce the content and structure of the training.



## Values of the peer support program

**Goal:** To understand the purpose of a peer support program

**Exercise:** Discussion about the values of the peer support program and mirroring those against the peer support activities in your own school and how those values are demonstrated through concrete actions

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** A printed out picture of the peer support program tree (annex 4A) and the Values of a Peer Support Program on a powerpoint or printout

**Time:** 15–20 minutes

Show the students a picture of the peer support program tree. Go through all the different aspects that make up the peer support program. Go through the trunk, branches and flowers. Then bring your attention to the roots that form the foundation of the program: the values.

Explain to the students what values are. For example:

Values are the things that are important and dear to us. Values can also help explain why it is important to do certain things. Usually, some of the values that are important to people are things that others also find important, like safety and fairness. Some values we each choose individually. Values hold a concept of actions that are important and acceptable, as well as things that we might believe threaten the things we hold important. Our values guide our choices and our actions, like how we spend our time and money. For example, if a person values their health, this will impact the choices that person makes about exercise, sleep, nutrition, media and alcohol and drugs. Sometimes our values and our actions don't meet, but when we know what things are important to us, we can also make choices that are aligned with our values.

Share with the students that the next step will be to talk and think about the values for peer support program that has been determined by MLL. Divide the students into small groups or pairs. Give each group/pair one value to discuss: participation and listening to young people's voices / voluntarism / joy / equality / confidentiality / appreciation of youth. Ask the students to discuss what their particular value could mean in their school community and in the peer support program. Then ask the groups/pairs to share their thoughts. You can add to their ideas with the help of the following text:

**Participation.** Participation in the school means having the sense of belonging in the school community and being a part of a group. Young people's voices and ideas should be taken into account in the school's activities, and young people should be included in planning, implementing and evaluating the school's activities. Influencing the school's affairs can be done through different student groups, and these groups should jointly encourage all students to become involved in volunteer activities.

**Voluntarism.** The volunteer-based nature of the peer support program is demonstrated through the student's willingness to take responsibility and function for the wellbeing of the entire school community. A peer support student will complete what they promise to do, or at least do their very best.

**Joy.** Joy and participation are the founding principle of a peer support program. The joy of doing, fun ideas and refreshing activities help create a positive atmosphere in the school.

**Equality.** Equality means valuing each individual student as an equal member of the community. The peer support program will enforce students' ability to accept themselves and others as equal and unique individuals. It is the responsibility of a peer support student to spread and strengthen the principle of equality in the school community.

**Confidentiality.** A peer support student is worthy of the trust placed on them. Other students can come to the peer support student for advice and share their concerns. In serious matters, the peer support student is expected to bring the issue to an adult, and the peer support student can expect confidentiality during their discussions with adults in the school.

**Appreciation of youth.** Youth is an important life phase. Young people are great at offering each other peer support, and they have a lot to offer for improving and developing the broader school community.

### Workbook exercise for optional classes

Discuss the following values with the help of these questions and write down your ideas and thoughts in the workbook or on paper:

- What things do you value in your own life?
  - Do the things you value highly in your life impact how you use your time and money?
  - How are your values reflected in how you act and behave in school and with your friends?
- If time allows, discuss together.

## Towards our goals

**Goal:** Goal-oriented activity planning

**Exercise:** Familiarise yourself with the general goals of peer support program and talk about your school's goals

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Each group should have a printed-out picture of the peer support program tree (annex 4B) and pens

**Time:** 30–45 minutes

Explain the general MLL goals of peer support programs to the students (listed on this page and in annex 5). Then think about your own goals in the following manner: the small groups will add to the peer support program tree. The centers of the flowers have the existing goals:

1. Promoting considerate behavior towards others in the school
2. Increasing student participation in the school
3. Developing as an individual
4. Preventing problems in the school environment

**Group assignment:** Discuss in small groups what kind of actions your school's peer support students are already taking that help in reaching these goals. What additional actions could be taken? Write those ideas in the flower petals around the centers.

Then go over what each group wrote down. Compare them and see if the ideas overlap. Are there new ideas

that have not been done in your school before? Is there an issue that is causing particular worry and needs immediate attention? Would support from the student welfare services be beneficial or necessary?

Collect and save these ideas and return to them when you are engaging in annual planning (section 4). That is when you will be building a shared understanding of which assignments and activities should be taken further. When doing this exercise, you can all jointly discuss whether some of these ideas are ones that the students want to start implementing right away. You can also discuss what would be the most important peer support student program goals for your school.

If time allows, you can expand the discussion around goals and everyday life in school. For example: have you noticed any situations where students behave in a particularly attentive and polite manner? What situations require further work on student behavior? When has your school engaged students and asked for their opinion? When should student opinions and feedback be asked more than currently? What kind of useful skills and things do you think you will learn from being involved in the peer support program? What kinds of problems could the peer support program prevent in our school community? What kinds of things can we influence?

You can use the following box to guide the unpacking of the discussion:

## The general objectives and principles of MLL Peer Support Program

1. Promoting considerate behavior in school, for example:
  - Strengthening school atmosphere and wellbeing in school so that everyone can feel a part of the school community.
  - Creating a fair and encouraging atmosphere.
  - Increasing positive interactions and respectful encounters.
  - Understanding the principles of equality, and planning and acting accordingly.
  - Supporting a positive atmosphere in study groups through grouping exercises.
2. Increasing student participation in school, for example:
  - Building an action-oriented culture: doing things yourself, ideating and participating in planning and executing.
  - Ensuring that all students have opportunities for influencing things in the school: youth voices and youth expertise should be a part of school's everyday activities.
  - Encouraging collaboration and interactions between the adults and students in the school.
3. Developing as an individual, for example:
  - Practicing the courage to bring up issues and being a part of finding solutions to them.
  - Practicing social skills, e.g. empathy and the ability to function in a responsible manner in the school environment and online.
  - Practicing taking responsibility, and being an active citizen.
  - Practicing planning and organisational skills and teamwork skills.
4. Preventing problems in the school community, for example:
  - Preventing bullying by bringing up hurtful behavior both preventatively, as in before it happens, and every time you see it happening.
  - Agree that the peer support students always tell an adult if they see someone being left outside in a group or a particular situation or notice someone being mistreated. Stepping in and stopping bullying or solving challenging situations is always the responsibility of the adults in the school, but it is important that peer support students share their observations.
  - Prevent loneliness through grouping activities, greeting, actionable tasks and through offering opportunities for students to get to know each other. Create a positive and inclusive atmosphere.
  - Carry out peer support guidance that promotes a positive culture, for example in media education, drug and alcohol education, and interaction and emotional skills.

### Workbook exercise for optional classes

Write down in the workbook, the most important goals of a peer support student selected by your group. Everyone can also take time to reflect on their personal goals for being a peer support student.





## Icebreaker: Slap

**Goal:** To get to know each other and learn people's names

**Exercise:** Play

**Space:** Classroom or a similar space

**Supplies:** A newspaper

**Time:** 15 minutes

Tell the students that just like in the previous game, peer support activities need to be planned together. When those plans are put into action, it requires swift and determined cooperation. A peer support student needs to be alert so that they know when they are needed. This exercise will train speed and help everyone remember the other participant's names.

In the game, everyone sits on the floor in a circle. One student stands in the middle. This student holds a rolled-up newspaper, which they will use to try to (gently) slap the feet of the student whose name is shouted out by whoever starts the game. The student whose name is called has to try to pull their feet back and say someone else's name, before the student in the middle slaps their feet. If they manage to slap the other student's feet first before that student pulls their feet back and shouts out someone else's name, then these two students switch places and the one who got slapped goes in the middle.

**Discuss after:** Peer support students need other skills too. We will talk about these in the next exercise.

## A pyramid of the most important skills of a peer support student

**Goal:** To gain an understanding of the kind of skills a peer support student should have

**Exercise:** To think about the most important skills of a peer support student. Compare the different things the groups came up with and discuss all the many qualities that peer support students need

**Space:** Classroom or a similar space

**Supplies:** Skill card printouts (annex 3)

**Time:** 25 minutes

Divide the students into groups of 3-4 and give each group a set of skill cards that have been printed out earlier. The group has to place the cards on the table in the shape of a pyramid so that the skill that they think is the most important skill for a peer support student is at the very top, the second and the third most important skills on the next row and so forth. The group has to agree on the order of the skills and be ready to justify their selection. The process of putting the skills in order of importance and building the pyramid usually takes about 15 minutes. You can also agree on using empty cards if a student comes up with a skill that isn't already included.

When giving instructions, remind the students that there are no right or wrong answers to this exercise, but the idea is to think about why all the different skills of a peer support student are valuable and important. When all groups have finished their pyramids, have a discussion:

- Which skills did each group pick as the most important skill?
- What was the selection process like? When you had to narrow down the top skills, did you feel like a particularly important skill had to be left out of the top choices?
- This prioritisation was done with the school environment in mind. One important means of communication is social media. If you thought of these skills in the context of social media, which skills would you then rank as the highest priority?

Remind the participants that peer support students are normal young people. They are volunteers who work in a position of trust. A peer support student does not have to be a student who gets perfect scores, but they do have to have a positive attitude towards studying and an interest towards acting for the wellbeing and positive atmosphere of the school, and in accordance with school rules. A peer support student is someone who is fair and a good mediator, who can also inspire and activate other students.

A good sense of humor and the ability to spread positivity are very useful skills. A peer support student does not act indifferent, and they pay attention and notice if another student is being mistreated. A peer support student offers guidance and advice to others on where to get support and help and offers their own support to other students.

A student who is a good fit to be a peer support student has the following qualities:

- Being themselves authentically
- Being empathetic and genuinely interested in other people
- Understands the concept of equality
- Is interested in improving and developing the school atmosphere
- Has good interpersonal skills and is interested in further improving them
- Wants to inspire others to take action
- Is trustworthy and honest.

## Nice job messing up!

**Goal:** To have a discussion about making mistakes and tolerating them

**Exercise:** Speed and being clever

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 10 minutes

Ask the students to choose a pair. The pairs will stand facing each other. They will take turns saying numbers out loud: 1,2,3 – and repeat. If one makes a mistake (for example says the wrong number, or takes too long to say their number), the other one will shake their hand and say: Nice job messing up!

In the beginning, the pairs will be saying just numbers, but after a couple of minutes it's time to turn up the difficulty. For example, replace number 1 with a clap, but still say numbers 2 and 3 like normal. Next, have the students to replace saying number 2 with stomping their foot, and only say number 3 out loud. Last, you can replace number three with for example making a funny face or snapping your fingers, and none of the numbers are said out loud.

### Discussion:

- How did the exercise go? How hard or easy was it to concentrate when the exercise kept changing?
- How did it feel to get it right? What about when you lost your rhythm and made a mistake?
- Everyone makes mistakes. What feelings do we associate with making mistakes (for example disappointment, shame, embarrassment)? Usually we can move past the negative feelings associated with making a mistake. Sometimes it can even make for a funny story to tell others later on!

Ask the students whether they think that maybe sometimes, when they are instructing a game or a peer support class, they might feel like they made a mistake? What could cause this feeling? Sometimes other people won't even notice things that to us seem like mistakes. A positive atmosphere is created through understanding that we all make mistakes sometimes. It is also important to remind the participants that we should never laugh at other people's mistakes.

## Final exercise:

### Ball of yarn - feedback exercise

**Goal:** Summarising the things we've learned

**Exercise:** Thinking through all the topics and lessons that the training has covered

**Space:** Classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** A ball of yarn

**Time:** 10 minutes

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Ask the peer support students to stand in a circle. Hold up a ball of yarn and ask: "What have you learned so far about the peer support program?". Students can answer when they are the ones holding the ball of yarn. The yarn should be thrown to a student who has not held it yet, while the person throwing it holds on to the yarn. Continue like this until everyone has gotten their turn - and the yarn has formed a net across the circle.

After this, you can reverse the exercise and start throwing the ball back, following the yarn and wrapping it back into the ball. You can change the question and ask, for example: "What other things would you like to learn about the peer support program and being a peer support student?"

It would be good to write the responses down, so that you can return to them if needed.

## Part 2: Enforcing a positive atmosphere (3 x 45 minutes)

### The goal is for the peer support students to:

- To clarify the role of a peer support student in promoting a positive atmosphere through small actions in the school
- Provide the peer support students with the tools and courage they need to encounter other students in the school
- Strengthen the peer support students' emotional and interaction skills
- Strengthen the peer support students' understanding on how they can, in a concrete manner, support and improve the wellbeing of students in the school and build the school's overall atmosphere.

In this section, discuss in groups about the different events and functions that peer support students could implement for the whole school community. Also talk about how to encounter individual students, prevent bullying, and the interaction and emotional skills that are needed to carry out these functions.

**S**chool atmosphere matters. If there is a general habit in the school to speak to others in a rude manner or form clicks, many students will feel that they have to watch their back in the school, so to speak. It is hard to do things differently if you feel like you're alone.

We can take active and purposeful steps to build a positive atmosphere and a general sense of belonging in the school environment. Building a culture of greeting other people in a friendly manner is a great first step. Different kinds of participatory activities and events are also a great way to cheer up the school atmosphere, and a way to bring students, peer support students and the school adults to work together. Within study groups a more personal grouping might be a good approach. This can include doing fun and participatory activities and icebreakers together to facilitate getting to know each other. Doing field trips and outings together is also a great way to support bonding. Joyful and positive experiences create fun memories, which builds a safe and accepting atmosphere.

**Interaction and emotional skills.** Peer support students have access to several exercises related to respectful conversations, interaction and emotional skills, empathy and thoughtful behavior. These can be used to prompt students to discuss together how positive interactions can be increased and improved in the school and on interaction media.

**Engaging with individuals and including everyone.** One job of a peer support student is to approach those students who appear lonely. This means that a peer support student has to have courage and the ability to take initiative, show compassion, and have the willingness to be friendly towards other students. Peer support students practice interaction and emotional skills and empathy. One important part of empathy skills is the ability to listen and to show to the other person that they are being listened to through language and gestures.

Peer support students can use the exercises and assignments to pass on the skills they are learning in peer support training to other students. Peer support students can also use their own example to demonstrate that no one's background, ethnicity or physical appearance should hinder their ability to be included. Activities are planned in a way that make it easy and effortless for everyone to participate.

The grounding idea of a peer support program is that we are all alike in some ways and different in other ways, but that we work together and act friendly and kind towards each other.

When talking with the peer support students, it is always advisable to reflect on the culture in your own school environment: do people usually greet each other, and do students and teachers have conversations with each other? What if a student wants to get to know new people - who should they approach about this? This chapter provides some ideas on topics to discuss alongside the exercises.



**To prevent bullying** peer support students can observe situations during recess. It is the job of an adult to step in if bullying does happen, and that's why a peer support student will tell an adult if they do observe bullying taking place. A peer support student can still have many tools at their disposal in a bullying situation. They can, for example, approach the student who is being bullied and ask that student to come with them. They can tell the person doing the bullying that what they are doing is not nice, and that they should stop. In class social media groups or messaging chains, they can calmly ask the other person to stop, if someone is using hurtful or discriminatory language. They can also do their best to give constructive replies to prejudice comments. In the case of racism or hate speech online, they can also report the person in the police online tip service, or to the company/authority maintaining the social media service in question.

## The structures of your own school

**Student welfare collaboration.** Plan beforehand how you are going to talk to your peer support students about the student welfare services in your school, and in which situations those services could be most helpful. How can a peer support student direct another student to these services and where can they find the guidance counselor, school nurse and school psychologist? Also tell the peer support students that they can walk the other student to the right office for the right services, or just advise them on how to find the right person.

**Community structures.** What needs to be taken into account in this year's annual planning? For example: is the school functioning in a temporary space, how does a comprehensive school work as a community, different changes that might be taking place and influencing the day-to-day life and routines in the school.

## Ideas from different schools on how to promote a positive atmosphere

### The charging station

Any student can come to the charging station to charge their phone, or just to hang out. The charging station can be maintained by peer support students, the student association or teachers.

### Peer support student meet-up or peer support student cafe

This can be implemented for example once a week in a jointly agreed upon location. Anyone can come to play board games, drink coffee, and meet the peer support students. These are also great opportunities for informing students about different topics or to organise short info sessions, questionnaires or quizzes about, for example, bullying, interaction and emotional skills, wellbeing, anti-racism, equality, internet use and respectful encounters online.

### Greeting recess

At a "greeting recess" all students greet each other and the school staff. Peer support students can model the behavior and act as an example.

### Game recess

Game recess includes organised communal games and playing that everyone can take part in. It is also okay to play age appropriate digital games with peer support students during game recess.

### Peer support student morning greetings

Peer support students meet students at the main doors in the morning, open the door, greet them and welcome them to the school.

### Small kind acts -day

These are regularly implemented theme days during which peer support students pay particular attention to other students by smiling, greeting and chatting with them, or sending positive notes to others. All students and school staff are encouraged to participate in small kind acts throughout the day.

### "Letkajenkka" (bunny hop dance) for the whole school

Form a line that includes the whole school either outside or in the gym hall. Play the traditional "letkajenkka" song in the school speaker system. Teachers should join too! Letkajenkka is a traditional Finnish dance that resembles the "bunny hop" dance. People form a line and hold the person in front of them from the shoulders or waist during the dance.

## Warmup: Things that make you feel good

**Goal:** To pay attention to positive things

**Exercise:** Think about things that have recently made you feel good

**Space:** Classroom, hall or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 5–10 minutes

Ask the students to line up according to their hair color: the students with the lightest/blondest hair will go to the left, darkest to the right. Give the students a minute or two to think about things that have made them feel good or positive over the last week. After that, each student will pair up with the student next to them and spend two minutes coming up with as many things as possible that make you feel good. At the end, count how many things each pair was able to come up with. After this, have the students think about ways in which students and staff could make each other feel good and positive during school days. What kind of actions or things could help spread positivity in the school on a regular school day?

## Hurtful behavior in school and online

**Goal:** To recognise hurtful behavior

**Exercise:** A line exercise

**Space:** Classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 15 minutes

Tell the students that there is an imaginary line that goes through the space you are in. Tell them that you will be presenting them with statements about school and online environments, and skills needed in these environments, one by one.

Ask the students to find their place on the imaginary line based on what their opinion is about the statements: one end of the line is “totally agree” and the other end is “totally disagree”. Students who are not sure how they feel, or don’t want to share their opinion, can then stay around the middle of the imaginary line. Every student will pick a spot on the line that best represents their views on the issue. Remind the students that there are no right or wrong answers to the statements. After each statement, you can ask the students to share their thoughts on where they are standing on the line, and about the statement.

### Statements:

- It is easy to be yourself in school.
- It is easy to be yourself on social media.
- Things that happen online are present and visible in the school too.
- Bullying in school is connected to online bullying.
- Bullying or hurtful behavior online is very common among young people.
- I have witnessed bullying or hurtful behavior regarding students in our school.
- There is at least one adult in school who could help if a student from our school faced bullying online.
- As a peer support student, I could help a student if I saw them being mistreated online.

## Exercises

- We can do small acts of kindness towards other people online.

Tell the students that online bullying can be addressed by notifying the admins of the social media platform in question about inappropriate behavior. Bullying is rarely confined just online or just in school. It is important to share these instances with adults so that hurtful behavior can be stopped together. In the school, adults are responsible for addressing and stopping bullying when it happens. It is important for peer support students to always share it with the adults in school if they witness bullying or mistreatment of others. They can also step in to support the student who is being targeted. Based on a survey administered by MLL, one of the most helpful things to a young person who is being targeted or bullied is to have someone else approach them and talk to them, sit with them, or send them messages of encouragement. In general, it is always a good idea to step in and do something when you witness hurtful behavior or bullying.

## Making sure no one is lonely

**Goal:** To pay attention to hurtful situations in the school and recognise the opportunities for peer support students to support a student who has been left outside / alone

**Exercise:** Showcase still images from everyday life in the school, practice putting yourself in someone else’s shoes and finding solutions

**Space:** Classroom, hall or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 30 minutes

Divide the students in small groups and give each group a scene to present. The groups will present a scene related to everyday life in the school or online as a still image. The scene will include a problem that peer support students can help with. A still image means that the students will position themselves in a way that represents the scene given to them. No one speaks during the presentation. If you want, other students can try to guess what the scene is about.

### Scenes:

- A student who is starting in the school mid-year arrives in the school yard. No one greets the student.
- During recess one 7th grader is always standing next to the wall. No one ever speaks to this student.
- Two students are always picking on a third student, but they are trying to mask their behavior as joking.
- Two students are criticising a third student because of his/her looks.
- Some students took a picture of another students without permission, and they are now making fun of the picture.
- A teacher asks a question. One student wants to raise their hand, but they don’t feel comfortable doing so because another student is staring at them in a derisive manner.

### Group assignment

Present your scene to the other students as a still image. One student will play the individual who is being bullied/



who is alone, and others will play the other students/ individuals related to the scene.

Ask each student to think what the person they are playing might be feeling and thinking. Go through the scenes that were presented to the groups. The instructor touches each character one by one. The character then shares what they are thinking and feeling. The instructor can ask more questions. With each scene, discuss what peer support students could do in that particular situation. What would you say to the people in the scene? At the end, the group can use the solution that they came up with to create a new, positive still image of the original scene they portrayed.

#### **Discuss:**

- What are the kinds of situations where you would feel comfortable and natural approaching a student who seems lonely to you?
- Why is it sometimes difficult to step in when you see bullying?
- Are there things that can be done to make it easier to step in and do something?
- Have you noticed what kinds of things are already being done in your school to make sure that no one is

left outside or feels alone? What about from the side of teachers?

**i** Watch the video “Yksin” (Alone in English) from the MLL Youtube channel.

Remind the students that peer support students are not expected to solve bullying situations in their school, but that they should always try to intervene and step in when it's possible. A peer support student can take small actions to show a student who is being left outside or bullied that they are on the student's side. It would be great if the peer support students would keep the bullied student company and invite them to join activities as much as possible. Peer support students should always tell adults about bullying when they see it happening, or if they notice that a student is left outside.

## What should you do if you notice bullying happening?

**Goal:** Practice identifying bullying.

**Exercise:** Carry out a test related to bullying

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Phones or school computers/tablets

**Time:** 15 minutes

Administer the “What should you do if you notice bullying?” -test, available at Nuortennetti, [nuortennetti.fi/testit](http://nuortennetti.fi/testit). After everyone has taken the test, have a discussion and ask the students to share what thoughts they had while doing it. Tell the students how student welfare services can assist with bullying situations in your school, and who are the grownups that students can approach if they notice bullying happening.

## Welcoming the student who is switching schools

**Goal:** To think about different ways in which peer support students can notice a student who is switching schools mid-year

**Exercise:** Familiarise yourselves with the guidance on how to welcome a student who is changing schools mid year.

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** If the school has an existing guidance on how to welcome a new student arriving mid-year, have it available

**Time:** 10 minutes

Familiarise yourselves with the guidance on how to welcome a student who is switching schools midyear. If the guidance doesn't exist, have a discussion about the protocols and procedures in your school for when a new student arrives. How could the existing protocols be improved? Write down the ideas and ask the principle if some of the ideas can be implemented.

### Discuss:

- Why can switching schools midyear be hard on a student in practice? (Maybe they have completed different courses in the old school than what the new school offers, they have to re-organise their class schedule, they have to get to know new students, learn new rules, the space is unfamiliar, and so forth)
- If you had to switch schools midyear, what kind of a welcome would you wish for in your new school?

When you switch schools midyear, you may be going through other changes in your life at the same time. For example, moving to a new house/town, or having been sick because of indoor air quality issues in the old school. That's why it's important that the new student gets off to a good start in their new school. New friends always make it easier to get comfortable in a new school, and the peer support students can facilitate the process of the newcomer meeting the other students - for example through grouping activities.

## Suggestion: Welcoming a student switching schools midyear

Many students who switch schools in the middle of the school year would really like to have another student to show them around the new school. It's a good idea to have an understanding and agreement in the school that when a new student is arriving midyear, the principal or assistant principal notifies the peer support student instructor about the arrival. The instructor will assign 1-2 peer support students to meet and greet with the new student, for example in the following manner:

- **Tour of the school:** The selected peer support students will take the new student on a tour around the school (cafeteria, gym, school nurse's office, guidance counsellor's office, principal's office).
- **Grouping of a study group:** Peer support students organise a grouping lesson in the classroom as soon as possible after the new student has arrived (so that the new student can learn everyone's names, and so forth). The peer support students have jointly decided in the beginning of the school year which grouping and icebreaker games will be implemented whenever a new student joins a class midyear. Agree together which class the peer support students could join to implement the games and exercises.
- **Follow-up:** Once it's been a week since the new student arrived, a peer support student will approach them to ask how they are doing.
- **Greeting:** A specific peer support is assigned to purposefully greet the new student regularly throughout the year, and offers them help if needed.

In addition to the peer support students, a class teacher will also agree with a few students who are of the same age as the new student, that they will keep the new student company during the first weeks.



## Interaction and emotional skills -quiz

**Goal:** To understand what interaction and emotional skills are

**Exercise:** To administer the quiz

**Space:** Classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Pen and paper, or if you administer the quiz through Nuortennetti website, students' phones or school computers

**Time:** 20 minutes

Share the basic concepts of interaction and emotional skills. Then have the students take the quiz at

→ [nuortennetti.fi/testit](https://nuortennetti.fi/testit)

Tell the students that interaction and emotional skills refer to skills related to relationships and your emotional life. Emotional skills include recognising and labeling your own feelings and emotions as well as processing them and understanding what emotions other people might be going through. Active listening and conversation skills also helps the students with being able to get along with different kinds of people.

Interaction skills include listening, taking turns, describing your own needs, abiding by common rules and agreements, and respecting others.

Being able to identify and label your own emotions is the foundation of emotional skills. You can practice identifying your own emotions by, for example, naming your emotions, narrating them and accepting different emotions. Identifying your emotions makes it easier to control your own behavior, and to understand the behavior of other people.

Being empathetic means that you are able to see things from another person's perspective and feel compassion. Empathy can be learned by, for example, putting yourself in another person's shoes and by trying to analyse what the other person is feeling and thinking in different situations.

### Discuss:

- How did the quiz make you feel?
- What do you think about your result from the quiz?
- Is there anything that you were unsure about or wondering about regarding the quiz?
- Why is being able to control your own emotions beneficial? For example, why is it important to be able to manage your emotions when you are upset or disappointed?

## Listening exercise

**Goal:** To understand what it feels like when you are being listened to versus not being listened to

**Exercise:** Sharing and listening exercise

**Space:** Classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 20 minutes

Share the following background with the students:

Empathy refers to a person's ability to understand what someone else is feeling, and the ability to put yourself in another person's position. Empathy can be expressed, for example, through a compassionate look, through words and gestures, or through consoling, encouraging and supporting someone else.

Divide the participants into pairs. The exercise is divided into three sections. First, the pairs will think of a situation or a story from their own lives, but they won't share it with their partner yet. The story should take them one minute or less to tell.

Then the pair decides who is the storyteller and who is the listener. Each section will be done twice, so that both people can do both roles and share their stories. Set a timer for one minute to ensure you stay on schedule.

### Sections:

1. The storyteller shares their story. The other person does not listen at all. The listener can be using their mobilephone, drawing, looking out the window etc. There should be no yelling or disruptive behavior.
2. The storyteller tells their story. The other person steals the story for themselves. For example, if the storyteller is sharing a story about their grandma's strawberry fields, the listener will start talking on top of them and telling their own story about their own grandma. The story that the "listener" is talking about should somehow be similar to that of the storyteller.
3. The storyteller shares their story and the other person listens with attention and is interested.

### Discuss:

After each section, ask how the listener's behavior made the storyteller feel. Have you experienced this in real life - someone not listening to you, or stealing your story? Have you experienced someone properly listening to you and paying attention to you?

Share the following in the end:

Non-verbal communication that promotes positive interactions between people can be described with the English word "soften". Non-verbal gestures that soften interactions can include making friendly facial expressions, open association position, warm look, a touch, an accepting nod, and leaning towards the person you're discussing with. (S = smile, O = open, F = forward, T = touch, E = eye, N = nod). Understanding the principle of "soften" is a great skill for the storyteller and the listener. Tell the students that being "open" towards someone also refers to being open to listening to their thoughts and opinions. Leaning "forward" also means meeting another person half way, for example when there has been a disagreement.



You can test what it looks like if a person first takes a position that makes them easily approachable (you can do this yourself, or select a couple of volunteers). Smile, make sure your hands are not aggressively crossed, turn towards your listener, touch their shoulder, look them in the eye and nod. What does the opposite of this look like? What if the person has a dismissive look on their face and doesn't look the other person in the eye? What if they turn away with their hands crossed in front of their body? If you have a volunteer who modeled all these options, thank them by shaking their hand and looking them in the eye.

Take some time to discuss the conflict between words and the facial expressions we make. What would it tell the listener if the storyteller is smiling but also hissing angry words? What if you say something polite, but give the other person a look of contempt? Ask every student to think 1-2 things that were addressed during this exercise that they could pay more attention to in their own behavior in future interactions with other people.

## Bypassers

**Goal:** To understand the meaning of non-verbal communication, gestures and facial expressions

**Exercise:** To practice making eye contact and polite gestures

**Space:** Classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 10 minutes

Ask the peer support students to walk around the classroom. Give them instructions on how they should be encountering the bypassers. For example:

- Stare at the floor, don't pay any attention to the other students (but don't bump into them).
- Look at a bypasser briefly, but quickly turn your eyes back on the floor.
- Make eye contact with a bypasser and smile to them.
- Make eye contact with a bypasser and nod as a hello.
- Make eye contact with a bypasser, shake their hand and introduce yourself.

### Discuss:

- What did it make you feel like when others were turning their face away? Would it have been easy to approach them?
- What did it feel like when someone made eye contact and nodded?
- What kind of a person is easily approachable? How do body positions, facial expressions and gestures have an impact on how we perceive other people?
- What benefits does it have for a peer support student to be perceived as easily approachable?
- Have you noticed that how you act and behave yourself has an impact on how other people perceive you and treat you?

Tell the students that if what you are saying is in conflict with your facial expressions and gestures, people will rely and trust your facial expressions and gestures more. Remind the students that small acts (gestures, eye contact, smile, saying hello) can make others feel better. And when someone smiles back at you, that in turn makes you feel better.

## Final exercise: Handing out positive feedback

**Goal:** To strengthen a positive self-image

**Exercise:** Give positive feedback

**Space:** Classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Cardboard or paper, pens

**Time:** 10 minutes

Give each student a premade empty card. You can cut them in heart shapes if you want. Each student writes their name on the card, and then the cards are passed around. Everyone writes positive feedback or praise on each card, related to the person whose name is on the card. The instructor will also participate with their own card. The purpose is to practice giving positive feedback. Knowing how to do this is an important part of interaction and emotional skills and creating a positive atmosphere in the school.





## Part 3: Instructing and encouraging a group (3 x 45 minutes)

### The goal is for the peer support students to:

- Understand what a safe group looks like
- Understand why it's beneficial to do grouping in classrooms and study groups
- Practice guiding and leading a game or exercise
- Familiarise themselves with the Buddy Class concept

In this part, the peer support students will do easy and simple grouping exercises and discuss why grouping is a necessary activity. Students think about what makes a good group and what kind of roles promote the group's functionality. Peer support students get to practice leading exercises.

**everyone's own study group** means a lot to a student. They spend a lot of time with those peers and friends, and therefore the atmosphere of the group matters a lot. In a safe group each student feels valued and appreciated and are comfortable participating and making mistakes without the fear of being made fun of.

Groups aren't automatically safe. If the students don't properly get to know each other, there may be prejudice, bullying, and leaving someone out of the group. The experience of being an outcast and an outsider can have serious consequences for a young person. Anxiety, depression and feelings of hopelessness are very straining, and can lead to exhaustion and marginalisation.

Peer support students support the grouping in a classroom by leading exercises and games that facilitate this process. Once everyone knows their classmates, working together becomes much easier. Grouping is useful





throughout the year, but it is especially important at the beginning of 7th grade and each time when new classes and new study groups are commencing their schoolwork. In addition, peer support students can plan and implement short grouping sessions for example during recess and help students to get to know each other. Grouping is particularly beneficial for those students who are too shy or reserved to take steps to get to know other students on their own. When everyone makes sure that no one is left alone, bullying is also decreased. Grouping exercises are meant to also produce fun, positive shared experiences among students.

A “Buddy Class” refers to a class or a study group that has been assigned to a peer support student pair or peer support student group for them to visit the class regularly throughout the school year, implementing grouping exercises or talking about different themes like interaction skills or media education.

In this section, the peer support students will familiarise themselves with the concept of grouping, and receive concrete tips on how to do it. It is important that the peer support students get a chance to practice these skills and leading games in real life as soon as possible after this training. This can be done during recess.

If part 3 is implemented at the beginning of day 2 during a two day training, take a moment to first discuss what the students remember from day 1. Then go over today’s schedule and program.

## Warmup: We are many

**Goal:** To strengthen self esteem

**Exercise:** Talk about yourself with the help of cards.

The goal is for students to recognise their own strengths and to talk about their qualities that they might not otherwise share with others

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Three types of cards: The cards for different themes should be printed on different colored paper and cut out (annex 6). Copy enough cards so that each student gets a card from each theme

**Time:** 20 minutes

Tell the students that we all have our own strengths, qualities and skills. There are no two exactly identical people in the world, and no one is exactly like you. Each person is unique.

Then tell the students that this exercise is about different qualities and strengths. Give each student three different colored cards (one per theme). The participants can exchange cards amongst themselves so that at the end, each student is holding cards that they feel represent themselves. You can only exchange a card for another card of that same color.

The themes of the cards are: Me and other people / Personality traits / Skills.

Unpack the exercise: every student reads the cards they are holding out loud, if they want to. They can also share how the word in a particular card is relevant to them and their life. You can also continue the exercise by having each student choose a card that has a trait or a skill that they hope to work on and strengthen. At the end, tell the students that it’s great to have a group of peer support students who demonstrate such a wide variety of strengths and skills. All kinds of skills and knowledge is needed and everyone has the chance to also learn something new.

## Paper towers or spaghetti-marshmallow structures

**Goal:** To familiarise the students with different roles in a group

**Exercise:** Work in small groups towards a shared goal: building a paper tower or a spaghetti-marshmallow structure

**Space:** Classroom or a similar space, with tables

**Materials:** Sheets of paper or spaghetti and marshmallows

**Time:** 20 minutes

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Tell the students that people can have different roles in a group. For example, someone might be the hardworking student in school, at home they might be the moody or helpful teenager, and with their friends they might be known as the funny one.

Tell the students that this exercise tests group work skills.

Divide the peer support students in groups of 4 or 5. The goal of the group is to use 15 sheets of paper (they don't have to use all the sheets) to build a structure that is as high and nice as possible. You can't rip the papers, break them, glue them, tape them, etc. You can only fold them. You also cannot prop up the sheets of paper (with your hand, a pen, etc). You have to set them on an even surface (table, floor). Give them 5–10 minutes for building. After the building, compare the different structures, the different building styles, the height and style. At the end, each group can blow down their structure.

Students can also use marshmallows and spaghetti to build their structure.

### Discuss:

- What did it feel like to build the tower?
- Did all the group members participate in building the tower? If not - why not?
- How did the division of labor happen in your group? Was there one person who was leading the exercise? Was there someone who took the lead with ideating?
- What motivated you to keep going if the tower fell down?

Go over the different roles in a group. Make a PPT slide or write on a flap board:

Suggestion maker, Leader, The one who asks questions, The critical one, The one who encourages others, The one who keeps up the positive atmosphere, The hardworking one, The mediator, The funny one, The one who hits the breaks, The one who wants all the attention, The competitive one, The outsider. The one who is not interested.

### Discuss:

- What kind of a role did you notice yourself taking during the building task? Was it something that you usually do, or did you take this particular role just on this specific assignment?
- What kinds of roles promote and improve group work? Which roles are self centered and disruptive to group work?
- How can you facilitate group work?

One person can have many different roles in different groups. A group can also go through a variety of different phases, for example:

In the forming phase group members are often a bit shy about each other, and you need to take some time for everyone to get to know each other better.

In the storming phase group members may demonstrate criticism towards the group assignment, group leader or being a member of the group. Sometimes people might blame a group member about the negative atmosphere, even though the reason behind the dysfunction is often related to problems in group cooperation.

In the performing phase the group finds their “We-spirit” - but at this stage, differing opinions are often still not accepted.

In the adjourning phase there is space for new ideas, and the group members understand that sometimes there will be conflicts, but that those can always be resolved

At the final phase the group members start thinking about detaching from the group and functioning outside of the group.

### Workbook exercise for an optional subject class

Group roles. Have the students think about this by themselves and write down in the peer support student workbook:

What is my role in a classroom?

In a hobby group?

In a peer support student group?

What kind of a role do I want myself to have in different groups?

## Instructing games and exercises

**Goal:** To strengthen the peer support students' instruction skills

**Exercise:** Preparing for instructing games and exercises through discussions

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space, preferably a space with lots of floor space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 5–10 minutes

---

When you are talking about instructing and leading games, ground the discussion in examples. Use examples from instructing familiar games. Talk about why it is important to select the games based on the space you are using. Talk about feeling nervous and ask the students to share their experiences.

### Discuss:

- How do you prepare well for instructing a game?
- How can you ease your nerves?
- How can you prepare yourself for different kinds of participants? (for example: planning for rambunctious students, quiet students and those who don't listen to the rules)

Share the following instructions with the peer support students:

Instructions for the leader of the game:

1. Test out the game yourself before implementing it with others.

2. Get the participants to pay attention to you first, and show through gestures and body language that you are the one leading the game.
3. Explain the rules of the game.
4. Show that you are excited about the game to get others excited too.
5. Oversee the game.
6. Be consistent and fair.
7. End the game at the right time (have a clear idea in your own head beforehand what kinds of signs to watch out for to know when it's time to end the game).
8. Notice and pay attention to all the participants, also those who are "out" of the game.
9. At the end, have a conversation about the game with all the participants.
10. Thank everyone for participating.

**Space:** You should always confirm that you have a space available where the plays and games you're planning to implement can be carried out. For example, for participatory games and conversations, chairs should be placed in a circle instead of a regular classroom setup. Alternatively you can also sit on the floor or stand in a circle.

**Being nervous:** When you are instructing a game, it is normal to feel nervous. Keep in mind that you don't have to have every step memorised by heart. When you are instructing a game with a partner, you can talk and discuss, and agree that you will both help one another. Many people like to hold something in their hand for a sense of security, or take a position that is comfortable.

**Preparation:** Instructing a game goes smoothly when you have properly prepared for the situation and familiarised yourself with the game, the rules, and everything else that is relevant for the situation. Who will be there? How many participants? Is the teacher going to be there? What school rules should be taken into account (for example recess time)? Discuss beforehand what your backup plan is if the students have recently done the exact same assignment, or if the space is not what you expected. What if you forget the rules of the game - do you have a cheat sheet, or can your partner help you remember?

**Observing the group:** Tell the peer support students why it is important for them to observe the students who are participating in a game. They can encourage the more shy and quiet ones, and calm down the rambunctious students. The instructor will also ensure that all students get to participate and get their turn to speak.

If there is time, model the students how to instruct an icebreaker game. → [leikkipankki.fi/](http://leikkipankki.fi/)

As you are instructing the game, tell the students why you are making certain choices – for example, asking a student to model the game with you to others – or why you chose to end the game at a certain point.

## Preparing for a grouping game or exercise

**Goal:** To strengthen the peer support students' game instructor skills

**Exercise:** Plan a game/exercise in a group and learn to lead and instruct others

**Space:** A classroom or a similar time

**Materials:** Pen and paper

**Time:** 45 minutes (in four small groups)

Divide the students into groups of 4–6 people. Then give them an assignment to either plan a game or exercise that they will then share with the other students and lead the game for them. While the students are planning their game, you can share the following guidelines and tips:

- The game should last about 5-10 minutes.
- It should be a game that can be implemented indoors.
- It should be a game that can be implemented with, for example, 7th graders.
- The theme of the game can be related to getting to know new people or grouping.

Additionally, the group members can think about the following issues: Who/which students in the group will give instructions about the game to the others, and how are the instructions given? Does the game require materials (pens, paper, and so forth)? Use about 10 minutes for planning.

The groups will take turns to instruct the others about the game they came up with. After each game, you can take some time to talk about the situations that this game would be particularly suitable for, and whether there was anything about the game that could be problematic (for example, if a participant is out of the game in the very beginning, will that student then have to stand to the side and wait around, or can the game be altered so that participants wouldn't be out of the game at least during the first few minutes). Who could be the most excited participants in a game like this?

Give feedback to the instructors of each game: Did they convey the rules of the game clearly? Did they remember to look at the participants and make eye contact? Did they smile? Did they show that they were in charge of the situation? Did they clearly explain what the goal of the game is? Did they use a voice that was loud enough and clear? What was positive and good about how they instructed the game, and what could be improved further?

The feedback can be given verbally, or you can agree that each participant writes some positive feedback on a piece of paper. It's always nice to return to read those later.

If you don't have time to try out all the games during the exercise, you can look through all the peer support students' ideas and try them out in your next peer support student meeting. If the peer support student program is being implemented in your school as an optional class, it is advisable to use sufficient time on this section. Giving feedback to the instructors is an important part of the course.

## General guidelines for preparing a peer support student class

**Goal:** To prepare for peer support student classes

**Exercise:** To prepare for leading classes through discussion

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Pen and paper

**Time:** 10–15 minutes for discussion or 45 minutes for drafting a plan and sharing it with others

A successful lesson requires good preparation. When you've done your prep work, you don't have to be nervous and you can focus on the situation at hand.

This guidance and the schedule have been drafted with a 45-minute class in mind. Prepare the class with a partner in the following manner:

1. Theme: agree on a theme for the lesson (for example: grouping, media education or relaxation). Check out the relevant exercises at [mll.fi/tehtavakortit](http://mll.fi/tehtavakortit).
2. Pick three exercises or games of your choosing.
3. Message: write down 3–5 most important things that you want students to learn during your class. Think about how you want to share these with the students. What would you say? How would you demonstrate the issues through the games you picked?
4. Division of work and schedule: agree with your partner which parts each of you will explain and which exercises you will instruct. Write down your plan and have it with you when you are leading the class.

A class consists of:

**Beginning (2 minutes):** introduce yourselves and your theme. Explain why you are in the class.

**Warmup practice (5 minutes):** short fun exercise that will get the students excited and interested to listen to you.

**Knowledge and exercises (30–35 minutes):** Carry out 1–3 of the games and exercises you selected, depending on how fast the group can get through them. Share your message in between exercises and encourage discussion. Ask for opinions and experiences.

**Ending (3 minutes):** thank the participants, ask for feedback and ask the participants to reach out to you if they need advice or help from peer support students.

**Share with the students:** When you go to hold lessons in your Buddy Class, make sure a teacher approves your plan and agree on practical issues. Think beforehand what kinds of materials you will need, who will bring them to the class, and how to handle problematic situations. Agree with the teacher how you will unpack any issues that might arise during class. Have a feedback discussion by going over the following topics: What worked well during the peer support class? What should be done differently?

## Final exercise: The flower of differences

**Goal:** To get to know each other

**Exercise:** A group assignment that helps participants to get to know each other and notice how they are alike

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** pen and paper

**Time:** 15 minutes

Have the groups draw a flower with a center, and a flower petal for each member of the group. Ask them to think of three things that they all share and write those in the center of the flower. Each petal will have a name of a group member, and something related to that person that is different from what everyone else in the group has written on their own petal. Tell the participants that they can write things about their hobbies, their personality or things related to their work. Anything that they feel comfortable sharing.





## Section 4. Planning of activities (3 x 45 minutes)

### Our goal is that peer support students:

- Participate in the planning of the peer support program activities for the school year
- Go over things they learned during basic training
- Get excited about continuing as peer support students
- Agree with the instructor how they will maintain communications and get together to plan for their activities.

In the last part of the training, you will be planning for the peer support program activities in your own school. If the basic training of peer support students is a part of a lengthy optional course, part 4 should be implemented in the early stages of the training and could be done together with previous peer support students so that the new peer support students can join the activities in the fall.

**i** Even if the peer support student basic training is carried out by an MLL trainer, this section requires participation from the other adults that are part of guiding the peer support program in the school. They will know what kinds of activities and ideas are feasible to implement in their particular school.

Peer support programs are about joy, fun moments, and shared experiences of doing things together. Through joint planning and executing their plans, the peer support students make a commitment to their work, and the excitement is maintained. It facilitates the planning if the previous peer support students have put together a peer support student folder, i.e. written down things they have done and experiences they have had. In addition to a physical folder, it is also a good idea to put things in online folders where the files are easy to keep and share for future use. This is a great way to maintain traditions, and share ideas and tips of lessons learned and good practices. When planning for activities, it is also advisable to pay attention to the annual routines of peer support program. Additionally, peer support students can

come up with themes and events that they are interested in or ones that are relevant to the school.

You should always be brave with the ideation process, try new things and ask ideas from other students and the adults in the school. Usually peer support students have lots of ideas that make for great events. Part of planning things together is also knowing where to draw limits. The instructor's responsibility is to manage excitement: sometimes, you need to activate and excite students - but sometimes, you also need to make sure that the activities are not too draining on the peer support students, or hindering their school work.

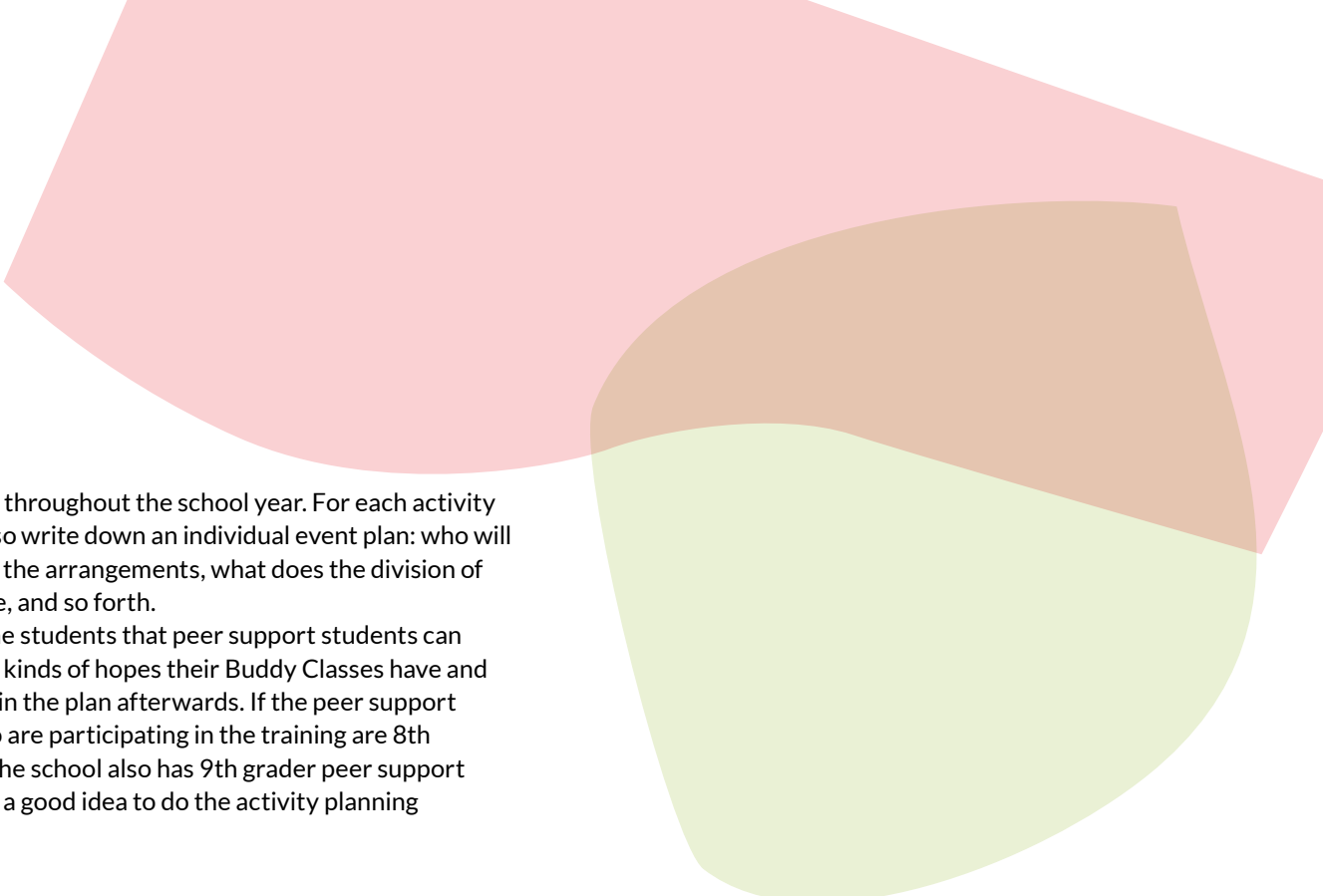
There are two levels to planning a peer support program:

**1. Small everyday things:** Greeting people, friendly behavior and including everyone are things that do not take time away from other schoolwork and that are easy to model for other students. When drafting the action plan, talk about what you can do to remind yourselves to do these things throughout the school year. For example:

- A campaign: Peer support students greet everyone -campaign (to make greeting into a habit)
- A place: A peer support student couch or cafe
- Things to do: recess activities
- There to help and to meet others: peer support students handing gum to others after lunch
- Noticing people's problems: talking to lonely students. If someone seems troubled, peer support students can direct them to the school counsellor. They can tell the teachers if they witness bullying or if a student seems to always be quiet in class, maybe because they are being mistreated.
- Paying attention to younger and newer students: noticing students who join the school in the middle of the school year and noticing students in your own Buddy Class.

**2. Events and theme weeks.** There will be lots of interesting opportunities throughout the year. You should pick the ones that excite and interest the students the most, or the ones that are important for maintaining and improving the school atmosphere. Events and theme weeks can be organised on a smaller scale, and when planning them it is important to make sure that no one is lonely or left outside. Tasks should be divided evenly, and everyone should be included in the activities.

Tell the peer support students that in this section of the training, the idea is to make a first draft of the action plan where you write down all the activities and events you want



to implement throughout the school year. For each activity and event, also write down an individual event plan: who will participate in the arrangements, what does the division of labor look like, and so forth.

Also tell the students that peer support students can find out what kinds of hopes their Buddy Classes have and update them in the plan afterwards. If the peer support students who are participating in the training are 8th graders and the school also has 9th grader peer support students, it is a good idea to do the activity planning together.

## Ideas for a plan of action

- **Buddy Class activities.** Peer support students work in pairs or in small groups as “Buddies” for 7th graders. In a comprehensive school, you can also select a Buddy Class among the primary school grades. The Buddy Classes are chosen during the previous spring from the same school, or from other schools nearby.
- **Declaration of school peace takes place each year in August.** The national event is live streamed, and you can watch it in school. The school or the area can also arrange their own school peace -event, and peer support students can participate in the planning and implementation. The school peace event reminds everyone that student wellbeing in school depends on many small things, and that everyone who is a part of the school environment is responsible for making sure their school is a safe and welcoming space. Read more at [www.koulurauha.fi](http://www.koulurauha.fi)
- **Recess activities.** Unfortunately, bullying during recess happens quite often. Recess time can also be very painful for lonely students. Peer support students can do a lot to work on this issue, for example by organising joint activities during recess that all students can participate in. Peer support students can establish a group to ideate, plan and implement recess activities.
- **Grouping.** It is easier for students to feel well and focus on their studies if they don't have to worry about things like whether they will be accepted in a group, if they can share their opinions, or what kind of behavior is expected of them. Peer support students can help with grouping a study group. Participatory activities, icebreakers and games guided by peer support students can facilitate cooperation and help students get to know each other. It is important to carry out grouping activities throughout the school year to increase team spirit, and to bring students to be a part of their class and school communities. The composition and interaction relationships in a group are often fluctuating throughout the year.
- **Friendship week.** Friendship week is a local week when children and youth practice friendship skills and being considerate towards their peers. Friendship week offers the opportunity for lots of fun activities, but it doesn't have to be anything large scale or time consuming. Activities can be small scale, like friendship challenges or peer support classes that focus on friendship themes. Friendship week can be celebrated whenever it best fits in your school's schedule.
- **Young people's voices at parent nights.** Peer support students can join the parent night to talk about a theme like the results of the welfare questionnaire administered at the school, or youth media habits.
- **A letter to the student welfare group.** Peer support students can send a letter to the student welfare group, introducing them to the concept of the peer support program.



## Warmup: Fill-in sentences

**Goal:** To pull together all the things learned at the course

**Exercise:** To go over things that you have learned with a partner

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Music

**Time:** 10 minutes

### Exercises

Walk around the classroom with music playing. When the music stops, find a pair. Have a conversation with your partner based on a beginning of a sentence that has been given to you. You can also come up with new sentence beginnings. In the end, briefly go over what was discussed if the students want to share what they talked about. Also use this time to talk about the things that have already been covered in the training, and what the participants have learned. Ask them if there is anything else they can think of that would be important to cover before wrapping up the peer support student training.

Sentence beginnings:

- I am good at...
- As a peer support student, I want to...
- In this training I have learned...
- I would still like to learn about...
- I still have questions related to the peer support student program, and they are about...
- The best thing about the peer support student program is...

## What would you do?

**Goal:** To notice that the activities done by peer support students make a difference

**Exercise:** To think about solutions to problematic situations where peer support student's help is needed

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 20 minutes

Divide the participants into a few groups of the same size. One group leaves the room. The others will think about a problematic scenario related to the peer support program or the school environment. Invite the group who left the room back inside. The group's assignment is to guess what the problematic situation is. Tell them that they can ask the other groups for hints only by using the sentence: "What would you do?". The other groups share possible solutions to the problem they came up with. The group whose hint helps the guessing group come up with the right answer gets to be the group doing the guessing in the next round. If the students have a hard time coming up with examples, here are a few suggestions:

1. Some students and teachers in your school are not aware of who the peer support students are.
2. The peer support students are holding a class and two students are acting in a disruptive manner
3. The school established a social media group for the students, but some students are using hurtful language in the group

4. Two students have to study at home, because they got symptoms from indoor air pollution. They are feeling lonely.
5. Students have ideas about recess activities, but teachers are not aware of these ideas.

After each guess, you can take time to evaluate the suggested solutions. Which ones are sensible, fair or clever? Are some suggestions questionable? Why?

## Brainstorming

**Goal:** To get students excited about the peer support program

**Exercise:** To ideate activities and familiarise yourselves with a past activity

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** The folder left from previous peer support students, and/or a big space to write (whiteboard/chalkboard), or paper and pens

**Time:** 35 minutes

First, take some time to remind yourselves about the things that the previous peer support students have done. If you have folders from previous years, use those. Then give the students 5 minutes to write ideas on the board or on paper about activities and events they want to implement. All ideas are good ideas at this stage. After this, read the ideas out loud. If there is a new idea that not everyone is familiar with, let the person who came up with that idea explain it to others.

It is common that during this ideation session, students will come up with big events and activities that require a lot of prep work. Also take time to think about the small actions and events that can be implemented to promote a positive atmosphere in the school, and how the peer support students should act when a new student joins the school, or if they notice that someone is always the outsider during recess.

**Tip:** During section 1, you wrote down "Goals for peer support student program in our school" - take those notes out and see what you had written down.



## Making an annual activity plan

**Goal:** To ensure that the peer support program activities carry out through the whole school year

**Exercise:** To make your own peer support student annual activity plan

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Pen and paper

**Time:** 45 minutes

Based on the previous exercise, start putting together an annual plan. The plan should be drafted on paper or in an electronic format, so that it is easy to always have it at hand and also revise it and add to it as the year progresses.

The annual activity plan can be made in a month-to-month format, or in the format of an annual clock. After it has been drafted, take a look at the whole picture: are the activities listed proportionate to the size of the peer support student group and the time that is available?

Select 1–6 ideas through a vote that you start developing further. The ideas can be results from the previous exercise, or things that have been thought out before. At least one of the ideas should focus just on the peer support students, for example grouping of the peer support students, spring potluck, etc. As you are finetuning the idea, you should start getting into the nitty gritty details. If the idea at hand is, for example, grouping of the 7th graders, think about possible games and exercises that can be implemented with them, or if you're planning a theme day, think about the different workstations that could be included. At this point, nothing is written in stone and plans can change.

For fine tuning the ideas, you can make a copy of the annual action plan form for each group from the peer support student workbook, or the groups can just write their ideas on paper.

Write down at least following things:

1. **Goals:** What are the goals of your peer support student group? For one school year, you should list approximately three goals. During the school year, you can usually implement a few events, one of which is usually a bigger thing like a theme week. Remember: school work and studying are the first priorities!
2. **Measures:** What kinds of measures are required to reach these goals? Measures don't always have to be big events or theme weeks. They can include things like being alert and perceptive during recess, if the goal is to create a safe school environment.
3. **Who:** You should implement some division of labor within the peer support student group. For example, all peer support students don't have to act as Buddies for 7th graders. You should also write down potential collaboration partners and the people in charge of each activity: a peer support student pair should have primary responsibility for the task.
4. **Where?** What are the spaces where peer support activities are implemented? Is the task to implement guided classes for 7th graders in their own classroom, recess activities for the whole school, or an adventure day in a nearby adventure park?
5. **When?** In this column, you will form the peer support student annual action plan for the school year. In the

autumn semester you should implement one or two activities, and same for the spring semester. Also pay attention to the resources available from the peer support student instructor, exam weeks and basic annual activities, like selecting new peer support students and welcoming the incoming 7th graders in the school.

6. **Help.** What kind of help do you need? Do you need materials, printouts, or are you inviting external speakers and visitors? Where can you turn to for help? What kind of collaboration are you planning to do, for example with the student association?
7. **Communications:** how will you share information with the school? (If you are running short on time, this column can be left empty at this stage, and you can return to it in a peer support student meeting after the training. See chapter X.)
8. **Evaluation:** How will you evaluate your activities? (If you are running short on time, this column can be left empty at this stage, and you can return to it in a peer support student meeting after the training. See chapter X)

Take a look at the Annual Planning Grid, Annex 1; and Annual Clock Model, Annex 2.

### Things to discuss:

**The principle of equality:** Are all the activities and situations related to the peer support program inclusive of everyone? Can everyone participate? Do some of the activities somehow underline loneliness for some students?

**Sense of community and shared responsibility:** How do the activities strengthen the sense of community? Can everyone participate in the preparations equally and take shared responsibility if they want to?

## The Tree of School Peace

**Goal:** To inspire students to do positive acts in school as part of everyday interactions

**Exercise:** Select some positive acts that everyone can do at school

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** The materials to make the Tree of School Peace printed out. Find them at [koulurauha.fi](http://koulurauha.fi).

**Time:** 15 minutes

The apples of the Tree of School Peace include small acts of kindness that everyone can implement at their school every day. Ask each student to pick 1-3 apples that have something written on them, that they can commit to doing - for example during the next week or month. You can put the apples on a shared tree, or you can let the students hold onto them to remind them of those good deeds and small acts of kindness.



## Final exercise: What were you left with?

**Goal:** To recap what you have learned.

**Exercise:** To go over the things students have learned, and what is left to still cover and learn after the training.

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 5–10 minutes

Recap what has been learned during the basic training. Ask the peer support students what they remember as the most important things from the training. Go back to the expectations and wishes that the students wrote down in the beginning of the training. Which ones were met? Which ones should be addressed later as part of the peer support program activities?

Agree on when the peer support students will have their next meeting, and how students will be notified about the meeting details.

Implement the following exercise:

Ask the peer support students to stand in line, facing the instructor. Make statements and ask the peer support students to take a step forward every time they agree with the statement.

Statements:

1. I have gotten to know the other peer support students better.
2. I know what is expected of me as a peer support student.
3. I feel like I can have an impact on the peer support program in our school.
4. I know our school's guidelines for preventing and stopping bullying.
5. I know what the next steps are to implement the peer support program in our school.
6. I know how to get in contact with the peer support student instructor.
7. I believe I will make a great peer support student.

At the end, see how many steps forward each person has taken. The instructor should take notice if there is a particular statement that most or many participants did not agree with. These observations should be brought back into the discussion in future peer support student meetings.

## Ending the training

When the peer support student training has been completed in your school, share the news with the school community. You could, for example, hand out the diplomas in a joint school event, or you could have cake and snacks during the last session of the training and invite the principal and guidance counselor to commemorate the milestone with you.

The basic training is just the beginning for functioning as a peer support student. Agree on the next meetups where you will start implementing all the plans you've made. Also remember to occasionally spontaneously ask feedback from the peer support students. You may be surprised by how meaningful this work is for the peer support students themselves.

**Have a happy school year!**

## What are the benefits of peer support programs?

"The peer support program helps the 7th graders to share their opinions more openly." - a peer support student

"Recess games. There should be even more of those, especially for younger students. Some events or competitions in groups." - 8th grader

"The peer support program saved my child. My child was a target of bullying and felt depressed. They are now feeling much better, and are happy to go to school because of all the exciting and fun things they get to do and be a part of as a peer support student, and because of being able to share their own ideas with the peer support student instructor." - a parent

Feedbacks gathered from an MLL questionnaire.



# Activities of a peer support group during a school year

The peer support student program is carried out through the school year. After the basic training, it is important to continue to do grouping with the older peer support students. When the old and new cohorts get to know each other, collaboration will be smoother.

Planning of activities, implementing them and evaluating them is carried out through the school year. This chapter includes some tips for how to share information about the activities and how to evaluate them. If the peer support program is an optional subject in your school, you can do these exercises during the course. Otherwise, you can use them as content during peer support student meetings.

## **i** Agree with the old and new peer support students on...

- How you will continue to keep in touch planning meetings for the whole school year.
- How they will act if they come up with a new idea for the peer support program: should they wait for the next meeting, should they send a message in a shared social media group, or should they approach the peer support student instructor directly.

## Grouping activities

When the new peer support students have been trained, you should do grouping exercises with the new students and the peer support students from the previous cohort. For example, when you start planning for the year's activities, include some grouping exercises in the mix. The purpose is to get all the participants to know each other better and give a positive experience about doing things together and being a member of the group.

When you are instructing the exercise, make sure that every participant gets noticed. Learn each other's names as part of the games and exercises. After the exercises, discuss how participating in the activities has felt. Here are some exercises to support bonding.

More game suggestions in Finnish at

→ [eikipankki.fi](https://eikipankki.fi)

→ [mll.fi/tehtavakortit](https://mll.fi/tehtavakortit)

## Three circles

**Goal:** To create a joyful and relaxed atmosphere

**Exercise:** Every student makes circles around a person of their choosing

**Time:** 5 minutes

Stand in a circle. Every person picks another person in the group, but doesn't let the others know who they picked (make the choice in your own head). Each student then has to do three circles around the person they chose. Everyone starts doing the exercise at the same time, and as fast as possible. Once you have completed the task, return to your own place in the circle.

### **Discuss:**

How did it feel like when everyone started moving at the same time? What kind of lessons could be drawn for doing things together? For example: if we don't clearly agree on our shared tasks and goals, everyone will start fussing about their own thing and the shared goal might be overlooked.



## When eyes meet

**Goal:** To get to know each other

**Exercise:** To look each other in the eye and switch places

**Time:** 5 minutes

Stand in a circle silently. Start looking the other participants in the eye, starting from your left side, going in order. The idea is that you pause to look at each person for a brief moment. If your eyes meet with another participant (if you look at each other at the same time), those two participants switch places silently. You can also do a variation of this exercise so that when you are switching places with another person, you will stop to meet them in the middle first, shake their hand and introduce yourself.

### Discuss:

Getting to know each other

- Do you remember everyone's names?
- Who did you get to know better during the exercises?
- What would you like to do together so that the peer support student group can get to know each other even better?
- How do you feel about the exercises?
- Which exercises did you enjoy?
- Was there an exercise you didn't like?
- Why is it important that participants are having fun and laughing together during the exercise?

### Applying the exercises in practice

- Which of the exercises you just tried could be used with the students in your Buddy Class?
- Can you think of alternative exercises and icebreakers that you would rather use?
- What kinds of exercises are best with a group of people who don't know each other?
- When you are instructing a grouping exercise, how can you ensure that no one is left outside?

### What is the benefit of grouping?

- What are the benefits of grouping to an individual student?
- What are the benefits to the whole class?
- Can grouping of students prevent bullying? Why? What is the basis of your argument?

Tell the participants that exercises that facilitate getting to know one another often involve learning each other's names and doing "ice breaking" activities. When you are playing together, you'll be making eye contact with others and helping other participants to introduce themselves to others. You'll often also talk with students who you might not approach otherwise. Icebreaker and grouping games are also about having fun. Laughing together creates positive interactions and can help to create a safer atmosphere in the group, which makes it easier for everyone to be themselves.

## Communications and visibility of the work

Peer support programs are most useful when other students, school staff and parents are aware of what the program is all about. When you are drafting a communications plan, in addition to informing the school community about activities you can also think about how information should be passed around within your group. This chapter offers some ideas on how to make sure that the school community is aware of and familiar with the peer support program.

### Drafting a communications plan

**Goal:** Making the peer support program known around the school

**Exercise:** Planning how to inform others about the peer support program and activities

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** The Peer Support Student Workbook for each participant, and paper and pens.

**Time:** 20 minutes

Bring out the annual activity plan you've put together. Split up into pairs or small groups so that each pair or group gets 1-2 of the activities that were included in the annual plan. Each pair/group will start planning communications around those activities. There are some supportive questions for this task in the Peer Support Workbook.

- What is the information you want to share?
- When should this information be shared?
- How and where will the information be shared?
- Who is the target audience?
- Who will do the informing?

When the groups have shared their plans, ask more specific questions. Add the specifications in the plans. Tell the participants that these plans made by the students will be used as the basis for communications throughout the year, and give positive feedback about the plans.

### Discuss:

Why is it important to demonstrate the peer support program to students, teachers and parents? What is the result if they are not aware of the program and activities? What kind of general information would you share about the peer support program? Talk about the kinds of issues and topics that require internal communications amongst the peer support student group, what kinds of things should be shared with classes, what should be shared with the entire school, and what information should be extended to parents.

**Tip:** Discuss the tone of your communications plans. Do they demonstrate the joy of doing? Do they make everyone feel welcomed?

## Staying in touch and visibility

**How do we reach each other?** Agree on how the peer support students and the peer support instructor will stay in touch with each other (text messages, through a bulletin board, email, social media...)

Also agree on how often you will meet face to face. How will the instructor inform the students about an upcoming meeting? How can a peer support student request a meeting session for the group? You can also mark down a few meetups on the calendar.

**How will other students find the peer support students in the school?** Should the peer support students introduce themselves to the school in each class, or in a joint event in the gym hall? Will they meet with students during the 7th grade orientation day? Will they wear peer support student t-shirts or pins when they are in the role of a peer support student? Should they hold morning assemblies? Should they open up a public social media channel for the peer support students (with introductions of all the peer support students, information about upcoming events, and so forth), or can the peer support students utilise the existing school social media channels for this?

The peer support student instructor can help the peer support students get started with informing other students about their work, opening up gallups and conversations about how the school social media channels can be used to support a positive social media conversation culture.

**How will the peer support student instructor help with sharing information?** What kind of communication methods will reach all the members of the school community? Will the peer support student instructor pass along messages to the whole school for example in e-mail or through school administration software (f.e. Wilma or Helmi in Finland).

**Peer support student visit to a teacher meeting or a teacher training day.** Peer support students can introduce their work and activities to the whole school staff. Share how the peer support program will strengthen the overall welfare work at the school and what kinds of goals the peer support program has. How does the peer support program benefit the students and teachers?

## A model communications plan for a peer support program

How will you inform the students and staff who the peer support students are and what goals they have?

### Events:

- Which events will you be informing the school community about throughout the year
- How and to what audience?
- Who will do the informing and when?
- What information needs to be included?
- Sign Up: If there is a need for participants to sign up for events: Who do they sign up with? What kind of instructions should be passed on?
- Informing students after the event: How to inform others about winners of contests, successful theme events or further ideas that come out of the activities?

### General issues related to the peer support program:

- What are the kinds of news related to the peer support program that should be shared with the whole school? How and by whom?

### Keeping school staff informed and up to date:

- How should the peer support instructor share relevant and regular information about the peer support program with the school staff (through the school welfare team, during joint planning sessions or in a teacher meeting)? Note: please agree on this with the school principal.

**Informing parents:** What kind of information should be shared with the parents? Will parents be asked to help with field trips or events?

**Does the school website have information about the peer support program?** What kind of information should be included on the school website for the school community?

**How can you pass information** to partners and collaborators who are outside of the school community? How can you increase awareness about the peer support program in the town/municipality?

## Evaluation and development work

Evaluation is the foundation of development. When you know how things are going now, you can also plan what activities should be continued and what should be done in a different manner. When doing an evaluation, it is always important to ask for the participants' opinions. Different feedback questionnaires, self-evaluations and discussions can produce important information about participant experiences. It is important to ensure there is sufficient time for gathering and analysing feedback and evaluation data. When used in the optimal manner, the information gathered as part of the peer support student program can be useful for improving and developing the welfare work in the entire school.

### Evaluation of a peer support program

**Goal:** To evaluate the peer support program in your school

**Exercise:** To plan for gathering feedback about the events included in the action plan and evaluate other activities

**Time:** 20 minutes

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** Peer support Student Workbook. The action plan that was done previously either accessed on a computer, or as a paper printout

Tell the peer support students that you will be discussing the evaluation of the activities. An activity can be divided into three parts: 1) ideation and planning; 2) implementation; and 3) evaluation. Peer support students can make an evaluation plan as part of their action plan, so that for each event or action in their annual action plan, you also write down the method of evaluation. Participants can sometimes have a different idea about the meaning of a certain event or activity than the organisers. That's why it is important to ask feedback from both sides. For different events, you can 1) gather participant feedback, and 2) carry out a self-evaluation among the peer support students

The purpose of this exercise is to have a brainstorming about the evaluation and feedback gathering methods for different activities. Bring up the annual work plan that you had prepared before. Divide up into pairs or small groups, so that each pair or group can start planning for evaluation methods for 1-2 activities that were included in the annual plan.

Questions for the groups:

- What is the activity or event in question?
- Are you planning a self-evaluation or participant feedback?
- What is the method for gathering the information?  
Traditional suggestions: paper form / online form, feedback box, feedback through social media, interview, Kahoot or some other voting app / software. You can also come up with your own ideas for how to gather feedback or carry out a self-evaluation.
- What would you ask? If there is time, think of a few questions that you would like to ask the participants.

When the groups have written down their thoughts and ideas in the action plan evaluation column, have a discussion. Tell the peer support students that with the help of the evaluation you will be able to further develop and

improve the peer support program, and also do follow-up and documentation. In addition to individual events, peer support students will also be evaluating the peer support program as a whole.

You can gather feedback about the whole school year from other students (for example, Buddy Classes) through an online form or through social media. You can use the feedback from autumn semester when planning for activities for the spring. You can agree on a shared evaluation discussion at the end of autumn and spring semesters and use the occasion to also celebrate ending a successful semester.

### Workbook exercise for an optional class

You can use the Peer Support Student Workbook chapter "Evaluating activities"

#### Give positive feedback

Young people can be very critical about their own actions. Keep in mind that positive feedback and comments are much more important than trying to find flaws or problems. The role of a peer support student instructor in carrying out evaluations and giving positive feedback is extremely important. Constructive feedback can also be given in a positive manner that enforces the peer support student's feelings of coping and doing well.

## What is your peer support student group like?

**Goal:** To evaluate your own peer support groups activities

**Exercise:** A line exercise where you think about the things that are important to you in a peer support group

**Space:** A classroom or a similar space

**Materials:** -

**Time:** 10 minutes

You can do this exercise in a peer support group meeting once the students have been acting as a student supporters for a couple of months first. Ask the students to imagine a line going across the space you are in. Tell them that one end of the line signifies “not important” and the other end “very important.”

Read the statements from the list or pick a few of them to read out loud. Ask the participants to stand in the line based on how important they think the issues are. After each statement, ask them to share the reason behind choosing a certain spot on the line.

1. We meet regularly and plan our activities.
2. We maintain contact for example through a social media messaging services.
3. Other peer support students talk to me in a friendly manner.

4. I can share my own opinions when we meet with the peer support students.
5. I can trust that the other peer support students don't belittle my ideas.
6. I listen to what the other peer supports have to say.
7. We have fun together and laugh a lot.
8. I can share my worries with the other peer support students.
9. We do things that I find fun.
10. We do things at school that I think are beneficial for students who feel lonely.
11. We discuss the school atmosphere and talk about our ideas on how to develop things in the school with the school adults.

### Discuss:

- How does the peer support student program benefit from people feeling comfortable in the group?
- Why is it an issue if all peer support students can't or are too scared to share their opinions?
- How could you learn to know each other well? What can you do to facilitate this?
- How can you ensure that everyone feels good and comfortable in your group?



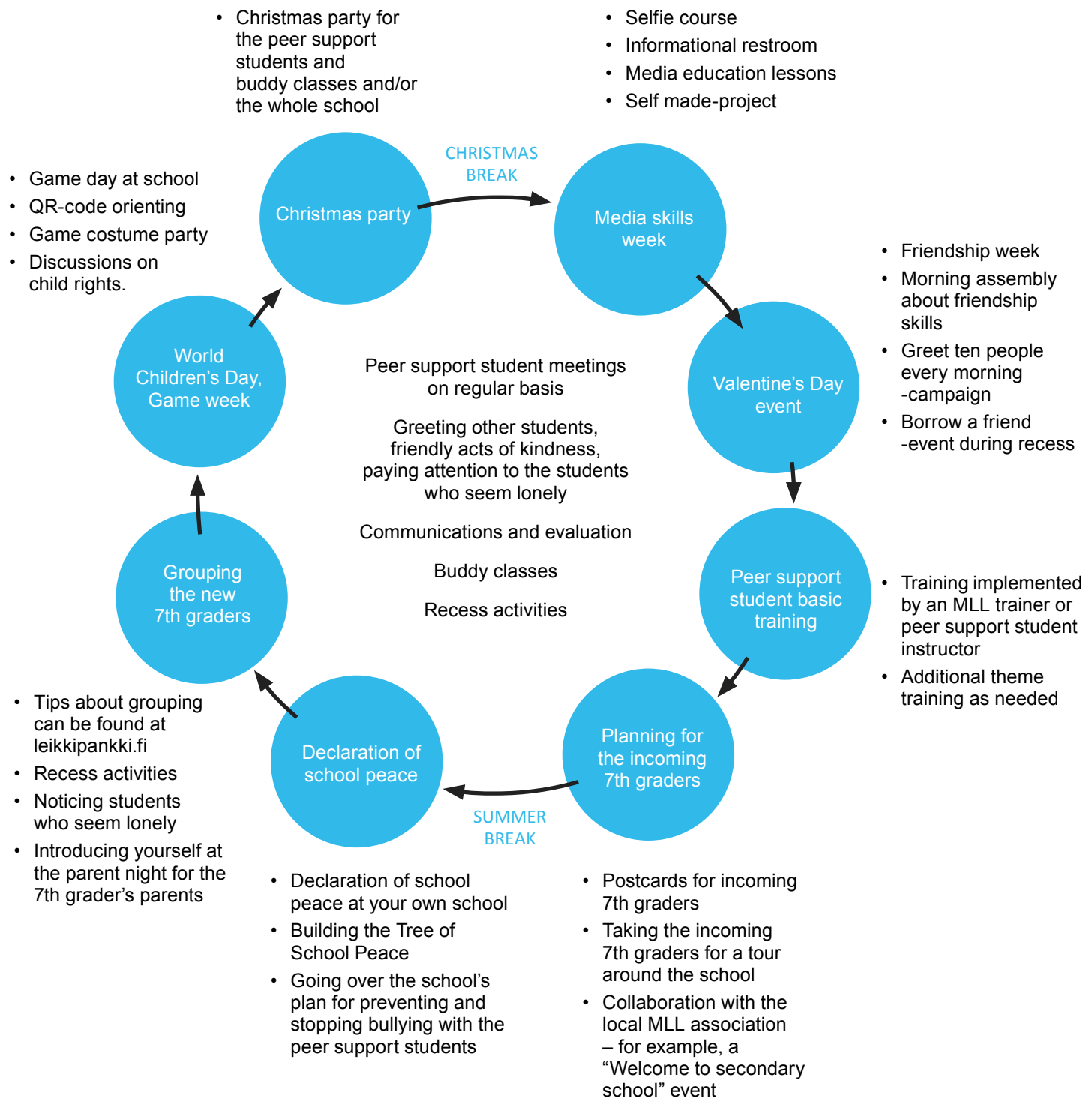


# Annual planning grid

<b>Daily</b> (e.g. activity xx during classes, recess, lunch break)	<b>Weekly</b> (e.g. activity xx every Friday)	<b>Monthly</b> (e.g. activity xx on the first Monday of every month)	<b>Ideas of events that will be implemented once</b> (what, when)
<b>What activity</b>			
<b>The people responsible for implementation</b>			
<b>Participants (Which classes? Whole school? Individual students?)</b>			
<b>Planning schedule: when should the activity be planned?</b>			
<b>Communications about the activity</b>			
<b>Evaluation</b>			

# Annual clock model

Here is an idea, how the annual planning model could look like. Pick ideas that suit to your school and add from your own ideas.



# Skill cards

Is comfortable being herself/himself	Empathic	Interested in other people
Treats everyone equally	Fair	Funny
Artistic	Conciliatory	Independent
Determined	Careful	Brave
Flexible	Inventive	Curious

# Skill cards

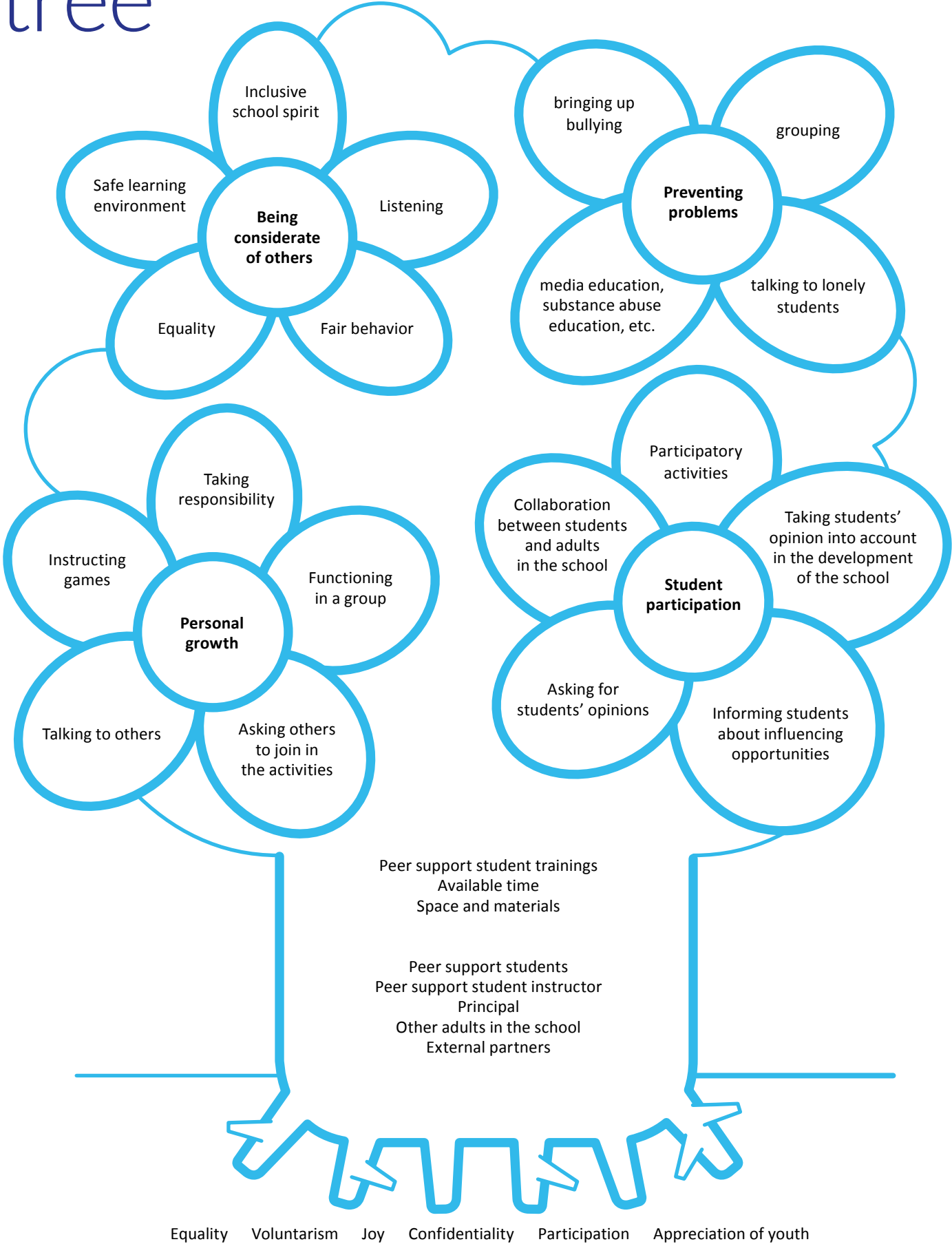
A good listener	Understanding	Adaptable
Good interaction skills	Excited	Encourages others
Reliable	Interested in a positive atmosphere	Someone who brings things up
Forgiving	Ready to negotiate	I mostly like other people
Emphatic	Helpful	Polite



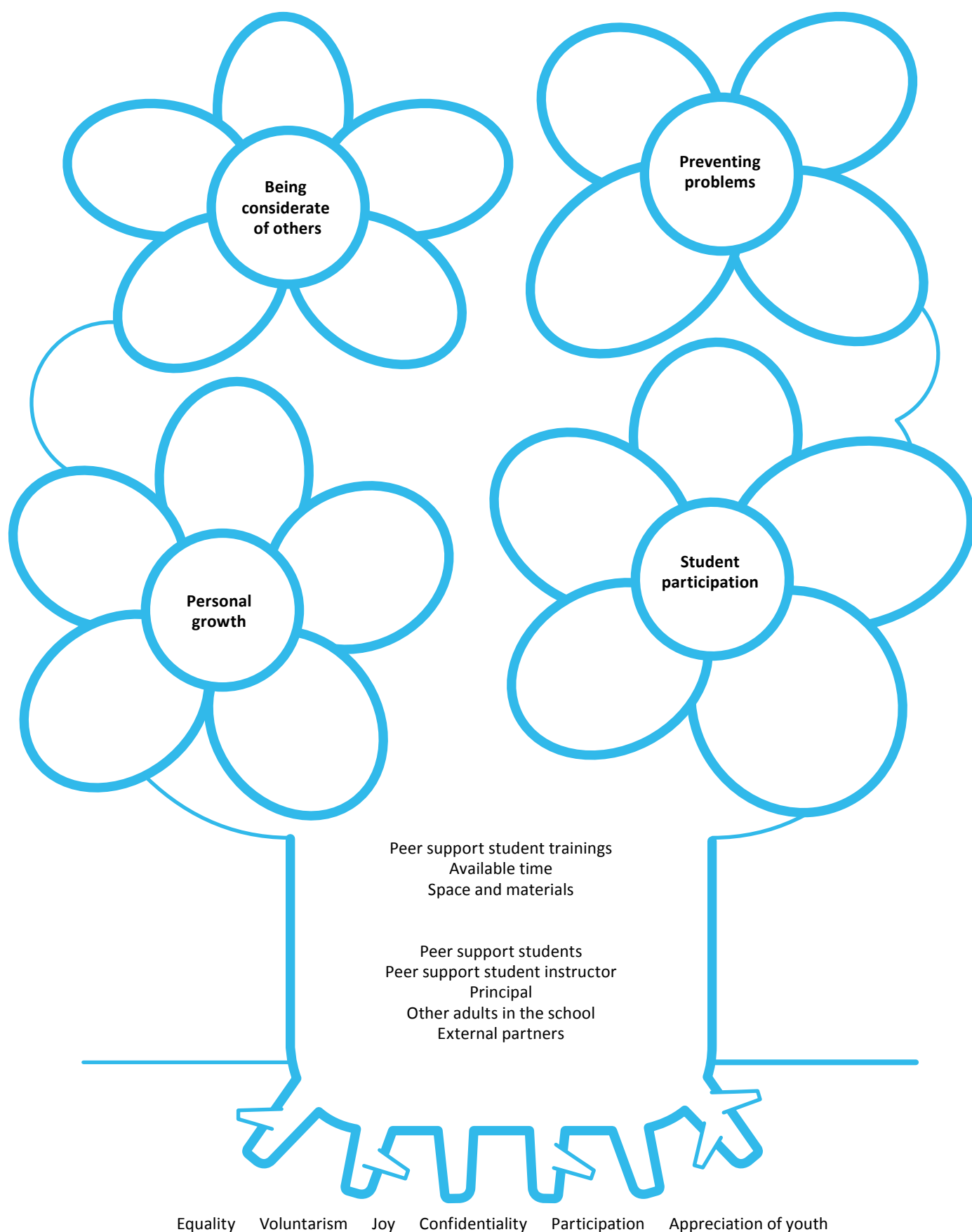
# Skill cards

Creative	Curious	Brave
Gutsy	Energetic	Careful
Patient	Cheerful	Hopeful
Lively	Busy	Peaceful
Flexible	Ready to give feedback	Ready to hear the feedback

# Peer support program tree



# Peer support program tree - fill in version



# The general goals and principles of the MLL Peer Support Program

## 1. Promoting considerate behavior in school, for example:

- Strengthening school atmosphere and wellbeing in school so that everyone can feel a part of the school community
- Creating a fair and encouraging atmosphere
- Increasing positive interactions and respectful encounters
- Understanding the principles of equality, and planning and acting accordingly
- Supporting a positive atmosphere in study groups through grouping exercises

## 2. Increasing student participation in school, for example:

- Building an action-oriented culture: doing things yourself, ideating and participating in planning and executing
- Ensuring that all students have opportunities for influencing things in the school: youth voices and youth expertise should be a part of school's everyday activities encouraging collaboration and interactions between the adults and students in the school

## 3. Developing as an individual, for example:

- Practicing the courage to bring up issues and being a part of finding solutions to them
- Practicing social skills, e.g. empathy and the ability to function in a responsible manner in the school environment and online
- Practicing taking responsibility, and being an active citizen
- Practicing planning and organisational skills and teamwork skills

## 4. Preventing problems in the school community, for example:

- Preventing bullying by bringing up hurtful behavior both preventatively, as in before it happens, and every time you see it happening
- Agree that the peer support students always tell an adult if they see someone being left outside in a group or a particular situation or notice someone being mistreated. Stepping in and stopping bullying or solving challenging situations is always the responsibility of the adults in the school, but it is important that peer support students share their observations.
- Prevent loneliness through grouping activities, greeting, actionable tasks and through offering opportunities for students to get to know each other. Create a positive and inclusive atmosphere.
- Carry out peer support guidance that promotes a positive culture, for example in media education, drug and alcohol education, and interaction and emotional skills.



We are many

# 1. Me and other people

I am a good listener.	I take others into account.	I can share my opinion.
I can defend myself in a friendly manner.	I am interested in other people.	I take care of my friends.
I meet new people easily.	I am a little bit shy.	It is not easy for me to meet new people.
I often wonder what someone else is feeling.	If I disagree with someone else, I negotiate.	I often give positive feedback.
I can wait for my turn.	I like other people.	I am emphatic.
I am forgiving.	If I need something, I know how to ask for it nicely.	If I have to say something unpleasant to someone, I do it in a friendly manner.
I stand up for my friends if I see them being treated unfairly.	I like to be the one in charge in a group.	I am friendly.

We are many

## 2. My personality traits

I am creative.	I am curious.	I want to learn new things.
I am brave.	I am gutsy.	I am honest.
I am energetic.	I am helpful.	I am fair.
I pay attention to detail.	I have a good sense of humor.	I think positively.
I often think that I can't accomplish something.	I usually believe that everything will be okay.	I am patient.
I am lively.	I am calm.	I am joyful.
I mostly follow the rules.	I often bend the rules.	I like to learn new skills.

# We are many

## 3. Skills

I know how to instruct games.	I know how to instruct physical exercise.	I know how to relax.
I can think of things to do during recess.	I write well.	I draw well.
I can sing or play an instrument.	I can play ball games.	I can explain the rules of a game.
I can organise events.	I can talk about my ideas in a way that excites other people.	I am good in math.
I am good with languages.	I am good at deducting.	I am good at doing research.
I am good at word processing.	I am good at games.	I can think critically.
I can have discussion on social media in a positive manner.	I can design ads for events.	I can be an admin in a message group.

This Step-by-Step Guide for Peer Support Student Programs includes detailed instructions for launching a peer support student program in a school. The guide underlines the importance of creating a positive atmosphere in the school through small acts of kindness and friendly gestures. Peer support students are encouraged to talk with students who seem lonely and to pay attention to instances of bullying and bringing these to the attention of adults in the school. The peer support students will also do grouping activities with other students and organise different activities and events that create a positive atmosphere in the school. With the help of the peer support student instructor, the activity plan is drafted for the whole school year.

This guide includes a basic training model that consists of 12 lessons. If the peer support program is being implemented in your school as an optional subject, you should use the other MLL peer support student program materials as additional content.



THE MANNERHEIM LEAGUE  
FOR CHILD WELFARE

