



VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Who is the Friendship Circle for?

A: The Friendship Circle is for anyone who needs a friend. Children with special needs and their families form a significant part of our organization, as do adults in need of friendship and support. Brought together by friendship and trust, children with special needs and our teenage volunteers form a warm and welcoming community.

Q: What does the Friendship Circle do?

A: The Friendship Circle organizes many programs for children with special needs and their volunteers. The Friendship Circle’s mission is to integrate children with special needs into a warm and accepting community, and to provide social, therapeutic and respite programs for them and their families.

Q: What do Friendship Circle volunteers do?

A: Two Friendship Circle volunteers will visit the home of a child with special needs or as we like to say ‘Your Special Friends’. Your mission: become his or her **BEST FRIEND!** These children have parents, siblings, school teachers and doctors just like you do. All their missing is a true friend. See below for “All about Friends @Home.

Q: How old must I be to volunteer?

A: You must be at least twelve years old to volunteer. After that, there is no limit on your age!

Q: How often must I volunteer?

A: You must volunteer once a week to be part of the Friendship Circle Volunteer Club. Volunteering is a commitment for the full duration of the school year. Make sure you are ready for this year-long commitment before you sign up. If for some reason you need to cancel a Friends @ Home visit, you must notify us at least 24 hours in advance!

When you commit to volunteering, expect it to take at least an hour-and-a-half of your time each week – in addition to travel time.

Q: How do I become a Friendship Circle Volunteer?

A: There are a few steps:

- **First**, call the Friendship Circle or e-mail your Friendship Circle Coordinator to request a New Volunteer Form
- **Second**, set up a meeting with our Volunteer Coordinator to discuss which programs would suit you and your schedule best. At the meeting, you'll also discuss all of your questions and concerns. You may need to set up a meeting with him or her to discuss these things
- **Third**, fill out all the appropriate paper work
- **Fourth**, you will be partnered with another volunteer matched with your special friend
- **Fifth**, complete our Volunteer Training Program that occurs periodically throughout the year
- **Congratulations:** You're now an official Friendship Circle Volunteer!

ALL ABOUT FRIENDS @ HOME

The Process:

- The Friendship Circle Coordinator gives you the name and contact information of the family of the child you will volunteer for, and tells you a little about them.
- The Volunteer Coordinator calls the family and arranges a weekly visit time that is good for both you and the family.
- The Volunteer Coordinator will accompany you the first time you visit your special friend at home. She will introduce you to each other and guide you as to what kind of games and activities you can do together.
- After you visit your special friend each week, you “send” a postcard/activity report to us via www.mitzvahrewards.com to let us know how it went.

Q: How long must I wait before I can start volunteering at Friends@Home?

A: Once you apply for the Friends@Home program, and have discussed all the details with the Volunteer Coordinator, it may take time until you are set up at the home of a child with special needs. The time it takes depends on availability, scheduling and personality.

To ensure your Friends@Home set-up happens as soon as possible:

- Provide a few days of the week that you are able to volunteer;
- Make sure you are able to drive yourself there and back or that you have a ride;
- If you would like to volunteer together with a friend, make sure you have compatible schedules.

Q: Must I be trained before volunteering as part of the Friends@Home Program?

A: It is *not* necessary to receive training before you volunteer as part of the Friends@Home program. The Volunteer Coordinator will tell you all you need to know about your special friend and, as his or her parents will be available to help you, you can always ask questions or bring up your concerns. Very often, parents will suggest activities and games that their child enjoys and point you in the right direction by explaining their child’s likes and dislikes.

Q: Am I responsible for the safety or well-being of my special friend when I visit his or her home as part of the Friends@Home program?

A: When you visit your child in his or her home as part of the Friends@Home program, you are not expected to be left alone with full responsibility for your special friend. The parents will be on hand to help with bathroom issues, and will be on top of any major health or safety risks. However, you must ensure that the activities and things that you do with your special friend are safe and appropriate. Turn to the parents immediately if you are worried about the safety or health of your special friend.

Q: Where can I get ideas for games and activities to do with my special friend?

A: Here’s a bunch of suggestions!

- 👉 Check out our cool booklet, “101 Things to Do With Your Special Friend”;
- 👉 Ask your special friend’s parent for their child’s favorite activities and ideas;
- 👉 Visit www.fcvolunteer.com and check out our activity section;
- 👉 Surf the Web or ask friends for ideas of activities, recipes, and crafts;
- 👉 Bring your favorite games or books from your house;
- 👉 Find out your friend’s favorite music, games, authors and pastimes, to give you an idea of what he/she likes to do; or
- 👉 Ask your special friend, “What should we do today?”
- 👉 If you’re still unsure, call us and we’ll help you out!

Q: What if I am late or must cancel a Friends@Home appointment?

A: Simple: Don’t be late. And don’t cancel your appointment. Always remember that your visit may very well be the highlight of the week for your special friend. Canceling an appointment or arriving late causes your special friend and his or her parents more disappointment and stress than you may realize. Please remain committed and visit your friend consistently.

In an emergency, when it is necessary to cancel or come late due to matters out of your control, you ***MUST contact us or the family 24 hours PRIOR to your scheduled visiting time!*** The Friendship Circle expects volunteers to take responsibility in protecting the feelings of their special friends and their families by doing their utmost to remain consistent and reliable in their volunteering.

Q: How do I keep in touch with the Friendship Circle once I begin volunteering as part of the Friends@Home program?

A: Postcards/activity reports are the best way to keep in contact with us once you begin volunteering. These tell us that you are consistent, and allow you to bring up any of your questions or comments.

*In addition, feel free to call us at any time to keep them in touch or just to chat.

Q: Who can I talk to if I have a question or concern regarding my Friends@Home setup?

A: If you are uncomfortable with anything about a setup, whether you are having scheduling conflicts or feel uncomfortable in your special friend’s home, do not hesitate to call us. We can help you by rescheduling, giving you tips and guidance on how to deal with your special friend, or point you in the direction of some great resources. The Friendship Circle can also communicate with the family of your special friend to help make your volunteering experience more enjoyable.

Q: What if a Friends@Home setup does not work out?

A: Usually, a volunteer and his/her special friend develop a beautiful friendship built on trust and care, but occasionally, a setup may not work out for various reasons. If this is the case, we will help you communicate with the family of your special friend and can set you up at the home of another child with special needs or a different Friendship Circle program which may be more successful for you.

VOLUNTEER COMMUNICATION

Q: What are postcards/ activity reports, and why are they so important?

A: Postcards/activity reports are a short form that you can either fill out online or send in the mail to the Friendship Circle after each time you volunteer. The Volunteer Coordinator keeps track of them to ensure that your volunteering experience is a good one.

Sending in postcards/activity reports is important because:

- They allow us to ensure you are volunteering consistently;
- They keep open the communication between you and our staff, allowing them to intervene if you need any help or are unhappy;
- They are the only way we can keep your record of hours for community service and recommendation letters.

Q: What is the Frequent Friends Mileage Program?

A: The Frequent Friends Mileage Program is a web-based program that allows you to earn “miles” each time you send in a postcard. You can then redeem your miles for Friendship Circle awards and items.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Q: What is the confidentiality policy of the Friendship Circle?

A: The Friendship Circle protects the confidentiality of all volunteers and families who take part in our program. All medical or personal information disclosed to Friendship Circle staff to protect your health and safety is held in the utmost confidentiality.

Any information you know or learn about your special friend, other special children, or volunteers of the Friendship Circle, is confidential – and must remain so. It is inappropriate and hurtful to discuss anything about your special friend with others, even if it may seem innocent or is said without meaning any harm.

Children with special needs have the right to take part in Friendship Circle programs with complete privacy, and to be treated with dignity and respect.

COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS

Q: Can I volunteer for the Friendship Circle to help complete my community service hours?

A: Yes! Hours spent volunteering at the Friendship Circle count as community service hours. Please note that your community service hours are counted by the amount of postcards/activity reports you send in, as this is the ONLY way we record your attendance and volunteer hours.

If you need the Friendship Circle staff to fill out any forms, contracts, reports or the like, please ensure you provide your **Volunteer Coordinator** with the vital information at least **two weeks** before the letter is due. This gives us time to complete it and you or your supervisor time to receive it in the mail.

Q: Does the Friendship Circle write recommendation letters for college or job applications?

A: We will be happy to write recommendation letters. You may also apply at www.fcvolunteer.com.

Q: Can I volunteer for the Friendship Circle for my Mitzvah Project for my Bar or Bat Mitzvah?

A: The Friendship Circle welcomes Bnei Mitzvah who would like to volunteer as their Mitzvah Project. However, we would like to make it clear that if you choose to do this, you must look at volunteering at the Friendship Circle as a year-long commitment from when you start until at least the end of the school year, not just something you'll do until your Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT

Q: Why all the stress on "commitment"?

A: When you choose to become a Friendship Circle volunteer, you choose to carry a lot of responsibility. This commitment and devotion is the biggest gift anyone can give your special friend, and builds a relationship of trust and sincerity.

The biggest disappointment for anyone—especially a child with special needs—is to lose a friend. It takes a long while to get over, and makes it much more difficult to believe the sincerity of other friends in the future.

For this reason we are very adamant about expecting volunteers not to let their special friend down, even though we know it can be difficult. That's why we urge you to sign up for programs you think you'll be able to stay committed to, and will not suffer too many disruptions from over the course of the year.

Our hundreds of capable, devoted and extremely reliable volunteers show us that it is possible, and we are very proud of them! Join them.

We look forward to welcoming you on the team!