

PALS

S.A.F.E., Inc. is pleased to offer our program, PALS, an outing and social skills group which meets monthly. This program is specifically designed to meet the needs of Lower and Middle School students age 6 – 12 with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The PALS group emphasizes sharing interests and interaction with age appropriate peers and siblings. PALS outings target activities that interest children and provide a comfortable, safe environment for participants to interact.

-  *Providing support and raising self-esteem.* Through regular PALS groups, participants and their families develop relationships with one another while having fun. Outings function as a platform to express difficulties and challenges and provide support to one another. Affected children often enjoy unique and special interests and it is beneficial to look for a friend who shares their hobby or interest. Results can be a dramatic increase in self-esteem.
-  *Improving social skills.* Focus in a safe group setting on improving social skills through facilitated activities, play and interaction with typically developing peers and siblings. Improving these skills can be beneficial in reducing anxiety.
-  *Mentoring.* An important component of PALS, typically developing, age-appropriate peers and siblings are invited and encouraged to attend outings as mentors. Mentors who interact positively with affected students have proven to be an effective strategy to assist in learning or improving appropriate communication and social skills. Mentoring also provides an opportunity for children to get to know, serve and provide support to other children with ASD - a fast growing population. Improving confidence can be the result of mentoring for both mentor and mentee.
-  *Increasing awareness.* Most PALS outings are scheduled activities in the community, which provides opportunities to practice social skills in the natural environment while increasing awareness in society.
-  *Supporting families.* Parents are invited and encouraged to actively participate in planning PALS outings. Families benefit by meeting other families facing similar challenges and rewards. Time spent at regular PALS outings helps to establish these relationships, promote unity and provide a built-in support network.
-  *Sustainability.* A long-term goal of PALS is to enlist participants in fund raising activities to help sustain the PALS program and fund special events such as holiday parties or daytrips. Fund raising projects will provide opportunities to participate in a group goal, build camaraderie, and reinforce the very skills PALS is designed to address and improve.

The PALS program is ongoing and expected to increase dramatically in size based on the need in our schools and community. For more information, to sign up or get involved please call us at 570.822.7259.