

# Being a TEAM DIXON BUDDY : The FIRST STEPS!

*Our Buddies have the HEART for the children of Team Dixon. If you ask our veteran buddies they will all say they get SO much from the experience of working with our special needs children. Being a Buddy does meet the community service hour guidelines, but there are many other opportunities for you to get those community service hours checked off so please do not sign up to be a Buddy **for this reason alone**. We at Team Dixon are building a better and more diverse, accessible community through the friendships between our buddies and special needs children. What was previously not possible for these children due to physical or cognitive disabilities now becomes possible because of this wonderful partnership.*

I want to be a Team Dixon Buddy and serve kids with special needs. **How do I sign up?**

**FIRST: Take out your phone. Join the GROUP ME message thread for TEAM DIXON BUDDIES: (to get the GROUP ME link, just ask a buddy or Team Dixon board member)**

**In the GROUP ME app, REPLY to messages AS SOON as you are able!**

We pair our buddies and need to know if you will be at a specific event, so the sooner you reply, the more likely it is you will get paired.

This will include you in a group/text message (your phone number is not visible to others) and you will be sent updates, info on upcoming events. You will use this to reply and commit to which events you will be attending.

**\*\* NOTE: GROUP ME has a feature which allows you to MUTE NOTIFICATIONS (yay!) if you go into settings.**

**SECOND: Complete a “New Buddy Application” form, which can be found on our website at [www.teamdixon.org](http://www.teamdixon.org). Mail the completed form to the address listed or you can turn it in to a Dixon High School Dream Team officer.**

**THIRD: STAY INFORMED about upcoming events, etc.** Our Facebook page will have the calendar, photos, and information about upcoming events and opportunities for you to volunteer. REMIND also will provide the information, but is very limited on how much can be sent so using **BOTH GROUP ME and Facebook is a great way to get all of your information.** We suggest having your parents “like” our Facebook page (TEAM Dixon) so

they can also be in the information loop, and so they can see photos of the great work you are doing for others!

### **NEW BUDDY FAQ:**

When you sign up as a new buddy, you are NOT paired with a special needs friend right away. We like to allow new buddies the time to observe and interact with all of our special needs children in a variety of settings before making a match. This also gives us a chance to see which personalities work best together. Sometimes it takes a few pairings to get the “steady buddy” pair, but we ask that our buddies stay open and flexible during this process, and understand that we take several things into consideration when pairing our special needs friends.

**What does that mean for me as a new buddy? Do I still show up to events? What will I be doing if I don't have a “steady buddy” yet?**

YES! You DO show up...as often as you want/are able to! This is how you get to know us AND how we get to know you. You will usually be placed with a veteran buddy and their special needs friend, as an “understudy buddy” and this is a great opportunity to talk to buddies who have been part of the Team Dixon family and learn all the tactics to working with the kids! It also takes the pressure off of you as you get to know the children.

**What does the calendar of events look like? Do I need to commit to all events?**

NO! That is one of the most common concerns/questions new buddies have, but you only volunteer/sign up for the events that fit YOUR schedule. Surprisingly, most of our buddies who are the most active in Team Dixon are also the most active in school sports, band, and other activities, so it CAN work but you will need to check your school/sport/family/work calendar AND discuss with your parents BEFORE committing to an event or activity. Once you send the GROUP ME message that you will be attending, we pair you with a buddy or a veteran buddy, so it's important to let us know as soon as possible.

**COMMUNICATION IS CRITICAL!** We have special needs friends who are looking forward to seeing you, and last minute changes can be extremely difficult and cause major meltdowns. We know last minute things can arise, but please let us know asap if your

plans change. You can use GROUP ME to let us know if/when you will not be attending, or text Erica at 707-365-6523.

Buddies who consistently fail to show or cancel at the last minute will not be placed as a steady buddy, but can still volunteer in other ways.

**What if I have questions/concerns about something or a certain child? I feel awkward asking questions about disabilities.**

The purpose of Team Dixon is to foster INCLUSION, UNDERSTANDING, and ACCEPTANCE, as well as INDEPENDENCE for our special needs community. **Doing this requires us to be good communicators and NO question is “awkward” or inappropriate, so please ask and learn...**it is how these great relationships are formed and how YOU as a buddy gain so much from your experience with us. The parents of our special needs children WANT you to ask questions, they want you to learn more about their child. If you do not feel comfortable asking the parents, you can ask any of the Team Dixon admin/board members, as well as veteran buddies.

**Other information:**

Buddies love social media, and we understand that..however, **we do not allow posting photos of special needs children UNLESS** you have asked their parent for permission OR unless you use a photo that has already been posted on our Team Dixon Facebook page.

Buddies love cell phones, and we also understand that. **Please refrain from being on your phone during events**, as your primary focus should be on keeping your special needs friend safe and connecting with him/her during their time with you.

**Buddies do not assist/transport special needs children to/from the restroom during events.** If your special needs friend needs to use the restroom, you will take them to their parent/guardian and then wait until they return them to you. Parents do not drop their children off at Team Dixon events, so they are always close by.

**Buddies are not to tolerate hurtful/abusive behaviors** from their special needs friend. This may sound odd, but just because our Team Dixon friends have a disability does NOT mean they can hit, pinch, bite, or otherwise harm you or others. If behaviors like these arise, it is

important that you bring it to our attention so we can work with the parents to keep this a safe and positive experience for all.

**Please be sure to give positive feedback to both your special needs friend and their parents.** This is so important on many levels, but remember these parents are not used to being able to sit back and have their child participate in things without them right by their side, so knowing that you find joy in being with their child means a lot. As you get to know your special needs friend, find ways to encourage, celebrate, and re-direct them during events. We have had buddies show up with their friend's favorite snack to keep them on track, buddies who get extra silly, or just sit and listen for the 110th time to the details about how awesome the latest Lego characters. It's all about finding ways to make your relationship personal, and meeting each child where they are. We like to say that when you are a buddy, think of yourself as being on stage for your special needs friend. Are you being engaging? Are you smiling? Being a little extra-animated sometimes and working to find conversation is an important part of becoming a great buddy.

Finally, remember that as a Team Dixon Buddy, you are representing our organization to our community, so **always speak kindly about your special needs friends.** Mocking or speaking negatively about your friend is unacceptable.

**When you join Team Dixon and meet our special needs kids, the first thing you will probably notice is what limits them. But as you spend time becoming familiar and building a relationship with them, you will discover what strengths, joys, and inspirations they offer. Come be a part of our buddies and kids TEAM=Together Everyone Always Matters.**

