



## BUDDY BREAK

### Kids Have Fun and Caregivers Get a Break

by Marie Kuck, Nathaniel's Hope

"Buddy Break is like walking into a hug!" says the mom of nine year old Jonathan, who is diagnosed with autism. Does this sound too good to be true? Think again! Nathaniel's Hope has developed Buddy Break, an exciting "Mom's Day Out" type of program to assist families with kids with special needs.

Through their life journey with their son Nathaniel, Marie and Tim Kuck experienced how hard it was to get the support they needed when Nathaniel was born with multiple special needs. Soon after his "change of address" to heaven, the Kucks established Nathaniel's Hope, an organization dedicated to sharing hope with kids with special needs (VIP kids) and their families. One of the ways that Nathaniel's Hope brings hope is by supporting VIP families in a practical way through the Buddy Break program.

#### What is Buddy Break?

Buddy Break is a FREE kids/respite program where VIP kids make new friends, play fun games, enjoy crafts, therapy dogs, children's stories, music, activities and more! Siblings have fun too! Meanwhile, their caregivers get a break from their ongoing care-giving responsibilities for three hours one Friday night or Saturday morning a month.

#### Why is there a need for Buddy Break?

The weight and stress of finding proper doctors, teachers, and financial resources for a VIP child's care can be overwhelming. Those responsibilities, as well as the never-ending demands of life, leave little opportunity for caregivers to take time for themselves, run errands, or plan one-on-one outings with a spouse or other children – things desperately needed to survive. Buddy Break provides a safe place for VIPs and their siblings to have fun while their caregivers get a break. Through Buddy Break, VIP kids (and siblings) are establishing meaningful friendships and socialization skills with other kids and adults, and they have an opportunity to experience fun activities at their own pace and ability.

#### Who are VIP kids?

VIPs are kids with any type of special needs, which include any physical, cognitive,

medical or hidden disability, chronic or life-threatening illness, or those who are medically fragile. This program is for VIP children birth ages: 2-16 years old, and their siblings: 4 years old to 5th grade. Some Buddy Break locations expand their program based on their ability to serve a wider age range.

#### Who are Buddies?

Buddies are friends of VIPs. They are screened volunteers who are at least 14 years of age and have completed a two-hour Buddy Training 101 class. During Buddy Break, they enjoy one-to-one friendship with a VIP kid. Doctors, nurses, therapists, and special education teachers also serve as Buddy friends.

#### How do I sign up as a VIP?

1. Identify a location where you'd like to attend Buddy Break by checking out [www.BuddyBreak.org](http://www.BuddyBreak.org) or calling the Nathaniel's Hope office.
2. Complete the online VIP Family Info Form.
3. Call your preferred location to reserve your space at VIP orientation. This orientation is required, allows the Buddies to meet you and your children, and gives you a chance to see Buddy Break before you begin participating. Orientation is held monthly at each Buddy Break location. After orientation, you may attend any Buddy Break program anywhere by calling the location to make a reservation.

#### Where Can I Find Buddy Break?

Nathaniel's Hope has a growing network of Buddy Break church partners expanding across the nation. The goal is have 1,000 Buddy Break locations serving VIP families by 2020!

To find the most current Buddy Break locations, visit [www.BuddyBreak.org](http://www.BuddyBreak.org). New locations will be added to this website as they are started. If you would like to start a Buddy Break program, please contact Nathaniel's Hope, who will provide your church with the training and tools to make Buddy Break an easy, safe, and successful program!



#### Hear what people are saying about Buddy Break!

"Buddy Break is such a gift for my family! My kids have found a place where they fit right in, are cared for, and loved in ways that sometimes I, as an exhausted mom, just can't do. My son with special needs has a wonderful time playing with his Buddy and his sibling gets to talk to other children "like me, with a special brother or sister." Meanwhile, I have time to get a few things done, reconnect with friends, or even just sit still with a sense of peace so that I can be a stronger and better parent. Thank you so much for all you do. I am incredibly grateful!"  
Lucette, VIP Parent

"I want to thank all of the fantastic volunteers at Buddy Break. Emma enjoys her morning with you all SO much, and she talks and talks about all the things she gets to do with you. For us, this is the true benefit of the program. We don't so much need a break from her as she needs a break from us! Having the undivided attention of "a buddy friend" to play with is a huge treat for Emma, and a delight for us as parents that she can experience it. We couldn't be happier with the program, and want to express our heartfelt gratitude to you and to your wonderful volunteers." Barbara, VIP Parent

"As a single mother of three and one of them a VIP kid, I cannot think of a better place to leave my daughter. I can actually relax and enjoy time children because I know she is being well cared for. Most importantly is that Jaide squeals with joy when we start driving down the church driveway toward Buddy Break. She loves going and I trust leaving her there. It is perfect!" Eliza

"I've got the best job in the church!"  
-Deanna, Buddy Break Coordinator at Idlewild Baptist Church

To learn more about Buddy Break, the VIP Birthday Club, or other programs that Nathaniel's Hope offers visit [www.Nathaniel'sHope.org](http://www.Nathaniel'sHope.org).



#### Current Buddy Break locations in the Tampa Bay area include:

**Idlewild Baptist Church**  
18371 Dale Mabry Hwy N, Lutz  
813-264-8773  
[BuddyBreak@Idlewild.org](mailto:BuddyBreak@Idlewild.org)

**Wesley Memorial UMC**  
611 Memorial Hwy., Tampa  
813-886-2536  
[BuddyBreak@WesleyMemorial.net](mailto:BuddyBreak@WesleyMemorial.net)

**Venice Presbyterian Church**  
111 Firenze Ave. E, Venice  
941-488-2258  
[VeniceBuddyBreak@yahoo.com](mailto:VeniceBuddyBreak@yahoo.com)

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