



Peer Connect Program Guide

INTRODUCTION TO RVRN

Rainbow Valley Resource Network (RVRN) originated in 1984, as a residential facility called Rainbow Valley Ranch in Hadley, NY. Operating as a working farm, the three founders, Doug and June Dickinson and their close friend and colleague, Joy Parker, dedicated their lives to providing a learning community in a healing atmosphere for Christian Scientists labeled in society as “developmentally disabled.”

The ranch sold in 2004, and the organization has evolved into a nationwide support community of volunteers, caregivers and ambassadors dedicated to delivering spiritually enriching activities and financial support to Christian Science families and their loved ones with developmental special needs.

RVRN’s mission is to build compassionate community and support for Christian Scientists with developmental/special needs and their families through financial assistance, informational and inspirational resources, and experiential enrichment activities.

Services Offered

- Family Support Network
- Loved One Network
- Enrichment programs
- Financial assistance

PEER CONNECT

Introduction: Over the years, RVRN has offered opportunities for loved ones in our circle to engage with other Christian Scientists through our enrichment programs at Christian Science (CS) camps (both in-person and online). These programs are engaging, fun, and uplifting,—yet they are designed for larger groups.

Meanwhile, there has been a growing desire from some of our Family Support Network (FSN) parents (and their children) for their loved ones to connect and socialize with other CS peers, as well as for support and guidance in navigating life’s social situations in joyful and elevating ways. Many Christian Scientists enjoy meaningful social interactions through church, CS summer camps and even schools. These avenues are often not accessible to our loved ones. They miss out on these social opportunities with fellow Christian Scientists—while their peers miss out on the blessing of interacting with our loved ones.

Purpose: To connect RVRN loved ones with peers from the wider CS community, one-on-one or in small groups, to engage in fun, social gatherings, while providing opportunities for all parties to learn and grow.

Gatherings:

Eligibility: Loved ones who are seeking this individualized connection and a learning opportunity

Activities: RVRN will work with CS organizations and individuals to ensure activities for this program are tailored to the loved one, emphasizing fun and connection while having a social-skill focus; for example, engaging in an activity with a new person, getting to know a new person, taking turns, listening, expressing a like or dislike in a graceful manner.

Duration of each gathering: 15 min – 60 min

Frequency: Frequency will be determined by the peers, along with the families we are serving. The idea is to have multiple gatherings per session, i.e. signing up for a winter session and meeting at least once per month.

Format: Phone and/or video conference

Expectations:

RVRN will:

- Manage the registration process
- Collect and share pertinent data/information
- Schedule an orientation meeting with peers to:
 - Provide suggestions and guidance for working with our loved ones
 - Assist with the initial contact with a loved one and their parent or caregiver
 - Discuss the debrief process that will occur after each gathering
- Be available to answer questions, and offer support or suggestions

Peers will:

Expectations: We are looking for individuals who are open to the opportunity to:

- Establish relationships with RVRN loved ones
- Offer support and encouragement
- Witness the growth, enthusiasm, and joy of RVRN loved ones
- Witness your own growth

Responsibilities:

- Set up a schedule of when to talk, best mode of communication [i.e. phone call, video conference (preferred), etc.], and how often (a minimum of 1x/mo)
- Communicate with the family if you are unable to make a scheduled hangout
- Come prepared with conversation topics and activities
- Maintain confidentiality

- Participate in the debrief process which includes submitting an email to the program director where you:
 - describe the activity from your hangout
 - share what worked and what didn't work/challenges
 - share fruitage or special moments between you and your RVRN loved one

Requirements:

- At least 18 year of age or older OR enrolled in DiscoveryBound's National Leadership Council (NLC) program
- Practice Christian Science and the practical application to daily life
- Complete the online Peer Connect application process
- Complete an orientation session with RVRN staff

Strategies for Working with RVRN Loved Ones

1. **Address loved ones by name** – they love being personally acknowledged and cherished
2. **Introduce yourself and ask “getting to know you” questions** that your peer can relate to:
 - a. How's your day going?
 - b. Do you have any pets? (If so, ask them to share more.)
 - c. Tell me about your family?
 - d. What are some of your interests? For example,
 - i. Favorite food?
 - ii. Favorite music?
 - iii. Favorite movie?
 - e. Find something you have in common?
3. **Allow “think time” / processing time** – expect pauses in the conversation as they have time to respond and/or to formulate their thoughts.
4. **Use visuals** (i.e. samples of final/completed product, or visual instructions)
5. **Use simple sentences**, i.e. “Today is: Stories, Cooking, Singing” or “Stories, Squishy Project [hold up sensory bag], Singing”
6. **Speak slowly and clearly, but avoid talking down to them.**
7. Kindly **ask them to repeat** themselves if you don't understand what they are saying.
8. **Respect personal boundaries** by not asking too many personal questions and not giving too much personal information yourself. Refrain from talking about politics or other “hot topics” in such a way to influence loved ones. It's probably best to refrain from bringing up “hot topics” unless the loved one does first, and then you can gently guide the discussion back to something more casual.
9. **Pin or highlight the Zoom screen** so the loved ones can see the activity closeup (when applicable).
10. **Be yourself. :)**

Activity Ideas

1. Read Alouds: Bring a book and read aloud
2. Sing/listen to hymns
3. Play musical instrument/make music together
4. Cook/bake

5. Play a game
 - a. Bingo
 - b. Memory/matching
 - c. Pictionary
6. Do an arts and crafts activity
7. Read a Bible story and talk about the spiritual lessons and applications to daily life
8. Make up a dance routine (music and movement activity)
9. Create a scavenger hunt
10. Color or draw together