

SDS Buddy Handbook

Social Development Studies Department

2020 – 2021

Table of Contents

Welcome to the SDS Buddy Program!	3
The Basics	4
Goals of the SDS Buddy Program	4
What are my SDS Buddy Responsibilities?	4
What can an SDS Buddy do?	4
What can an SDS Buddy <i>not</i> do?	4
Guideline #1 – Initiating Contact and Building the Relationship	5
Guideline #2 – Establishing your Communication Standards	6
Guideline #3 – Maintenance and Managing Expectations	7
Guideline #4 – Leaving the Buddy Nest	8
Communications and Events	9
What is a “Buddy Bite”?	9
SDS Buddy Events	9
Scenario Examples	10
Campus Resources and Referrals	14
Volunteer Tracking Sheet	15

Thank you for your commitment to help our new students transition through their first year in SDS. This program could not run without the willingness of our volunteer Buddies. We sincerely appreciate your enthusiasm and hope you all have a great time!

The SDS Department

Welcome to the SDS Buddy Program!

The SDS Buddy Program is a volunteer-driven, peer-support initiative that pairs incoming SDS students with an upper year SDS student. Based on your awesome personality and experience, you've been chosen to be part of the SDS Buddy Team for the upcoming academic year.

We're so happy to have you! 😊



This handbook will outline the goals of the program, clarify your role and responsibilities as an SDS Buddy, and provide some guidance on how to interact with your matched first-year student(s). It will provide an idea of what types of messaging and opportunities you can expect as an SDS Buddy and give you some scenario examples. Included at the end is a list of key campus resources and an optional time tracking sheet for your own use.

If you have any questions during your time as an SDS Buddy, please email them to sds@uwaterloo.ca or connect with your SDS Advisor at any time.

The Basics

Goals of the SDS Buddy Program

1. Encourage the academic, emotional, and socio-cultural success of incoming SDS students as they adjust to life in university.
2. Provide opportunity for new students to connect with experienced students in their program and establish a respectful, relatable and useful peer-relationship.
3. Empower students to learn about campus services, academic responsibilities and engagement opportunities early in their program through the information shared from experienced peers.

What are my SDS Buddy Responsibilities?

- Commit to participating in the program for the 2020-2021 academic year (Sept – April). Fall term will likely require more engagement.
- Determine the needs and expectations for the Buddy relationship (e.g. advice, tips, networking, resource referral, logistical supports, etc.).
 - Review this handbook;
 - Communicate with your student(s);
- Commit to connecting with your buddy at least once per month.
 - E.g. can use *Buddy Bites* for examples of discussion topics or simply check-in.
- Contact the SDS Department or appropriate campus offices/administrators if your Buddy is having difficulties (i.e. financial, academic, personal, professional etc.), or if you have any questions yourself.

What can an SDS Buddy do?

- Connect SDS students with people, places, experiences, and services.
- Share knowledge, skills, and personal stories about your experiences.
- Take an active interest in the academic performance and overall wellness of your student(s).
- Aid in creating a positive and productive experience for SDS students at Renison.
- Offer support, challenge, patience, and enthusiasm while helping your student(s) navigate various issues in their transition (i.e. normalize their experiences).
- Say “I don’t have the answer to your question” – you won’t know everything!
- Share [the SDS Website \(current student page\)](#) and other relevant or informative websites.

What can an SDS Buddy *not* do?

- Provide counselling/psychotherapy or any promise of direct mental-health support
 - INSTEAD: Refer them to Renison’s wellness team and/or main-campus services
- Advocate on a student’s behalf to their professors or other campus service providers
 - INSTEAD: Refer them to the services directly or to their academic advisor
- Advise your student about specific courses they should or shouldn’t take or which courses are “easy” or “difficult”.
 - INSTEAD: Note that your experience might be different than theirs for any course
- Access your student’s Quest account to help them add, drop or swap courses.
 - INSTEAD: Direct them to the appropriate [help resources](#)
- A student’s taxes (seriously, we don’t recommend it)

Guideline #1 – Initiating Contact and Building the Relationship

First

- Initiate contact by the first week of September. Introduce yourself, share some basic information, and encourage questions.
- Determine together the method of communication that works best for you both (e.g. email, texting, Instagram, Facebook, Zoom, etc.). → **See Guideline 2 for more detail.**

Next

- Find out what your Buddy has done so far (e.g. course registration, moves into residence vs. staying at home, connected with a resource, etc.) and how things are going.
- Ask why your Buddy chose SDS as their program and share your “why”.

Within the First Month

- Ask your Buddy about their goals and determine your role: social connection? Advice on how to study? Referrals to resources? Procedures? It’s okay if you don’t have answers to every question—make appropriate referrals.
- Inform your Buddy of upcoming events or activities that are important to new students
 - E.g. attending any virtual SDS orientation event in early September, participating in other online events at Renison or main campus, keep an eye on their 2020-2021 Facebook Cohort Group page, etc.
- Buddy contact information should be kept private. Only assigned Buddy Mentors and SDS staff should have access to the names and email addresses of assigned Buddies.

Keep in Mind

- This “getting to know you stage” may take some time, so be patient. Your new Buddy may be shy at first, but will hopefully come to trust you as a strong peer resource. Taking things slowly will be helpful in increasing the comfort level.
- Avoid assumptions. Ask and learn.
- Take initiative with communication and schedule it for yourself.
- If your Buddy does not respond at all during the first few weeks, don’t take it personally. **See the scenario on pg 12 for next steps.**
- Be sensitive to cross-cultural similarities and differences, and how they influence interaction.
- Know that some Buddies may treat you as a trusted confidant and disclose personal information during conversations. This information should be treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality. If you are uncomfortable with a request, please refer the student to the appropriate resource (**see pg 14**).
- Take note of any questions you may have for discussion with peers or the SDS Advisors.

Guideline #2 – Establishing your Communication Standards

Establishing your communication preferences and what to cover can take some time. You might be limited in scope with the shift to online classes this fall, including what you have access to do and when (especially if different timezones come into play!).

Starting Tips

- Aim to connect at the beginning of each month, at the very least. *Buddy Bites (see pg 9)* can provide a guide for relevant monthly topics. Feel free to connect more often if it goes well!
- Adjust your communication style as necessary to accommodate that of your Buddy (e.g. directness/indirectness; outspoken manner vs. reserved; outgoing vs. shyness). Be yourself, but also sensitive to their responses.
- Do your best to be aware of any verbal or non-verbal cues your Buddy may present (e.g. if chatting in Zoom). They could be opportunities for conversation.
- Ask about their class schedule and share personal experiences on how to deal with schoolwork demands, stress, and extracurricular activities.

Potential Challenges

- Awkwardness of meeting a new person in general
- Your match(es) may be a few years younger or older than you.
- Conflicting schedules.
- Building trust and mutual respect.
- When your suggestions are not accepted.
- Straight-up rejection (e.g. your Buddy saying they don't want your help).
- Working with a Buddy for many months, but they unexpectedly drop out.
- Deciding on virtual activities to do together.
- Worrying if you're doing enough or too much – trust us, you'll be awesome!

Keep in Mind

- It takes time, commitment, and sensitivity to develop a connection. Doing so virtually will be harder than if you had opportunity to hang-out in person.
- As your Buddy gets to know you better, they will feel more comfortable and less intimidated.
- Buddies have the option of opting out of the program before the match process and can request to end their participation at any time. Do not take it personally if this happens. Let us know and we'll work with you on next steps.
- Listen to your Buddy and point out strengths, building their confidence towards making independent decisions.

Guideline #3 – Maintenance and Managing Expectations

The hardest part of any relationship is the maintenance. You and your Buddy may match well and start the term off with enthusiasm. However if school or external stressors start to pile up, sometimes that connection can be lost.

As the mentor-Buddy, remember that it's your responsibility to maintain some level of communication with your new-Buddy. There may be periods where your student feels like they've got everything handled and periods where they're completely overwhelmed. Go with the flow!

Tips

- Maintain encouragement, support, and guidance.
- Continue to refer them to appropriate resources, as needed.
- Support and reassure your Buddy during difficulties.
- Communicate as often as you like, but be sure to check-in near the beginning of the month (i.e. use the *Buddy Bites* as a guide).
- Inform your Buddy of upcoming events or activities that you're aware of or enjoyed in your first year:
 - E.g. midterm study sessions, career/volunteer/club fairs (if applicable), joining teams or volunteer-run groups (if applicable), etc.

Goals

- Through continued communication, the needs, values and beliefs of Buddies will become more apparent.
- The Buddy will get more familiar with life as a student, involved in their social life, and better understand how to do common academic procedures.
- They'll learn about resources they can access if they need specific supports.

Keep in Mind

- Do not expect that your Buddy will do everything you advise.
- Put yourself in the Buddy's situation; try to see it from their point of view.
- Verify Buddy's feelings and concerns.
- Respond to the Buddy's needs properly (need for nurturance vs. need for autonomy).
- Maintain good boundaries. You're not meant to be a "cure-all" resource and they're not expected to rely on you for all questions!

Guideline #4 – Leaving the Buddy Nest

Congratulations – you’ve made it to the end of the SDS Buddy Program for the year!

Thank you for your commitment and effort put into this initiative. We hope it was a good experience for both you and your Buddy.

By the end of first-year, we hope to see the following happen for our new students:

- Acquired a familiarity with SDS, including general expectations, advisors and faculty, and the SDS Website.
- Gained some confidence, knowledge, and a more stable social network.
- Became less dependent on you (and/or other resources) over the course of the year.
- Increased self-sufficiency and learned how/where to search for their own answers.

As you leave the Buddy Nest for this year, remember to communicate with your student about the end of the program. Thank them for their involvement and if comfortable, feel free to extend an offer of continued, *informal* support for the following fall term (don’t feel obligated to do so – the choice is completely yours).

You may find you really hit it off with your Buddy and you maintain a friendship going forward – that’s great! Just be clear on any boundary changes and have a great summer. 😊

Feedback Surveys

In December you will receive a mid-year survey to gather initial information on your experience. By April you will receive a final request for program feedback. This is a chance to be open and honest with your experience, as the survey will be entirely anonymous. It won’t take more than a few minutes.

Your opinions and suggestions are key to improving its structure and usefulness for both Buddy partners going forward. Past feedback let us know about the challenges of matches who went MIA, the desire for more connection with other volunteers, and the usefulness of some resources vs. others. Consider thinking of the following throughout your time in this role, so you have an idea of what we’d love to learn from you:

- How was your overall experience? Any key positive or negative situations?
- Did you think your match was successful? Appropriate? Useful? What would you have liked to be matched on, if an option?
- How did you find the SDS Buddy-related communications? Did they come too often or not enough? Did the *Buddy Bites* provide decent ideas to work from? If not, any ideas to share?
- Did you feel included, appreciated and/or supported during your time as an SDS Buddy? If not, what would you have needed more/less of and from whom?
- Anything you think the program could benefit from in the future?

Communications and Events

As an SDS Buddy, it is your responsibility for initiating contact with your matched Buddy and continuing communication throughout the term. No need to harass them into being social, but don't disappear either 😊

Please access your *uwaterloo* email account regularly, as Buddy-specific messaging will only be sent there throughout the academic year. Here are some examples of potential messaging you will receive as a Buddy:

- Welcome emails at the start of each term
- Event invitations and reminders, when applicable (could be virtual)
- Check-in's and end-of-term feedback surveys
- Monthly *Buddy Bites*

What is a "Buddy Bite"?

A part of your role is to touch-base with your Buddy at least once a month. Sometimes that will be very easy and you might have multiple chances to connect. Depending on your Buddy's needs and personality, you might also have *less* communication than expected.

"*Buddy Bites*" are 1-page PDFs sent monthly by email. They are optional to use, but provide some relevant ideas of what to connect with your Buddy on if you're feeling stuck. Each month will highlight one practical topic (e.g. academic) and one social/wellness topic generally associated with the month in question.

SDS Buddy Events

In a non-COVID world, we plan to hold one Buddy-oriented social event per term - in the past these have sometimes coincided with another peer-led event, like Pizza with Profs. Unfortunately this year, there's a good chance your experience as an SDS Buddy will be a virtual one. **Please stay tuned to your email for updates though, as we still want to find ways everyone can connect "in-person" (e.g. Zoom)!**

SDS Buddies are also welcome to get involved with other department or Renison-hosted events or volunteer opportunities, if available and interested (e.g. study sessions, virtual recruitment events, etc.). However there is no requirement to volunteer for the department beyond the Buddy role.

Scenario Examples

Your student requests some support as they approach their first PSYCH 101R midterm. You offer encouragement and tips that worked for you, but they demand to see your past study notes.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

Academic Integrity

- By now you've seen rubric notes on academic integrity *many* times. While it can seem common sense, it's a serious issue that can have very negative consequences if ignored. Copying other people's work, not citing things properly, having someone else write a test for you...academic integrity can involve a lot of nuanced situations and in some cases, result in failed grades for an assignment/test, failure of a course, or suspension.
- Did you know there's a whole website on academic integrity at UW? Feel free to pass along this resource to your student (and take note of it yourself ☺): <https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/integrity-students>

What's at Play Here?

- You've likely already taken PSYCH 101 or 101R. It's a content-heavy course and can be really challenging in your first year. Try to remember how you felt taking it or how you saw your friends get through, and empathize that your student is likely stressed and uncertain about their abilities.
- Students will probably gladly accept any tips and resources you provide them, though they shouldn't be given your exact notes. If your student rejects your help in a harsh manner, take a step back before replying right away. *Why might they have reacted so abruptly?*
 - Maybe they perceive your suggestions in a negative light because they remind them of past insecurity, stressors, etc. - or it could simply be their communication style.
 - Perhaps sharing personalized study materials was a norm for them before starting university. If they've never encountered consequences before, they won't expect to.
 - They could misinterpret your familiarity with the course for subject expertise.
 - They could also misunderstand your role as an SDS Buddy – you're not a private tutor or the gateway to 80%!

Other Resources (see the Resource page for contact information and links!)

- Academic Advisors
- Wellness team
- Student Success Office workshops

You and your student connect well in August/September, but notice their replies and questions start to decrease during October.

You receive an urgent message in early-November requesting to speak with you. Your student appears visibly upset through Zoom, says they are behind in their courses, and are terrified of failing.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

Timing

- We anticipate that everyone's enthusiasm may peak in September and begin to taper off when midterm season begins. We also expect some unique challenges with the transition to online courses this coming fall term.
- You may get busy yourself and not have as much time as you'd want to support this case. That's totally ok – please refer the student to their academic advisor 😊

Managing a Crisis

- Don't panic! But it's also ok if you do a little. There's no expectation that you'll immediately have the "right" answers to anything a student comes to you for.
- Aim to make yourself grounded first. Most of our communication is non-verbal and we can often absorb another's emotional state without knowing it.
- You can make a world of change for someone by listening empathetically, acknowledging their distress, normalizing what you can and giving them hope.

Personal Factors

- Perhaps they're struggling through a relationship breakdown, family or friend hardship, something in residence/at home, or the transition to university.
- Maybe they're juggling courses on-top of external work or volunteering.
- There could be elements of isolation, cultural norms, self-doubt, or more.
- They may or may not open up to you with detail. It can be tempting to pry, but try and meet your student "where they're at" and work with them at their comfort point.
- Explore their perception of failing. What does it mean to them? Why is it so scary? Are they experiencing family pressure? Comparing themselves to their friends? Were their expectations of university proven right or wrong?

Other Resources

- This is definitely a situation we'd recommend you refer the student to their academic advisor for. The advisors can determine if the student's needs are actually academic based or if they'd benefit from a warm-transfer to another resource.
- If your student is in residence somewhere on campus, encourage them to connect with a Peer Leader, dons or other student-life team members.

You email your matched student in September to get to know them and establish a Buddy relationship. You receive a message in return, asking you not to contact them.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

Contact SDS Advisors

- New students were notified in late-July/early-August about the match process.
 - They were instructed to fill-out a similar form you did to ensure matches are grounded in as many criteria as possible.
 - They were also given the opportunity to opt-out of the matching process, with the understanding that abstaining meant an automatic match to one of you.
- That said, there may be a case where a student simply didn't respond by the initial deadline, their needs change over time (they no longer want the support), or they've misunderstood your role.
- **If you receive a similar message to above, please forward it on to sds@uwaterloo.ca.** One of the SDS Academic Advisors will follow-up with the student in general terms (e.g. see how things have been going) and explore their reason for not wishing to participate. Students are not mandated to take advantage of the Buddy Program and have the option to voluntarily withdraw.
- If the student confirms they do not want to be matched for the year, you will be contacted by the advisors for next steps. You might have an opportunity to be matched with a different student (we get a few new transfer students each term!) or can still get involved in other department events (e.g. online study sessions).
- We hope we don't get many (if any) of these cases, but there's always the possibility!

External circumstances have negatively impacted your ability to do well in your current courses. You're not sure if you can drop your Buddy commitment to focus elsewhere.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

Self-Care and Balance

- We understand that you're committing to at least 8 months of Buddy service without fully knowing what that service will look like, how your current academic year will unfold, etc. It's difficult to predict in August how your life will be in January!
- Please ensure you are managing your own self-care and work-life balance.
 - Learn to recognize your strengths and limits, understanding that we all have them.
 - Take time to reflect on your physical and mental wellbeing – we can't adequately support others if we're not in a good place ourselves.
 - Consider if your current situation might offer opportunities to share real-life resiliency with your Buddy. Is it something that is out of your hands, or do you have the ability to resolve it? Can this be a learning opportunity for a new student if they find themselves in a similar position?
- **Before officially cancelling your role, please connect with the SDS Academic Advisors** (email sds@uwaterloo.ca). We want to understand what's going on and help you where we can. There may be resources or supports you can access that can help you get back-on-track faster than expected!
- There might also be opportunity to have an honest conversation with your Buddy:
 - Letting them know you might not be able to connect frequently right now, but will respond to their requests when you can. It may take a few days or longer.
 - Informing them of alternative resources they can connect with in the meantime.
 - Whether you believe you can still serve as a resource going forward, etc.

Re-matching of Buddy

- If you determine that you are unable to provide support to your Buddy for the remainder of the academic year, please inform the SDS Advisors right away. By emailing sds@uwaterloo.ca we can start initiating a re-match for your student.
- While we hope students will be matched for the full year and experience a complete first-year transition, *there is no penalty for ending your role as an SDS Buddy.*
 - No need to feel guilty or ashamed - we want the Buddy program to be a success for both parties and sometimes it's just not a good fit for the moment. That's ok 😊

Campus Resources and Referrals

Click on the links below to learn more about each service, including relevant contact info and location.

If a student asks you about:	You can tell them to connect with:
Wanting to meet with a counsellor or indicates any significant physical/mental health concerns	Renison's Wellness Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reta Franci – Student Service Counsellor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ INTAKE: TBD, online ○ Students in the 2020-2021 Facebook cohort group have her information • Megan Collings-Moore – Chaplain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ @meganchaplain on Instagram <p>UW Counselling Services UW Health Services</p>
<u>Clarifications on:</u> - their degree plan - different majors and minors - changing courses or trouble in a course - support for petitions or grievances	Their SDS Academic Advisor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwen Bisset (<i>last names A – F</i>) • Jennifer Andrews-Coffey (<i>last names G – O</i>) • Lyndsay Masters (<i>last names P – Z</i>) <p>Direct them to the SDS Website – has info on courses, outlines, specializations, degree checklists and our emails!</p>
Paying tuition, account holds, refunds, promissory notes	Student Financial Services (SFS)
OSAP, UW awards, bursaries and scholarships	Student Awards & Financial Aid (SAFA)
Renison-based scholarships or bursaries	Renison's Registrar's Office
Needing accessibility accommodations	AccessAbility Services – located in Needles Hall

Other Handy Resources

- [UW Map](#) – virtual way of seeing campus buildings and estimating walking time.
- [Student Success Office](#) – hub for campus jobs/volunteer info, study skill workshops, etc.
- [Centre for Career Action](#) & [CareerHub](#) – connect with career advisors; attend workshops; access online resources.
- [The Writing Centre](#) – support for academic writing and academic organization tips
- [UW MATES](#) – peer-based emotional/social support program
- [WUSA](#) – Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (previously FEDS/Federation of Students)
- [The Centre](#) – main place for help with forms, finances, resource finding, etc.
- [Renison's Housing & Student Life Team](#) – if your student is in residence, they have a don. Start there!
- [UW Co-op Website](#) – if your student(s) are in Honours Arts Co-op or plan to add co-op at the end of their first year, direct them here for most questions.
- [EDGE Program](#) – available for students not in co-op plans to gain credit for volunteer/work experience, access to professional development courses and support from career advisors. Free to join.
- [Global Experience Certificate \(GEC\) Program](#) – get a certificate at graduation for completing requirements.
- [Arts Exchange Information](#) – first-years are unlikely to inquire, but if they do, send them here!

