

AUTISM & SAFETY

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bullying

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TOPICS

- o The Problem
 - oWhat is bullying?
 - oWhat are the numbers?
 - oWhy are our children at greater risk?
 - oWho are the players?
 - oWhat are the signs of bullying?
 - oWhat are the short and long term effects?
- o Creating Change
 - oSEL's – what are they?
 - oWhat doesn't work?
 - oWhat works?
 - oSpecific strategies for parents
 - oWhen your child is the bully
 - oResources/References

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bullying & autism | what is bullying? **ags**

- Aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions
- A pattern of behavior over time
- Interactions characterized by an *imbalance of power*
- Situations in which the victim is unable to defend himself/herself

How does your school district define bullying? *Check your student code of conduct.*

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bullying & autism | what is bullying? **ags**

Bullying can be:

- Manipulative – where a child is coerced and controlled
- A Conditional Friendship – friendship alternated with bullying behavior
- Exploitative – features of a child's condition are used to bully via technology/social media

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bullying & autism | types of bullying **ags**

- Verbal bullying including derogatory comments, name-calling, and taunting
- Bullying through social exclusion or isolation
- Physical bullying such as hitting, kicking, shoving, and spitting
- Bullying through lies and false rumors
- Having money or other things taken or damaged by students who bully
- Being threatened or being forced to do things by students who bully
- Racial bullying
- Sexual bullying
- Cyber bullying (via cell phone or Internet)

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bullying & autism | the numbers **ags**

Children with autism are at increased risk for bullying

- 60% of students with disabilities reported being bullied compared to 25 percent of the general student population. *Source: British Journal of Learning Support (2008)*
- Only 10 studies have been conducted in the United States on bullying and developmental disabilities. All studies found that children with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be victims of bullying than their nondisabled peers. *Source: Disabilities: Insights from across Fields and around the World (2009)*
- 88% of children with autism were reported by parents to have been the victim of bullying. *Source: Massachusetts Advocacy for Children (2009)*
- In general, bullying is most common in grades six thru eight. *Source: JAMA (2001)*

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bullying & autism | the numbers **ags**

- 65% of parents reported that their children with Asperger's syndrome had been victimized by peers in some way within the past year
- 47% reported that their children had been hit by peers or siblings
- 50% reported them to be scared by their peers
- 9% were attacked by a gang and hurt in the private parts
- 12% indicated their child had never been invited to a birthday party
- 6% were almost always picked last for teams
- 3% ate alone at lunch every day

Source: Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing (2009)

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bullying & autism | the numbers **ags**

Length of time bullying occurred
(when asked of parents with children on the autism spectrum)

- 1 time 11.7%
- 2-5 days 9.3%
- 2-4 weeks 11.4%
- Several months 20.4%
- 1 year 5.1%
- More than a year 39.6%
- Other 10.8%


Source: Massachusetts Advocates for Children (2009)

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bullying & autism | why are our kids targets? **ags**


- Low frustration tolerance can lead to meltdown: the person stands out as being different
- Deficient social skills make it difficult to hold conversations and make friends
- Motor skills impairment may not allow students to "keep up" with peers drawing attention on the playground and in gym class
- Children with communication difficulties may use assistive technology other students don't understand and view as "weird"
- Students with physical impairments may move slower and have less stamina; perception of weakness may precipitate physical or verbal abuse
- Move toward more inclusive environments; more students with autism served in general education settings, less adult supervision

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bullying & autism | the players 


- The bully
- The victim
- The bystanders
- Teachers and other professionals
- Administrators, legislators, policy makers
- Parents/caregivers

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bullying & autism | signs of bullying 


- Reluctance to attend school
- Emotionally sensitive behavior; anxiety
- Change in daily routines, i.e. diet or sleeping patterns
- Torn clothing, damaged books or other items
- Cuts or bruises
- Decline in academic performance

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bullying & autism | short term effects 

- Anger
- Depression
- Anxious avoidance of settings in which bullying may occur
- Greater incidence of illness
- Lower grades than non-bullied peers
- Suicidal thoughts and feelings


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bullying & autism | long term effects 

- Reduced occupational opportunities
- Lingering feelings of anger and bitterness, desire for revenge
- Difficulty trusting people
- Interpersonal difficulties, including fear and avoidance of new social situations
- Increased tendency to be a loner
- Perception of self as easy to victimize, overly sensitive, and thin-skinned
- Self-esteem problems
- Increased incidence of continued bullying and victimization

Source: *The Long Term Effects of Bullying*, Mark Donbeck, Ph.D., MentalHelp.net

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bullying & autism | long term effects 


Bullied children are twice as likely to have psychotic symptoms in adolescence, regardless of other risk factors, such as other mental illnesses, family circumstances, or the child's IQ. The risk of psychotic symptoms was stronger when the childhood bullying was chronic or severe.

Source: Schreier, A. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, May 2009; vol 66: 527-536.

Serotonin transporter gene variant (5-HTTLPR) appears to increase the risk for developing emotional problems as a result of being bullied.

Source: Sugden et al, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, August 2010; vol 49: 830-840.

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bullying & autism | creating change 

Creating a Culture of Acceptance

Social and emotional learning (SEL) assists children in developing fundamental skills to effectively handle school, relationships and personal development

High-quality SEL programs implemented in Illinois led to significant improvements in students' social and emotional skills, in attitudes about self and others, and in classroom behavior. Programs were also associated with substantial decreases in conduct problems and emotional distress such as anxiety and depression—all of which are part of the bullying phenomenon

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bullying & autism | creating change 

What doesn't work . . .

- Individual counseling (for bully or victim)
- Accepting bullying as normal
- Focusing on only physical aggression
- Zero tolerance policies
- Isolated efforts (special auditorium events, lectures)
- Stigmatizing victims
- Adults model intimidation, anger, power

Source: *What Works, What Doesn't Work in Bullying Prevention Strategies* Michael B. Greene, Ph.D. Director, YCS Center for the Prevention of Violence mjgreen@ycs.org, *Research-Advisor, NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention

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bullying & autism | creating change 

What works . . .

- School climate change
- Safe ways to report (safety net programs)
- Focus on all types of bullying (not just physical aggression)
- Focus on role of bystanders
- Peer support networks
- Adults model supportive relationships
- Active parent involvement


Source: *What Works, What Doesn't Work in Bullying Prevention Strategies* Michael B. Greene, Ph.D. Director, YCS Center for the Prevention of Violence mjgreen@ycs.org, *Research-Advisor, NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention

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bullying & autism | strategies for parents 


- Prepare the Team
- Address with IEP
- Prepare your child
- Monitor
- Use your complaint process

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bullying & autism | prepare the team 

- Talk to administrators, school board about features of autism and problem of bullying: *What is our districts' SEL? If we don't have one, why not?*
- Communicate with teachers about your child's specific strengths and challenges (student portfolio)
- Include ancillary personnel (lunch room monitors, campus security guards, etc.)
- Consider talking to your child's peers to enlist support
- Be polite, but make it clear to teachers, counselors, administrators that you will be involved in helping the team *avoid your child's victimization due to their disability*

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bullying & autism | address with IEP 


- Include social skills goals in IEP
- Include building self-advocacy skills goals in IEP
- Write familiarization plan (visit school, introduce to teachers, walk thru schedule) into IEP to assure it happens
- Buddy up – best to identify at least one friend who will be with your child during less structured environments (lunch, PE, recess)
- If your child does not have a suitable friend, ask that peer support be written into IEPs
- Consider asking for accommodation for student to dress out for PE in alternate setting unless adult supervision is present (or pursue alternate PE credit if available)

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bullying & autism | prepare your child 


- Talk to your child about friendships and how real friends behave
- If possible, obtain social skills training (Michelle Garcia Winner) even if you have to carry it out yourself
- Visit the school prior to the first day-- walk through schedule
- Introduce your child to key players (teachers, security guards, front office personnel, counselors)
- Help child get organized
- Ask your child if they have any specific fears
- Emphasize their strengths, reassure them bullying is not their fault, many children experience bullying, and bullying is always wrong and must be reported

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bullying & autism | monitor 


- Visit the school and observe (volunteer, be there for another purpose)
- Talk to your child often
 - Do your friends have special names for you?
 - Who do you sit with at lunch?
 - Which friends do you talk to during the day?
 - What's your least favorite class? Why?
- Keep communication lines open with teachers, others
- If there is a student who might be aware of how things are going for your child, ask them questions, whether your child is verbal or non-verbal

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bullying & autism | when things aren't working 


- Informal resolutions (document all communication in writing)
- File a complaint (read your procedural safeguards)
- Avoid becoming overly emotional, but be persistent
- Emphasize that your child cannot make educational progress on IEP goals due to bullying
- Know your rights – children with disabilities are a protected class – bullying children with disabilities is defined as harassment and can carry harsher penalties (OCR) <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html>
- If it becomes necessary to file suit against your school district, be aware you will need to prove *deliberate indifference* on their part.

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bullying & autism | when your child is the bully 

- Act quickly
- Include social skills goals in IEP
- Ask for an FBA
- Be aware if your child is over age ten, they are subject to arrest and detention
- If school calls for a Manifestation Determination, consider hiring an advocate

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bullying & autism | when your child is the bully 

Discuss with your child definitions of assault (elbow in the lunch line, throwing an object, any act perceived as a threat can result in juvenile detention.)


Go over the student code of conduct with your child so to help him understand the definition of each offense and possible consequences.

Instruct your child if they are ever questioned by police (campus police or local law enforcement) to ask that you be present.

Youth are often subject to interrogation they don't wish to participate in or don't fully understand. Unless they are placed in police custody, they should be free to leave but most don't understand this and may be intimidated into incriminating themselves.

Read "Strategies When Children are Arrested for School-Related Behavior Problems" by Pete Wright Esq. www.wrightslaw.com

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bullying & autism | a few words about suicide 

What Are The Warning Signs For Suicide?
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/GetHelp/SuicideWarningSigns.aspx>

Seek help as soon as possible by contacting a mental health professional or by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK if you or someone you know exhibits any of the following signs:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities - seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped - like there's no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Feeling anxious, agitated, or unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life

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bullying & autism | resources/references



[Walk A Mile In Their Shoes, AbilityPath.Org](#)

[What Works, What Doesn't Work, by Michael Greene, NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention](#)

[From FindYouthInfo.org, US Government website](#)

[Bullying Experiences Among Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)

[Bullying at School and Online](#)

[When Behavior is Caused by a Disability](#)

How Common is Bullying? Education.com

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Questions?



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