



Parent's Guide to Bullying

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**American
Autism Association**

American Autism Association
www.myautism.org

Types of Bullying

- *MANIPULATIVE*: Where a child is coerced and controlled.
- *CONDITIONAL FRIENDSHIP*: Friendship alternated with bullying behavior.
- *EXPLOITIVE*: Features of a child's condition are used to bully via technology or social media.

Forms of bullying

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

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

5 Things Parents Can Do

1) Prepare the Team

- Talk to teachers, administrators, and your school board about features of autism and the 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. A student portfolio is an excellent way to communicate with the team. Include ancillary personnel (lunch room monitors, campus security guards, etc.) when introducing your child to the school community. Often these individuals will monitor unstructured situations when bullying is most likely to occur.
- Consider talking to your child's peers to enlist support. You may want to talk to your child before you decide whether to disclose his disability to other students. Be sure to highlight strengths, as well as discuss challenges, in an age appropriate way.
- 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

2) Address with IEP

- Include social skills goals in IEP. Make sure the goals are clear and measurable, and that data is taken to monitor progress toward goals.
- Also include building self-advocacy skills in IEP goals.
- Write a familiarization plan (visit school, introduce to teachers, walk thru schedule) and document it in the student's IEP to assure it happens.
- Buddy up - if possible, identify at least one friend who will be with your child during less structured environments (lunch, PE, recess). Children who are alone are most vulnerable to bullies.
- If your child does not have a suitable friend, ask that peer support be written into IEPs. Some campuses have programs such as Circle of Friends or other buddy systems. Even something as simple as having another student accompany your child during class changes can thwart many potential problems.
- Consider asking for accommodations for the student to dress out for PE in alternate setting unless adult supervision is present (or pursue alternate PE credit if available). Locker rooms are notorious for bullying behaviors.

3) Prepare your child

- Talk to your child about friendships and how real friends should behave
- Also include building self-advocacy skills in IEP goals.
- If possible, obtain social skills training, again, with goals written into the student's IEP.
- Visit the school prior to the first day - walk through the student's schedule with them. You may need to obtain permission to do this and have the requirement documented in the IEP.
- Introduce your child to key players (teachers, security guards, front office personnel, counselors).
- Help your child get organized. Practice opening lockers, consider color-coding materials by subject, and provide visual schedules and maps if needed.
- Emphasize their strengths, reassure them bullying is not their fault and that many children experience bullying. Let them know bullying is always wrong and must be reported.

4) 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

- Ask questions. 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.

5) Use your complaint process

- Informal resolutions (in writing to document communication)
- File a complaint (read procedural safeguards provided by your school district)
- 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

The Bully Project

The Bully Project is an organization that raises awareness about how bullying affects children with special needs. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), AbilityPath, PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, and Autism Speaks are proud partners. BULLY lists the top ten facts that parents, educators and students need to know:

1. The Facts - Students with disabilities are much more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers.

Bullying of children with disabilities is significant but there is very little research to document it. Only 10 U.S. studies have been conducted on the connection between bullying and developmental disabilities but all of these studies found that children with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers. One study shows that 60 percent of students with disabilities report being bullied regularly compared with 25 percent of all students.

2. Bullying affects a student's ability to learn.

Many students with disabilities are already addressing challenges in the academic environment. When they are bullied, it can directly impact their education.

- Bullying is not a harmless rite of childhood that everyone experiences. Research shows that bullying can negatively impact a child's access to education and lead to:
- School avoidance and higher rates of absenteeism
- Decrease in grades
- Inability to concentrate
- Loss of interest in academic achievement
- Increase in dropout rates

3. The Definition - bullying based on a student's disability may be considered harassment.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have stated that bullying may also be considered harassment when it is based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion

- Harassing behaviors may include:
 - Unwelcome conduct such as verbal abuse, name-calling, epithets, or slurs
 - Graphic or written statements
 - Threats
 - Physical assault
 - Other conduct that may be physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating

4. The Federal Laws - disability harassment is a civil rights issue.

Parents have legal rights when their child with a disability is the target of bullying or disability harassment. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (often referred to as 'Section 504') and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II) are the federal laws that apply if the harassment denies a student with a disability an equal opportunity to education. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Section 504 and Title II of the ADA. Students with a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Program (IEP) would qualify for these protections.

According to a 2000 Dear Colleague letter from the Office for Civil Rights, "States and school districts also have a responsibility under Section 504, Title II, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is enforced by OSERS [the Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services], to ensure that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is made available to eligible students with disabilities. Disability harassment may result in a denial of FAPE under these statutes."

The letter further outlines how bullying in the form of disability harassment may prevent a student with an IEP from receiving an appropriate education: "The IDEA was enacted to ensure that recipients of IDEA funds make available to students with disabilities the appropriate special education and related services that enable them to access and benefit from public education. The specific services to be provided a student with a disability are set forth in the student's individualized education program (IEP), which is developed by a team that includes the student's parents, teachers and, where appropriate, the student. Harassment of a student based on disability may decrease the student's ability to benefit from his or her education and amount to a denial of FAPE."

5. The State Laws - students with disabilities have legal rights when they are a target of bullying.

Most states have laws that address bullying. Some have information specific to students with disabilities. For a complete overview of state laws, visit Olweus.org. Many school districts also have individual policies that address how to respond to bullying situations. Contact your local district to request a written copy of the district policy on bullying.

6. The adult response is important

Parents, educators, and other adults are the most important advocates that a student with disabilities can have. It is important that adults know the best way to talk with someone in a bullying situation. Some children are able to talk with an adult about personal matters and may be willing to discuss bullying. Others may be reluctant to speak about the situation. There could be a number of reasons for this. The student bullying them may have told them not to tell or they might fear that if they do tell someone, the bullying won't stop or may become worse.

When preparing to talk to children about bullying, adults (parents and educators) should consider how they will handle the child's questions and emotions and what their own responses will be. Adults should be prepared to listen without judgment, providing the child with a safe place to work out their feelings and determine their next steps. It is never the responsibility of the child to fix a bullying situation. If children could do that, they wouldn't be seeking the help of an adult in the first place.

7. The Resources - students with disabilities have resources that are specifically designed for their situation.

IEP – Students with disabilities, who are eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), will have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP can be a helpful tool in a bullying prevention plan. Remember, every child receiving special education is entitled to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), and bullying can become an obstacle to that education.

Dear Colleague Letter –In 2000, a 'Dear Colleague' letter was sent to school districts nationwide from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) that defined the term "disability harassment." In 2010, another Dear Colleague letter from the Office for Civil Rights was issued that reminded school districts of their responsibilities under civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and religion.

Template Letters –Parents should contact school staff each time their child informs them that he or she has been bullied. PACER has created these letters that parents may use as a guide for writing a letter to their child's school. These letters contain standard language and "fill-in-the-blank" spaces so that the letter can be customized for each child's situation.

These sample letter(s) can serve two purposes:

First, the letter will alert school administration of the bullying and your desire for interventions. Second, the letter can serve as your written record when referring to events. The record (letter) should be factual and absent of opinions or emotional statements. The two letters – "Student with an IEP, Notifying School About Bullying" and "Student with a 504, Notifying School About Bullying" – are for parents who have a child with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504. The bullying law of the individual state applies to all students as noted in the law. When bullying is based on the child's disability, federal law can also apply under Section 504, Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

8. The Power of Bystanders - more than 50 of bullying situations stop when a peer intervenes.

Most students don't like to see bullying but they may not know what to do when it happens. Peer advocacy – students speaking out on behalf of others – is a unique approach that empowers students to protect those targeted by bullying. Peer advocacy works for two reasons: First, students are more likely than adults to

see what is happening with their peers and peer influence is powerful. Second, a student telling someone to stop bullying has much more impact than an adult giving the same advice.

9. The importance of self-advocacy

Self-advocacy means the student with a disability is responsible for telling people what they want and need in a straightforward way. Students need to be involved in the steps taken to address a bullying situation. Self-advocacy is knowing how to:

- o Speak up for yourself
- o Describe your strengths, disability, needs, and wishes
- o Take responsibility for yourself
- o Learn about your rights
- o Obtain help, or know who to ask, if you have a question
- o The person who has been bullied should be involved in deciding how to respond to the bullying. This involvement can provide students with a sense of control over their situation, and help them realize that someone is willing to listen, take action, and reassure them that their opinions and ideas are important.

The Student Action Plan is a self-advocacy resource. It includes three simple steps to explore specific, tangible actions to address the situation:

- o Define the situation
- o Think about how the situation could be different
- o Write down the steps to take action

10. You are not alone

When students have been bullied, they often believe they are the only one this is happening to, and that no one else cares. In fact, they are not alone. There are individuals, communities, and organizations that do care. It is not up to one person to end the bullying and it is never the responsibility of the child to change what is happening to them. No one deserves to be bullied. All people should be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what. Everyone has a responsibility – and a role to play – as schools, parents, students, and the community work together for positive change.”

Resource Articles

“Why Autistic Kids Make Easy Targets for School Bullies,” 2012.

<http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/07/health/autistic-kids-bullied-time>

“Many people with autism have trouble recognizing social cues, which makes them awkward around others. They also often engage in repetitive behaviors and tend to be hypersensitive to environmental stimuli, all of which makes kids with the disorder ripe targets for bullies who home in on difference and enjoy aggravating their victims.”

“Bullying Harms Kids with Autism, Parents Say,” 2013.

<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/news/articles/2013/01/11/bullying-harms-kids-with-autism-parents-say>

“Immediate consequences of being bullied included emotional trauma (69 percent) and physical injuries (8 percent). Nearly 14 percent of the children who were bullied said they feared for their safety.”

“Bullying and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): How to Help your Child,” 2013.

<http://www.wetreatkidsbetter.org/2013/04/bullying-and-autism-spectrum-disorder-asd-how-to-help-your-child/>

Asks questions: What makes autistic kids vulnerable to bullying?

How parents can help autistic kids avoid being bullied?

How parents can help prevent bullying

How teachers can help prevent bullying?

“Almost half of kids with autism are bullied, study shows,” 2012.

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504763_162-57505938-10391704/almost-half-of-kids-with-autism-are-bullied-study-shows/

“The researchers wrote that classrooms should increase social integration of adolescents with ASD and help students who don’t have ASD understand, interact and empathize with kids who have ASD and other developmental disorders.”

“Bully-Proof Your Child,” 2012.

<http://www.autismfile.com/living-with-autism/bully-proof-your-child>

“How will you know if your child is being bullied? Often, children don’t tell adults they are being bullied. Kids on the spectrum may have limited speech or might not actually realize they are being victimized.”

“Bullying and Cyber Bullying: Resources for How to Get Help,” 2012.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/bullying-cyberbullying-resources/story?id=15962497>

Helpful Hotlines

BRAVE – “Building Respect, Acceptance, Voice through Education”

Phone Number: 1-212-709-3222

Kids have 24-hour access to professionals who can provide supportive listening, crisis intervention and suicide risk assessment.

Bullying UK (UK only)

0808-800-2222

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week

<http://www.bullying.co.uk>

Crisis Call Center

800-273-8255 or text ANSWER to 839863

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week

<http://crisiscallcenter.org/crisisservices.html>

CyberTipline

800-843-5678

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week

<http://www.cybertipline.com>

Kids Helpline (Australia only)

1800-55-1800

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week

<http://www.kidshelp.com.au>

Kids Help Phone (Canada only)

800-668-6868

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week

<http://www.kidshelpphone.ca>

National Suicide Hotline
800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
800-442-HOPE (4673)
Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week
<http://www.hopeline.com>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
800-273-TALK (8255)
Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Thursday's Child National Youth
Advocacy Hotline
800-USA-KIDS (800-872-5437)
Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week
<http://www.thursdayschild.org>

The Trevor Lifeline (U.S. only)
866-4-U-TREVOR (488-7386)
Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week
<http://www.thetrevorproject.org>

Your Life Iowa: Bullying Support and
Suicide Prevention
(855) 581-8111 (24/7) or text TALK to
85511 (4-8 PM every day)
Chat is available Mondays-Thursdays
from 7:30 PM-12:00 AM
<http://www.yourlifeiowa.org>