

Bullying and Autism

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Bullying Basics

- Frequent targets are children with ASD.
- All age groups are targets...children—adult.
- All environments...home, school, community, workplace.
- Bullying...a national double take.
- Research suggests consequences are much greater than we had imagined.
- The natural victim...poor social savvy/poor street smarts...ASD.
- Bully repeats itself—sequence is predictable. Experts say ignoring it is ineffective.
- Research suggests that interventions can reduce the rate of bullying.
- Reporting vs. tattling.

Bullying vs. friendly teasing or conflict situations

- Repeated, intentionally negative actions (intent to harm) toward a targeted individual over time;
- An imbalance in the power (physical, verbal, social, psychological) within the interaction;
- Marked, contrasting differences in the affect of the individuals involved as a result of the interaction (a distressed target).

Categories of Bullying

- **Verbal & Written**
- **Physical**
- **Relational/Social**
- **Educational**

Common bullying attributes that impact kids with ASD

- **Backhanded bullying—Offers of friendship with the intent to mislead.**
- **Absurd Information and requests—Directions to engage in inappropriate activities.**
- **The Bullying Backdraft—Child returns to a situation that other children would avoid.**
- **Educational Bullying—the bullying may be seen as for the victim’s own good. (Look closely at educational programming.)**

Bullying Myths

- **Bullying is inevitable. Ensure vs. effectively addressed.**
- **The child is bullied because of peculiar traits. Bullying topic vs. bullying reason.**
- **The child needs to learn to be less “teasable”. Target coaching vs. teaching social understanding.**
- **Bullying ends when children mature. Certain point vs. lifelong.**
- **Increased supervision ends bullying. Increased supervision vs. increased understanding.**

The Bullying Interaction

	Children in the social majority	Children who are targets of bullying Passive/Proactive	Children who bully others 4%
Social Perspective	Possess social insight, possess social ability, pragmatic	Overwhelmed with or unaware of social cues, Misinterprets the intentions of others	Often defiant and noncompliant, lacks empathy
Social Skills	Able to balance social power	Lacks social confidence, lacks social skills, lacks understanding of emotion	Needs to be in control, has to win,
As the Bully	Curious / experimental / modeled	A learned behavior, unintentional, don't know how, fight/flight/fright, Sensory consequence	Frequently instigates aggressive interactions, not remorseful

Targets: Children with ASD

General Research

The Victim's characteristics

- Anxiety
- Passivity
- Sensitivity
- Low self-esteem
- Low self-confidence
- Lack of humor
- Lack of friends
- Among boys
 - Physically smaller
 - Weaker
 - Few prosocial actions
 - Submit to suggestions

- Child rearing factors that foster the bully
 - Indifference and lack of warmth from the parent toward the child
 - Lack of clear or adequate limits
 - Use of physical punishment
 - Impulsive temperament in the child (Bee, 2001)

Children with ASD

- Avoidant/Passive
- Engaging
- Language and Socialization
- Inability to Predict Others' Behavior
- Other Factors that Contribute
 - Parenting Styles
 - Peer Relationships
- Reactions to Bullying Experiences
- Consequences of Chronic Victimization

General Characteristics of Children with AS

- Frustrate peers
- Rejected by peers
- Clumsy may be ineffective in play, sports and fights
- Difficulty engaging in age-expected social interactions
- Formal “little professor” speech
- Emotionally vulnerable; easily stressed
- Anxious
- Inflexible
- Easily fatigued; tendency to be sedentary
- Socially naïve
- Viewed as “easy targets” (Howlin, R. 2002)

Avoidant/Passive Social Presentation

- Are passive/withdrawn socially
- Tend to be “loners”
- Prefer objects and special interests (sometimes instead of playmates)
- Lack reciprocity in play
- May be identified by professionals at earlier age
- Relate better to adults than peers
- Viewed as “easy targets” (Howlin, R. 2002)

Engaging Social Presentation

- Are most rejected by peers
- Disliked by some adults in authority, including teachers
- Have irritating habits
- Lack focus; impulsive and immature
- Attempt to fight or talk back when bullied but ineffective
- Demonstrate excessive bossiness
- Seek out social interactions in an “in your face” kind of way
- Tend to receive a diagnosis at a later age; seen as “odd” and ill-mannered
- Seen as demanding and oblivious to the feelings and responses of others (Howlin, R. 2002)

Bullying Prevention with Special Considerations for Children with Autism

Typical Peer Conflicts and Bullying

Normal conflicts: Equal power, possibly friends, no real intent to harm or upset the other student.

Bullying conflicts: Power imbalance and no real friendship. Targets are often alone without peer support. Repeated, negative, purposeful.

Distinguishing between normal peer conflict and bullying

Normal Peer Conflict	Bullying
<p>Equal power Friends No pattern of negative actions No premeditation to upset or harm Take responsibility for own actions Sincere remorse afterwards Interested in repairing the relationship Alternate roles, not one-sided Stay together after the incident</p>	<p>Power imbalance No real friendship Targets are alone without peer support Pattern of repeated negative actions Actions are purposeful Gain control, power, and items Bully shifts blame No sincere remorse Not interested in repairing relationship One-sided Students separate after incident</p>

Considerations for Students with ASD

- Determine antecedents
- AS may react in an unexpected manner
- May not recognize bullying
- May be talked into doing inappropriate things

- **May tolerate abuse for possible friendship**
- **May not understand why a given behavior is not appropriate**
- **May misinterpret**
- **May fail to understand consequences of own behavior**
- **May be mimics behaviors of more popular students**
- **May attempt to retaliate**
- **May join in when bullying someone else**
- **May initiate bullying to keep from being bullied**

Avoid Blaming the Target

- **Assist in developing skills that will aid them during challenging social situations and help provide for their safety.**
- **Adults should not inadvertently escalate matters when student with AS are already anxious and upset. Twice victimized.**
- **Don't pinpoint student's reaction as the reason or solution to the problem.**
- **Don't blame AS behaviorisms as provoking other children.**

How to Talk to Students When Bullying Occurs

- **Avoid overly emotional and harsh responses**
- **Respect privacy**

Formative and Prosocial Consequences

- **Punitive measures usually do not serve to change behaviors.**
- **Formative discipline teaches the child to think in a different way.**
- **Prosocial discipline provides consequences that require a child to do something positive and then receives positive feedback in response.**
- **Possible formative consequences**
 - **Participation in social skills classes and/or anger management classes.**
 - **Removal of privileges.**
 - **Making amends to the targeted child.**
 - **Working in a helper role with younger students.**
 - **Promoting identification of the target's emotions by having student role-play the fully-target incident in the role of the targeted child, with an adult**
 - **Performing work for office staff and teachers**
 - **Making a call to parent**

- **Meet with counselor to process the incident and identify emotion and the wrong thinking involved and explore more appropriate choices.**

Adult Accountability

When adults take the position that a student is somehow responsible for provoking harassment from peers, these same adults may unintentionally be modeling these attitudes and beliefs through their behaviors to their students.

- **Teachers responses**
- **Belief that no person deserves to be teased or humiliated**
- **Some adults contribute to the emotional mistreatment of students by intimidating, ignoring, being overly punitive, and critical**
- **Teachers need to be supported by colleagues and administration**
- **Training**
- **Modeling appropriate behaviors**
- **Being proactive**
- **Development of school code**

Promoting Social Competence

- **Social Skills Training**
- **Other focused**
- **Social Stories**
- **Power Cards**
- **Theory of Mind development**
- **Empathy**
- **Development of relationships (Gutstein)**

Addressing Bullying in the IEP

Goal: Student will develop and maintain effective relationship with his peers and teachers and learn to recognize and report bullying and teasing if it occurs.

Helping Students Identify Their Roles

- Bystanders
- Bullies
- Targets

Strategies from Carol Gray

- 1) Draw a map of the child's "real world". Mark safe places and dangerous place.
- 2) Find others who will support action. Find out what they believe and who will help.
- 3) Organize a team and get to work.
- 4) Seek out children who are likely targets.
- 5) Communicate effectively.
- 6) Model effective conflict resolution skills-avoid educational bullying.
- 7) Strengthen the social hierarchy, don't lie about it.
- 8) Review bully-proofing curricula.
- 9) Develop self-esteem.
 - a. Don't target coach
 - b. Use effective praise
 - c. Define the child by his strengths
 - d. Help child to understand self
- 10) Three final steps
 - e. Increase informed supervision
 - f. Restructure high-risk settings
 - g. Modify bully-proofing curriculum

Improving the understanding of developing a relationship.

Excerpt: Relationship Development Questionnaire. Steven E. Gutstein Ph.D. Relationship Development Intervention (RDI) program. The Connections Center, 4120 Bellaire Blvd., Houston, TX 77025; gutstein@connectionscenter.com

Level I

5. Visually checks to determine others' reactions to his/her behavior.
6. Successfully carries out adult-requested actions as an assistant.
7. Carefully observes an adult when requested to match their actions.

Level II

14. Make sure that his/her partner is ready, before starting an activity.

Level III

40. Makes sure that social partners can see objects just the way s/he does, for example, turns a photo around so that the other person can see it.

Level IV

45. Makes peers feel important and comfortable when they come to visit.

Level V

54. Actively attempts to solicit social partner's ideas and feelings.
55. Talks about his/her own feelings in a meaningful way.
63. When someone takes an action that is negative or hurtful, he/she tries to determine if it was accidental or deliberate before responding.

Level VI

76. Shows respect and appreciation for others beliefs, when different from his/hers.
77. Willingly explores personal strengths and weaknesses.

78. Solicits and accepts constructive feedback.
79. Accepts and delivers constructive feedback in an appropriate manner.
80. Tries to obtain accurate information about how others see him/her.
81. Maintains up-to-date knowledge of family members feelings, interests, and concerns.
82. Finds meaningful ways to show caring and concern for family members.
83. Productively manages conflicts with family members.
84. Has a reciprocal “give and take” relationship with family members.
85. Thinks about the needs of friends, even when he/she is not with them.
86. Values membership and actively contribute to several groups, organizations and /or teams.
87. Treats friends who share a history of trust and loyalty, differently from superficial “playmates.”
88. Chooses close friends based on realistic appraisal of their trustworthiness.
89. Takes effective day-to-day actions to maintain close friendships.
90. Shares private feelings and concerns with close friend.

Supplemental

91. Observes people’s faces to determine how they feel.
92. Willingly gives in, or compromises in a conflict.
93. Chooses to interact with a peer, even if it means sharing a favored object, or interrupting a favored activity.
94. Requests help for ways to improve social functioning.
95. Asks a social partner to choose their joint activity.
96. Peers make comments that he/she is fun or exciting to be with.
97. Voluntarily takes actions to help a family member.
98. Invitations received to the home of a peer (not including “required” invitations).
99. Invites a friend over to the house, or to go do something together, without anyone telling him/her to do so.
100. Calls to friends, without being told to do so?