



Autism Society
of NORTH CAROLINA



Bullying

The signs, ways to prevent it, and how to stop it

Part of the ASNC School Toolkit Series

Rev.10.14

About the toolkit

It is our goal to do all that we can to ensure that students with autism have a safe learning environment in which they are treated as valued members of the school community. This toolkit aims to teach parents and professionals about the signs of bullying, ways to prevent bullying, and how to stop it.

Table of contents

This toolkit is broken into different sections; you can read all of it or just choose sections that most interest you.

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Bullying | 3 |
| What is Bullying? | |
| Why Children with ASD can be Targeted | |
| What Parents Can Do | 4 |
| Signs Your Child is Being Bullied | |
| If You Suspect Your Child is Being Bullied | |
| Strategies to Avoid | |
| Bullying Prevention Tips | |
| What If Your Child is Considered a Bully? | |
| What Schools Can Do | 8 |
| Bullying Prevention | |
| Policies That are Ineffective | |
| Additional Resources | 11 |
| Addendum: Schools' Obligations and NC Laws | 14 |
| About Autism | 15 |

Beyond the toolkit

ASNC has about 50 local chapters and support groups across North Carolina, and they can be an excellent place to connect with other parents to address bullying in your local schools. Chapters are parent-run and offer support and education on a wide variety of topics, including bullying prevention and school issues. To find one near you, please go to our website: <http://bit.ly/ASNCChapters>.

In addition, ASNC has Autism Resource Specialists and a Hispanic Affairs Liaison who cover all 100 NC counties. They are available to answer questions, help with school issues, intervene in a crisis, and direct families to local resources. You can find contact information for the Autism Resource Specialist in your community here: <http://bit.ly/AutismResourceSpecialists>.

If you would like to read more, please refer to the end of the toolkit for additional information sources that are recommended by the ASNC Advocacy and Bookstore staff. To keep updated on the latest books and DVDs on autism and bullying, we invite you to connect with the ASNC Bookstore on Facebook, at <https://www.facebook.com/AutismBookstore>, or by emailing staff at books@autismsociety-nc.org to tell them you would like to join the newsletter mailing list.

Bullying

What is Bullying?

Bullying is deliberately aggressive or hurtful behavior toward another person. It can take many forms, including physical aggression (pushing, hitting, kicking, tripping, taking belongings), verbal aggression (name-calling, taunting, threatening, saying things to hurt feelings), and indirect aggression (excluding someone, spreading rumors). Verbal aggression is the most common, and the effects of ongoing verbal bullying can be just as devastating to the victim as infrequent acts of physical bullying. Girls are more likely than boys to commit indirect acts of aggression, which can be very hard to detect, and thus to stop.

Today we recognize that bullying is very serious, and that it cannot be dismissed as “kids being kids,” harmless teasing, or a childhood rite of passage. Left unchecked, bullying has very detrimental effects on the victim, the school community, and even the bully himself. Bullying can have a long-lasting impact on victims (and bullies), including depression, anxiety, lower grades, school avoidance, poor self-esteem, increased illness, fewer friends, school violence, and a higher dropout rate. When a child with a disability such as autism is bullied, it may also be a violation of their legal rights under IDEA and Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Why Children with ASD can be Targeted

Children with disabilities are bullied at far greater rates than their nondisabled peers, and this holds true for children with ASD, which is often an “invisible” disability. Students with more obvious impairments are bullied less than those whose disability is more subtle. Children whose peers see them as “odd” or “annoying” without realizing that their behavior is caused by a disability such as autism are far more likely to be targeted for harassment. A child with ASD may have behaviors that make him stand out from his peers in an inclusion classroom, might have age-inappropriate interests, or might be easily provoked to react, all of which increase the likelihood of being bullied. According to the IAN study, other things that can attract the attention of bullies include:

- Clumsiness
- Poor hygiene
- Rigid rule-keeping (enforcing adults’ rules when other children would not)
- Continuing to talk about a favorite topic even when others are bored or annoyed
- Frequent meltdowns
- Inflexibility or rigidity

Children with autism are also vulnerable to being bullied because of their difficulties with social understanding. Poor social skills can make them appear to be strange, or rude, or otherwise different. It may be difficult for the student to tell true friends from bullies, understand the nuances of social situations, and discern the motives and intentions of others.

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What Parents Can Do

Teach children an easily remembered strategy for dealing with bullies, such as “**Stop, Walk, and Talk.**”

- Stop means to put a hand up to indicate that the bully should stop bothering the child
- Walk means to walk away without responding
- Talk means to tell an adult about the bullying

Signs Your Child is Being Bullied

Bullying can be very overt or quite discreet. Children with or without autism are often afraid to report that they are being bullied, because of embarrassment or fear of retaliation. Add to that the communication impairments that are part of autism, and the likelihood that your child will directly inform you that he is being harassed is further diminished. In addition, a child with autism may not even fully comprehend that he is bullied, making it even harder to determine what is happening at school. Therefore, parents must be alert to the following signs:

- Depression
- School refusal or complaints about going to school
- Unexplained bruises, cuts, or scrapes
- Torn clothing
- “Missing” or damaged belongings
- Social isolation

Parents also need to watch for signs of cyber-bullying, which can occur via email, text messaging, voicemail, through social networks, and on chat boards. Cyber-bullying often involves spreading rumors, revealing secrets, threatening the victim, posting private photographs, and other harassing behavior.

Parents are advised to:

- Keep a close eye on your child’s devices.
- Keep the family computer in a public part of the home rather than in the child’s bedroom so that you can supervise online activity.
- Consider your child’s maturity level and social-cognitive abilities before allowing them to join social-networking sites.

If You Suspect Your Child is Being Bullied

If you are concerned that your child might be a victim of bullying, it is important to take action. Adopting a “wait-and-see attitude” or hoping that the problem will resolve itself are not effective strategies and may prolong your child’s suffering. First and foremost, your child needs to be told that being bullied is not his fault and that no one deserves to be bullied. Children who are bullied can be psychologically fragile, isolated at school, and fearful, so having unwavering support from their parents at home is critical. There are some important steps parents should take if they suspect bullying:

- Support your child and assure him that being bullied is not his fault.
- Document every incident in writing with details:
 - what happened
 - who was involved
 - who witnessed the incident
 - where it occurred
 - who the child told about the incident
 - what actions were taken by school staff
 - If the bullying was physical, take photographs to document injuries or damage to clothing.
 - For more serious injuries, take your child to their pediatrician for care and for additional documentation for your records. Remember that you are building a case to ensure that the school takes the necessary action to protect your child.
- **Contact your child’s teacher or school principal** to discuss the bullying. Write a letter or email detailing the situation so that you are creating a paper trail.
- **Do not allow school personnel to blame the victim** or imply that your child brought on the bullying himself. Every child in school deserves to feel safe. Do not permit the teacher to publicly shame the bully, as this may result in increased aggression against your child.
- **If you do not get help from the first person at the school that you contact, keep moving up the ladder.** You can “cc” the district superintendent or contact the school board if that is what it takes to get a serious response. The school has an obligation to keep your child safe in school, and parents are not overreacting by insisting that they uphold that obligation.
- **If the school fails to respond appropriately to the harassment of a student, they may be violating civil rights laws,** including Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act. You may wish to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Right Division, and the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. Go to <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/edu/documents/filecomp.pdf> to find out more about this process.
- **Get counseling for your child.** Bullying can be very damaging to a child’s emotional health. The child may become anxious, fearful, and distrustful, feel worthless, or even become suicidal. Choose the type of therapy that is appropriate to the developmental stage of your child with ASD; traditional “talk therapy” may not be effective for some individuals on the autism spectrum.
- **Teach your child strategies to deal with bullying.** For children with ASD, role playing can be helpful, as can Social Stories™, scripting, and Social Thinking® exercises.
- **Have bullying prevention strategies added to your child’s IEP** at school. Ideas include a lunch bunch, social skills groups, or a circle of friends who will stay with him walking through the halls, at lunch, and at recess. Unstructured times such as those are when bullying is most likely to occur; it may be necessary to increase adult supervision for those times.
- **Form alliances** with other concerned parents to address bullying in your school.
- **Contact the Autism Resource Specialist** in your region if you need assistance. (Find one here: <http://bit.ly/AutismResourceSpecialists>.)
- **Work to have disability education implemented** in the general education classes to improve understanding and empathy. A school-wide social curriculum can also be very helpful in increasing both the skills of students with ASD and the sensitivity of the mainstream students. (See a listing of programs under the heading “Bullying Prevention Programs for Schools” later in this guide.)

Strategies to Avoid

As a parent, it can be hard to know what to do if you suspect that your child is being bullied. Some strategies that were commonly used when we were schoolchildren are no longer considered to be the most effective ways to stop bullying. Parents may wish to avoid the following:

- **Calling the parents of the bully directly.** Parents may not want to accept that their child has been harassing another student, and it can end up being quite contentious and counterproductive. It is far better to go to the school officials, whose job is to keep students safe, and let them contact the parents of the other student.
- **Telling your child to ignore bullying and it will go away.** While it is true that teaching children to keep their cool and walk away from bullies is a useful strategy, it is not enough; adults need to become involved. Furthermore, telling children who have been victimized to ignore the abuse can make them feel like they are not being taken seriously.
- **Instructing your child to fight back aggressively.** In today's schools, a child who lashes out physically at another student is likely to face severe punishment, even if he was provoked. In addition, an aggressive reaction can lead to an escalation of the violence perpetrated by the bully. Children with ASD need to be taught to be assertive, rather than aggressive.

Bullying Prevention Tips

In addition to school-wide bullying prevention programs, there are some things that parents, therapists, and educators can do to minimize the chances of a child with autism becoming the victim of a bully. Concepts must be directly taught, as children with autism are unlikely to pick up on social cues and social rules intuitively.

These are some bullying prevention tips for children with autism:

- **Directly teach children what bullying is** and how to tell the difference between friendly teasing, accidental contact (like being bumped in the hallway), and genuine harassment.
- **Teach children an easily remembered strategy for dealing with bullies, such as "Stop, Walk, and Talk."** Stop means to put a hand up to indicate that the bully should stop bothering the child, walk means to walk away without responding, and talk means to tell an adult about the bullying. Role playing and Social Stories™ may be useful preparation for real-life situations. Be sure to help the child identify which trusted adults he can turn to for help, so he knows to whom he should go to report harassment. Carol Gray has a useful section about identifying the members of a child's support team in *The New Social Story Book*.
- **Teach children what not to do when being bullied.** They should not react aggressively, which can cause the bullying to escalate, nor should they react by getting upset if they can help it. Explain to your child with ASD that bullies want to see a strong reaction, and if they do not give one, it will decrease their appeal as a target.
- **Implement a social curriculum.** Children with autism may draw the attention of bullies to themselves because they do not understand the social customs or the "hidden curriculum" of their classmates and are therefore more likely to unwittingly violate social conventions. In addition, the child may not realize that his behavior sets him apart from his peers. Certain behaviors, such as talking at length about a special interest, have been found to increase the likelihood of a student with ASD being bullied. Social skills and friendship skills, including how to recognize, interpret, and respond appropriately to social cues, should be directly taught to children with ASD.
- **Help students with autism develop a wide social network at school.** Children with more friends tend to be bullied less, but unfortunately making friends can be challenging for some children with ASD. Adults can help by setting the child up with a lunch buddy or partnering them with several peers to walk with during the unstructured times of the day. If your child's school does not have a lunch buddy program in place, work with the school to establish one. A program such as Circle of Friends might also be useful. It is an inclusion program for students with disabilities to help them establish friendships with their nondisabled peers. The nondisabled students receive disability-awareness training and can also help to educate their classmates about autism.

What if Your Child is Considered a Bully?

Increased Incidence of Bully-Like Behavior Among Students With Autism:

In the IAN survey about bullying and autism, 20% of parents reported that their child with autism had bullied others, which was more than double the rate for their typical siblings. However, what may appear like bullying from the outside is often different from “true” bullying, which is done to seek power and social status. When children with ASD act aggressively, it is not necessarily done with the same intentions as those of a genuine bully. But in a school with a zero-tolerance policy, underlying intent may not be taken into consideration. It is important that educators, parents, and administrators take the time to dig deeply and determine the nuances of the situation before taking disciplinary action. While children with autism need to be taught that physical aggression is unacceptable, they also may not fully understand the implications of their actions; an individualized consequence may be more appropriate than the usual disciplinary techniques.

The Bully-Victim Syndrome:

Most children with autism who are viewed as bullies are actually bully-victims, meaning that they have been both the victim of bullying and have also acted aggressively themselves. What often happens is that the child decides to fight back against the student bullying them in a way that escalates the situation. This may involve verbal insults or acts of violence. The IAN study notes that bully-victims tend to be “disruptive and impulsive, with poor social and problem-solving skills.” Co-morbid conditions such as ADHD can greatly increase the likelihood of a bullied child becoming a bully.

Not Every Act of Aggression Is Bullying:

Children with ASD may commit acts of aggression that can be misconstrued as bullying, when the intention behind them is nothing of the sort. For instance, a student who lacks strong social communication abilities may use inappropriate methods to try to gain the attention of peers. Or the child who is very rigid may overreact if he sees another child break a rule, either a school rule or one of his own making. Children may take items instead of asking for them appropriately. The lack of guile that is common among many with ASD may result in the student making an honest observation that is insulting and upsetting to another child. Students with autism are prone to misinterpreting accidental physical contact as an attack, and some will respond in kind. In other words, there are many reasons why a student with autism might exhibit inappropriate or aggressive behaviors in school, but rarely is it done with the calculated cruelty and social motives of a true bully. Parents may need to advocate for their child to make this clear to school officials and to help come up with appropriate behavioral interventions.

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Aggressive Behavior May Be Deliberately Provoked:

One method that bullies use to torment children with autism is to intentionally provoke them to have a meltdown or lose control. Once a bully learns the triggers of their target, they can use that information to “push their buttons” until the child with ASD snaps. More than half of kids with autism who have been bullied have faced this particularly cruel form of harassment. Because bullies know how to fly under the radar of adults, it is often the victim who is punished for these incidents. Parents can help combat this form of bullying by teaching their children to walk away from bullies without reacting and to seek help from an adult immediately. Bystanders also need to be taught that they have a duty to intervene on behalf of the victim, whether it is by telling the bully to stop or by getting help from a staff member.

What Schools Can Do

The entire school community needs to become involved in bullying prevention, including administrators, teachers, other staff (cafeteria staff, custodians, bus drivers), students, and parents. The message needs to be consistently reinforced that students are expected to abide by a respectful code of conduct and that bullying will not be tolerated.

Bullying Prevention

It is far better to proactively prevent bullying than to react to individual instances. There are a variety of effective bullying prevention programs that schools can implement, which are covered in greater detail below. Whichever specific methodology is chosen by the school, there are universal principles that should be incorporated into any bullying prevention program. These are some of the core strategies that can help to prevent bullying in schools:

Change the Climate of the School: Changing school culture is at the heart of any bullying prevention program. Without this, there is little chance of any anti-bullying initiatives being effective in the long run. Bullying is not just about the bully and the victim; in schools where bullying is tolerated, there is a pervasive sense of an unsafe climate in which the adults are not in charge. The entire school community needs to become involved in bullying prevention, including administrators, teachers, other staff (cafeteria staff, custodians, bus drivers), students, and parents. The message needs to be consistently reinforced that students are expected to abide by a respectful code of conduct and that bullying will not be tolerated. It is absolutely essential that the adults in the school buy into the anti-bullying program, because if they do not, neither will the students.

Implement a Long-Term, School-Wide Bullying Prevention Program: There are no quick fixes to bullying. The most effective programs are long-term and are reinforced throughout the school year. A good bullying prevention program will address all domains: primary (school-wide and classroom), secondary (small-group), and tertiary (individual). It should emphasize teaching students (and adults) what behavior is expected and appropriate, as well as what to do about disrespectful or harassing behavior.

Use Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS): PBIS works hand in hand with bullying prevention programs, as it is designed to create a school environment that proactively supports pro-social skills and behaviors. When implemented consistently, PBIS results in less aggressive and disruptive behavior by individuals by changing the behavioral expectations across the entire school community. PBIS and tiered responses to bullying behavior have been found to be more effective than zero-tolerance policies.

Make Rules and Behavioral Expectations Clear: When children know what behavior is expected of them, they are more likely to behave appropriately. Some schools have children take an anti-bullying pledge, such as this one from the Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools initiative of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/>):

- We will not bully other students.
- We will try to help students who are bullied.
- We will make it a point to include ALL students, even those who are usually left out.
- When we know someone who is being bullied, we will tell a teacher, parent, or adult we trust.

Make Bystanders Responsible: For nearly every act of bullying, there are bystanders: those who witness the bullying and either do nothing or even encourage the bully's behavior. Part of changing the culture of a school is making the bystanders responsible for stopping or reporting bullying that they observe. Teachers must be taught how to effectively intervene. Students must be taught that they need to report bullying to an adult every time they see it. It can be particularly helpful to involve popular students in standing up against bullying behavior, as they are often role models for their peers.

Remove Obstacles to Reporting: In many cases, bystanders may be afraid to report what they have witnessed because they fear reprisal from the bully. They might also be worried about getting the bully in trouble or about being seen as a tattle-tale by the other students. Teach students the difference between tattling, which is done to purposefully get someone in trouble, and reporting, which is done to keep someone safe. It may be helpful to establish a way that students can report bullying anonymously. Schools should also be aware that harsh, zero-tolerance policies can actually cause bystanders to remain silent about bullying, for fear of getting another student expelled. (Zero-tolerance policies are also less effective in general than more measured responses.)

Educate Students about Disabilities and Differences: Incorporating disability education into the classroom can increase understanding and empathy, while reducing the bullying of students with autism. If the school does not offer school-wide disability education, parents may want to take the initiative in making a presentation to their child's class about autism. Autism Resource Specialists can provide these upon request. Older students with a good understanding of ASD might wish to make a presentation about their autism themselves.

Include a Social Curriculum in All Classrooms: All children can benefit from a social curriculum. Schools that have implemented a social curriculum in the mainstream classrooms find that students learn about how their actions affect others, resulting in more empathy and less bullying. Michelle Garcia Winner's Social Thinking® curriculum is an excellent model to use in schools.

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Policies That are Ineffective

Just as there are programs that are effective in changing the climate in a school and reducing bullying, there are also some well-intentioned strategies used to address bullying that can do more harm than good. Some of these strategies may sound good on paper and may still be in use in schools. These are some of the strategies that are ineffective in combating bullying:

Zero-Tolerance Policies: While schools are right to make the safety of students a priority, zero-tolerance policies are not as effective as bullying prevention programs that promote pro-social behaviors. First of all, about 20% of students admit to having bullied another at some time, so zero-tolerance policies can result in a large number of suspensions or expulsions. Second, the threat of such a serious consequence can actually discourage bystanders from reporting bullying, because they don't want to be the cause of another student being expelled. Third, students who bully need positive pro-social role models to teach them to modify their behavior, not time out of school. Zero-tolerance policies should be of particular concern to parents of students with autism; a victim who reacts aggressively to a bully is in danger of being suspended or expelled, too, under this type of policy.

Peer Mediation: Attempting to have the bully and victim try to resolve their differences through peer mediation is another misguided anti-bullying strategy. Mediation implies that both parties are in the wrong somehow and need to work together on a solution. However, bullying is not a form of conflict – it is abuse. The appropriate message to send is that the bullying behavior must stop immediately, not that the two students should shake hands and become friends.

Group Treatment: While therapy groups to address anger management, empathy, and self-esteem for bullies may seem like a good idea, the reality is that grouping students with anti-social behavior together can actually reinforce it. The group members tend to encourage each other to bully more, not to change their behavior. Students with behavioral challenges need positive social role models and mentors.

Short-Term Initiatives: Reducing bullying in a school requires completely changing the climate in the building. This is something that can only be accomplished by ongoing school-wide programs. Limited approaches such as working with individual students or having an assembly about bullying must be part of a larger, comprehensive bullying prevention program.

Additional Resources:

ASNC's Autism Resource Specialists are available to help families with school issues. Find the Autism Resource Specialist in your area here: <http://bit.ly/AutismResourceSpecialists>.

Books & DVDs

All of these titles are available in the ASNC Bookstore. Shop online at www.autismbookstore.com to benefit ASNC.

- **Asperger Syndrome and Bullying: Strategies and Solutions** – *Nick Dubin*
- **Being Bullied: Strategies and Solutions for People with Asperger's Syndrome (DVD)** – *Nick Dubin*
- **Nobody Knew What to Do: A Story About Bullying** – *Becky Ray McCain*
- **Perfect Targets: Asperger Syndrome and Bullying** – *Rebekah Heinrichs*
- **Freaks, Geeks & Asperger Syndrome: A User Guide to Adolescence** – *Luke Jackson*
- **Intricate Minds: Understanding Classmates with Asperger Syndrome (DVD)**
- **Intricate Minds II: Understanding Elementary School Classmates with AS (DVD)**
- **No Fishing Allowed: "Reel in Bullying" (DVD, workbook and teacher manual)** – *Carol Gray and Judy Williams*
- **Bullying Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help You Deal with Social Aggression and Cyberbullying** - *Raychelle Cassada Lohmann and Julia V. Taylor*
- **Bullies Are a Pain in the Brain** – *Trevor Romain*
- **Freda Stops a Bully** – *Stuart J. Murphy*
- **Getting Beyond Bullying and Exclusion, PreK-5** – *Ronald Mah*
- **Gum in My Hair: How to Cope With Bullying, Version 2.0 (DVD)**
- **How to Stop Bullying and Social Aggression: Elementary Grade Lessons and Activities** – *Steve Breakstone, Michael Dreiblatt, and Karen Dreiblatt*
- **Nobody Knew What To Do: A Story About Bullying** – *Becky Ray McCain*
- **No More Victims: Protecting those with Autism from Cyber Bullying, Internet Predators, and Scams** – *Jed Baker*
- **Tease Monster: A Book About Teasing Vs. Bullying** – *Julia Cook*
- **Work In Progress: Bullying & ASD: Perfect Storm (DVD)** – *Autism Partnership: Ron Leaf, John McEachin and Mitch Taubman*

Programs to Educate Peers about Autism

Autism Resource Specialists: ASNC staff are available to make presentations in schools to help children understand differences and foster empathy. To talk with us about a presentation, please contact the Autism Resource Specialist near you: <http://bit.ly/AutismResourceSpecialists>.

Intricate Minds: Understanding Classmates with Asperger Syndrome and Intricate Minds II: Understanding Elementary School Classmates with AS from Coulter Video: These two DVDs feature interviews with teens and elementary students with Asperger's Syndrome. They are designed to be viewed by mainstream classmates to promote understanding and decrease bullying, harassment, or ignoring of students with Asperger's. www.autismbookstore.com

PACER Center COUNT ME IN puppets: A program that uses child-size puppets to educate children and adults about disabilities to bridge the gap between typical children and those with disabilities. <http://www.pacer.org/puppets/count.asp>

Kids on the Block Puppets: Educational programming that uses puppets to teach children about disabilities. An autism-specific puppet set is available. <http://www.kotb.com/>

Circle of Friends: An inclusion program to help establish friendships between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The typical students receive special training to teach them about their friend's disability and how best to interact with them. The program also includes disability awareness presentations that are given to classmates by both the students with disabilities and their non-disabled friends from the program. <http://www.circleofriends.org/>

The Sixth Sense II by Carol Gray: This book provides a lesson plan to introduce Autism Spectrum Disorders to general education students. It is designed for elementary age students. www.autismbookstore.com

A Hair-Dryer Kid in a Toaster-Brained World: This is a wonderful presentation that one mother created to educate her son's classmates about autism using a humorous analogy. <http://momnos.blogspot.com/2010/03/on-being-hair-dryer-kid-in-toaster.html>

Informative websites

PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center: An extremely comprehensive website with a huge number of resources, including template letters parents can send to schools, information about National Bullying Prevention Month events held each October, facts about bullying and disabilities, and much more. PACER also has websites designed especially for elementary age children and teens. The website also offers printable publications on a wide range of bullying-related topics, including "The IEP and Bullying." <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/>

National PTA: The National PTA has a program called Connect for Respect, which is an initiative to encourage PTAs across the country to lead conversations in their school communities about bullying and how it is affecting their communities, and to develop solutions that they can implement collaboratively. <http://www.pta.org/programs/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3003>

StopBullying.gov: This is the federal government's website about bullying education, prevention, and action. It offers tips on what to do if someone is being bullied, discusses risk factors that increase the likelihood of becoming a victim or a bully, and addresses bullying of youth with disabilities. <http://www.stopbullying.gov/>

Council for Exceptional Children: The Council for Exceptional Children is a vast resource for special education information, and they specifically discuss bullying of children with special needs. The site has statistics on bullying, links to helpful resources, and advice on how to create safe school environments for children with disabilities. <http://www.cec.sped.org/>

The Respect for All Project: An initiative of Groundspark, an organization that strives to spark social change through film. The mission of the Respect For All Project is to promote respect, create inclusive communities, and decrease bullying. <http://groundspark.org/respect-for-all>

The Bully Project: This is the group that made the film “Bully,” a brutally honest documentary that aims to encourage youth to take a stand against bullying. They also offer a special needs toolkit developed by PACER that addresses bullying and disabilities. <http://www.thebullyproject.com/>

The Imagifriends: DJ Svoboda, who was bullied as he grew up with autism, created a place called Imagiville, where “everyone is special just the way they are.” DJ, who is also a motivational speaker, uses the Imagifriends characters to raise acceptance and awareness for all those with autism. <http://myimagiville.com/>

Bullying Prevention Programs for Schools

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program: A leading bullying prevention program that is designed to change the culture of schools for the long term. It has four key levels for intervention: school, classroom, individual and community. The Olweus Program emphasizes the importance of getting the bystanders involved to reduce the acceptance and prevalence of bullying. <http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/index.page>

Second Step and Steps to Respect: Programs designed by the Committee for Children that can be used in tandem to change the school climate and teach children necessary skills. Second Step focuses on teaching students in preschool through 8th grade the skills needed for social and academic success. Steps to Respect is an anti-bullying program for elementary schools, with an emphasis on training adults, teaching friendship skills, teaching social skills, and teaching responsible bystander skills. <http://www.cfchildren.org/>

Operation Respect: Operation Respect’s mission is to create compassionate, safe, and respectful environments for learning and growth. Their “Don’t Laugh at Me” curriculum is designed to sensitize children to the painful effects of behaviors that too often are accepted as necessary rites of passage in childhood – ridicule, disrespect, ostracism, and bullying – and to foster a positive climate in schools and communities. <http://www.operationrespect.org/>

Addendum

Schools' Obligations to Protect Students with Disabilities

Parents play an important role in protecting their child; however, parents cannot stop or prevent bullying alone. Schools have a legal obligation to create a safe learning environment for all students, and in the case of students with disabilities, to do so in accordance with their IEPs. There are currently no federal anti-bullying laws; however, students are protected against discriminatory harassment under federal civil rights laws that are enforced by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. According to StopBullying.gov, schools are obligated to by these laws to address conduct that is:

- Severe, pervasive or persistent.
- Creates a hostile environment at school. That is, it is sufficiently serious that it interferes with or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school.
- Based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion.

North Carolina Laws about Bullying

In 2009, the state of North Carolina passed an anti-bullying law called the School Violence Prevention Act, which specifically prohibits bullying and harassing behavior, whether it is written, electronic, verbal, or physical. Also banned is conduct that could reasonably be construed to create a hostile environment on any school property, including school buses. The School Violence Prevention Act applies to every student and school employee, but it also specifically mentions students with developmental or sensory disabilities as a protected group. The law requires every school district in North Carolina to implement an anti-bullying policy that includes:

- A statement prohibiting bullying or harassing behavior.
- A definition of bullying or harassing behavior no less inclusive than that set forth in the law.
- A description of the type of behavior expected for each student and school employee.
- Consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person who commits an act of bullying or harassment.
- A procedure for reporting an act of bullying or harassment, including a provision that permits a person to report such an act anonymously. This shall not be construed to permit formal disciplinary action solely on the basis of an anonymous report.
- A procedure for prompt investigation of reports of serious violations and complaints of any act of bullying or harassment, identifying either the principal or the principal's designee as the person responsible for the investigation.
- A statement that prohibits reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of bullying or harassment, and the consequence and appropriate remedial action for a person who engages in reprisal or retaliation.
- A statement of how the policy is to be disseminated and publicized, including notice that the policy applies to participation in school-sponsored functions.

Given that the law does not set forth what the consequences should be for bullying or harassment, it is still important for parents to familiarize themselves with their local school district's policies.

About Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a group of developmental disabilities – including classic autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger’s Syndrome – that affect a person’s ability to understand what they see, hear, and otherwise sense. It is a brain disorder that affects communication, social interaction, and behavior.

Individuals with ASD typically have difficulty understanding verbal and nonverbal communication and learning appropriate ways of relating to other people, objects, and events. No two people with ASD are the same. As its name implies, ASD is a spectrum disorder that affects individuals differently and with varying degrees of severity. Additionally, ASD is often found in combination with other disabilities.

It is estimated that up to 1 out of every 68 children has some form of ASD. Evidence suggests that the prevalence rate in North Carolina is even higher than the national average, at 1 in 58. More than 60,000 individuals live with ASD in North Carolina.

The overall incidence of ASD is consistent around the globe, but it is five times more prevalent in boys than in girls. ASD knows no racial, ethnic, or social boundaries, and family income, lifestyle, and educational levels do not affect the chance of occurrence. While ASD is typically diagnosed in children, it is a lifelong disorder that affects individuals of all ages.

What Causes ASD?

Although it was first identified in 1943, to this day no one knows exactly what causes ASD. However, research to discover its cause is ongoing. Many researchers believe that there is a strong genetic component. Some research suggests a physical problem that affects the parts of the brain that process language and information; other research points to an imbalance of brain chemicals. A variety of possible external or environmental triggers are also being studied. It is possible that ASD is caused by a combination of several factors.

Signs and Symptoms

People with ASD may have problems with social, behavioral, and communication skills. They might repeat behaviors and might not understand change in their daily activities. Many people with ASD also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things.

A person with ASD might:

- have severe language deficits or differences
- talk about or show interest in a restricted range of topics
- not point at objects to show interest, such as an airplane flying over
- not look at objects when another person points at them
- have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in other people at all
- avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- have trouble understanding other people’s feelings or talking about their own feelings
- prefer not to be held or cuddled or might cuddle only when they want to
- appear to be unaware when other people talk to them but respond to other sounds
- repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language (echolalia)
- have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions
- laugh, cry, or show distress for no apparent reason
- repeat actions over and over again
- have trouble adapting when a routine changes
- have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound
- be oversensitive or under-sensitive to pain
- lose skills they once had (for instance, stop saying words they were once using)



Autism Society of NORTH CAROLINA

The Autism Society of North Carolina is the leading statewide resource organization serving people across the autism spectrum throughout their lifespans. We understand the challenges of the autism community because we work with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) every day.

ASNC works to directly improve the lives of individuals and families affected by autism through advocacy, training and education, and direct services.

Advocacy: We are the only autism-specific advocacy organization in North Carolina, and it is the heart of what we do. We find resources for families, assist with school issues, educate families through workshops, help individuals navigate the services system, and host local support groups. We also give those with autism a voice in public policy by maintaining relationships at the state legislature and other policy-making entities.

Training & Education: We focus on evidence-based best practices that empower self-advocates, families, and professionals. We also work to increase understanding and acceptance of people with ASD in the community.

Services: ASNC is a direct care service provider, and a recipient of the highest level of accreditation by the Council on Quality Leadership for exemplary service provision. Individuals with ASD receive a variety of residential, recreational, vocational, and community-based services that are designed to meet their needs, interests, and strengths.

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