



**Autism
Society**
Inland Empire



IEAutism.org

Bullying Prevention Toolkit

for Students with Autism



INTRODUCTION

BULLYING PREVENTION TOOLKIT

While bullying can occur anywhere - at work, in relationships, or at a Day program- this resource will focus on bullying in the school setting. Unfortunately, in today's society, it is not unusual to hear stories about students being bullied. Today most people recognize bullying as very serious and that it cannot be dismissed as "kids being kids," harmless teasing, or a childhood rite of passage. Left unchecked, bullying negatively affects the victims, the school community, and the bullies. 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.

Children with Autism are 3 times more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers. For students with Autism, bullying can be hard to understand or even recognize. When a child with a disability such as Autism is bullied, it may also violate their legal rights under IDEA and Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This toolkit was compiled to help families understand what bullying is and empower them with the knowledge of what they can do if they suspect bullying.

This toolkit is meant as a resource for families and students with Autism to help prevent bullying and provide resources if bullying occurs.

Thank you to the San Bernardino Fraternal Order of Eagles for their generosity in making this project possible. Thank you to all the resources referenced throughout this document and especially the Autism Society of North Carolina for their tremendous work in this field. We also extend our gratitude to Stephanie Fletcher, Anna Sosa, and Kevin E. Grisham, Ph.D.; without their insight, resources, and assistance, this project outcome would not be the same.



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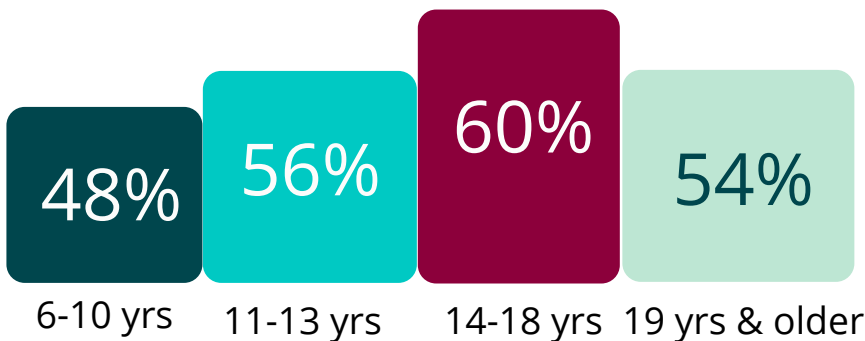
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Bullying Statistics

Children with Autism are bullied 3x more than their neurotypical siblings. This is 50% more than other special education students.

Percentage of Kids Bullied by Age



Bullying occurs at every grade level; however, the grades that appear to be the worst are 5th to 8th with 42%-49% for students with Autism.

Types of bullying most often reported include:

- **73% being teased, picked on, or made fun of**
- **51% being ignored or left out of things on purpose**
- **47% being called bad names**
- **30% being pushed, shoved, hit, slapped or kicked**

Physical bullying declines with age, while verbal, social, and cyber bullying tend to increase between the ages of 11 and 15.

Girls tend to begin using social forms of bullying at earlier ages than boys.



Bullying Defined

Children with Autism are 2 to 3 times more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers.

CALIFORNIA DEFINITION

The California Education Code, which schools use, defines "bullying" as any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or using an electronic act, and including one or more acts committed by a pupil or group of pupils as defined in Section 48900.2, 48900.3, or 48900.4, directed toward one or more pupils that have or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

1. Placing a reasonable pupil or pupils in fear of harm to that pupil's or those pupils' person or property.
2. Causing a reasonable pupil to experience a substantially detrimental effect on the pupil's physical or mental health.
3. Causing a reasonable pupil to experience substantial interference with the pupil's academic performance.
4. Causing a reasonable pupil to experience substantial interference with the pupil's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.

BULLYING is **aggressive behavior** **THAT** is:



UNWANTED

REPEATED OR LIKELY TO BE REPEATED

DELIBERATE

INVOLVES AN INBALANCE OF POWER



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Types of Bullying

TYPES OF BULLYING

Bullying exists in many forms, such as:

- Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things and can include teasing, name-calling, and threatening;
- Physical bullying is hurting another person's body or belongings and can consist of hitting, tripping, kicking, spitting, pushing, or taking and breaking someone's things;
- Social bullying is hurting someone's reputation or relationships. It can include spreading rumors, leaving someone out on purpose, demanding money or property, or scaring or threatening someone;
- Cyberbullying is often defined as an aggressive, intentional, and repeated act against someone using technology, such as email, texting, social media, or instant messages. Cyberbullying often involves spreading rumors, revealing secrets, threatening the victim, posting private photographs, and other harassing behavior.

TYPES OF BULLYING

VERBAL

yelling, taunting, insulting



CYBERBULLYING

sending hurtful messages or images via cell phone, social media, email, or other websites or apps

PHYSICAL

pushing, hitting, kicking



SOCIAL/RELATIONAL

excluding, spreading rumors, turning friends against you

DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY

theft, vandalism with the intention to cause harm





Bullying vs Conflict

BULLYING IS NOT THE SAME AS CONFLICT

There is a difference between conflict, meanness, and bullying. One of the first things to look at when differentiating bullying and conflict is all about power. A conflict is between individuals with equal power, whereas, with bullying, there's an imbalance of power. It is repetitive and intentional.

Peer Conflict vs Meanness vs Bullying

Helping School Communities, Parents & Staff Identify the Key Differences

Sometimes people think that peer conflict, meanness, and bullying are the same, but they aren't. Peer conflict is a part of everyday experience, in which we navigate the complexities of how we interact. While the behavior may be the same, it depends on the power balance. These are some examples for informational purposes, but each situation varies. The power dynamic and the frequency is fundamental to determining which category these behaviors fall into.

Peer Conflict

Definition:

Peer conflict is an argument or disagreement when both sides express their opposing views. Equal power between those involved.

Behavior:

Harm is done by both people. Generally, feels remorse and will change behavior when they realize it is hurting someone.

Example:

Ethan and Amy are both in special education and are playing hide and seek, and Ethan finds Amy. She accuses Ethan of cheating. Ethan tells Amy she is a liar, and an argument starts.

Meanness

Meanness can be subjective and can be motivated by angry feelings and/or being socially rude (i.e. bluntness). It is not a frequent occurrence. Equal or unequal power between those involved.

Frequency matters. A one-off situation where the behavior may have the intent to hurt, but nobody else is pulled into the conflict.

Mary tells Anthony that he can't play four square during recess because he is the worst player in the whole third grade. Because this happens only once, it is considered being mean, however, if it happens continually, it could be bullying.

Bullying

Bullying has the goal to continuously hurt, harm or humiliate with emotional or physical aggression/threats towards a targeted victim(s). Unequal power between students.

The person who is bullying misuses their power (i.e. older, stronger, popular, etc) and continues behavior when they realize it is hurting someone.

Dan has Autism and joins the Computer Club. John is in one of Dan's general ed classes and has been calling Dan a "geek" for a month. Now John is using his social power to convince the other kids in the club to call Dan a "geek".

Sources: <https://www.weareteachers.com/difference-between-meanness-and-bullying>
<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/questions-answered/conflict-vs-bullying.asp>



WHY CHILDREN WITH AUTISM MAY BE TARGETED

Children with disabilities are bullied at far greater rates than their nondisabled peers, which holds true for children with Autism, an "invisible" disability. Children whose peers see them as "odd" or "annoying" without realizing their behavior is caused by a disability such as Autism can be targeted for harassment.

Bullies focus on children or adults who stand out in some way. Students who bully are often "policing" social norms and target students who don't "fit in."

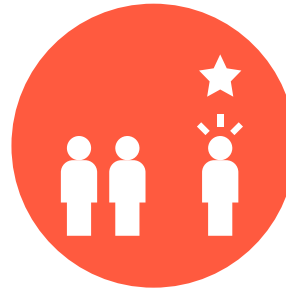
Common Reasons Why Children with Autism Are Bullied



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.



Poor social skills can make them appear to be strange, or rude, or otherwise different.



Lack of communication skills to tell students to stop or tell an adult.



Poor social understanding makes it difficult to differentiate true friends from bullies or the intentions of others.



Poor hygiene



May want to play with toys or talk about things that are not considered "age-appropriate" to peers.



Clumsy or uncoordinated



Frequent meltdowns



Stories of Bullying

Chris has Autism and is a huge fan of Michael Jackson. He loves to dress and dance just like him. Often during lunch time and passing periods Chris would play Michael Jackson songs on his phone and dance. For the most part, students cheered him on, but some laughed and made fun of him. Eventually a few students recorded Chris and shared the video on social media outlets. Many people saw the footage, insulted him in the comments, and called him names for months at school and online.

- Freshman in High School

Ashley has High Functioning Autism; she was having trouble making friends but noticed some cute boys at school paying attention to her, so she found them on social media and messaged them. They told her she was pretty and made her feel good. She liked all the attention she was getting, so she kept messaging them. Eventually, they asked her to send topless photos of herself and she did. The photos kept getting shared throughout the school. She got called a slut and many other insulting names by girls and boys. Even after the name-calling and school administrators getting involved, she still continued to send the boys photos of herself on and off for a few months.

- Junior in High School

John has Autism and is in the general education setting. He doesn't have friends, so he really looks up to another student in class named Danny because he has a lot of friends. A group of boys suddenly started paying a lot of attention to John, which finally made him very happy to have friends. Soon after, these boys began calling him fat and other mean names. They told John that that's how friends get along and that if he wanted to make new friends, that's how he should do it. So John started insulting Danny, but Danny just ignored him, which really upset John. After several days, John began to chase after Danny during recess, screaming insults at him while everyone just watched and laughed.

- 5th grader



Bullying: Learn the Signs

SIGNS YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

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

The signs of bullying include:

- Unexplained injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
- Complaints of frequent headaches or stomachaches
- Changes in eating habits
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Self-destructive behavior, like running away or harming themselves
- Loss of friends or interests
- Feeling sick or pretending to be sick
- Losing interest or not wanting to go to school





What Can Parents Do?

BE PROACTIVE

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 taught directly, as children with Autism are unlikely to pick up on social cues and rules intuitively. Many of these goals can also be written into an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

1. Become familiar with your child's school's bullying policies and procedures. Each school district has its own policy on misbehaviors, including bullying. School districts provide guidance and can push for certain expectations from each school site, but ultimately, every school may have different bullying procedures and disciplinary plans. The information specific to your child's school is provided in your child's back-to-school paperwork and can readily be found on the school's website. Inform yourself of the proper steps that need to be taken to report a suspected bullying incident so that if something does arise, you will be prepared and not have to struggle to search through paperwork or school websites. Your child being bullied is a highly emotional and stressful life event, but knowing how to report it can save you time and frustration.
2. Identify possible areas where the child's behavior may make them a target. Because children with Autism often do not understand their classmates' social customs or the "hidden curriculum," they are more likely to 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 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) being bullied. Social and friendship skills, including recognizing, interpreting, and responding appropriately to social cues, should be taught to children with ASD.
3. Directly teach children what bullying is and how to differentiate between friendly teasing, accidental contact (like being bumped in the hallway), and genuine harassment.





What Parents Can Do

BULLYING PREVENTION TIPS

4. Teach your child what being mean, or bullying might look like and strategies to deal with it. Ask an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) or speech therapist for help. For children with ASD:

- PEERS® Social Skills Training for Teens is an evidence-based curriculum with an anti-bullying session with video and role modeling. They also have units on finding people with similar interests, making children less likely to be targets and more likely to have support. You will have to sign up for the entire 16-week curriculum to have access to the anti-bullying units.

- Role-playing, Social Stories™, scripting, video modeling, and Social Thinking® exercises can also be helpful.

5. Be sure to help children identify which trusted adults they can turn to for help, so they know to whom they should report harassment.

6. Help students with autism develop a wide social network at school. Children with more friends tend to be bullied less. Making friends can be challenging for many 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.

7. Ask the school or classroom about their current bullying and disability-awareness curriculum aimed at increasing the sensitivity of nondisabled students and classmates about Autism. If it is insufficient, work towards and advocate for disability education to be implemented in the general education classes to improve overall understanding and empathy. Children in schools should be taught that neurodiversity is a difference, not an impairment. More than 50% of bullying situations stop when a peer intervenes. Help other students understand your child's behavior and their power to stop bullying. Advocate if needed at Special Education Community Advisory Committee meetings (CAC) or school board meetings to voice your concerns, provide suggestions, and become informed about district and school-related matters that affect the success and wellbeing of special needs students. Most districts still have meetings through Zoom or offer a hybrid in-person and online participation model.





What Can Parents Do?

**LESS THAN HALF
(46%) OF BULLIED
STUDENTS NOTIFY
AN ADULT AT
SCHOOL ABOUT
THE INCIDENT**

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 the problem will resolve itself are ineffective strategies and may prolong your child’s suffering. Bullied children 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:

1. Support your child and assure them that being bullied is not their fault and that they are not alone. Many children feel they are the only ones being bullied and that no one cares. Let them know that there are people who do care. Reinforce:
 - It is not up to the child to stop the bullying. It is never the responsibility of the child to change what is happening to them.
 - Bullying happens to a lot of kids, but that NEVER makes it right. No one deserves to be bullied. Everyone deserves respect. All students have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what.
 - We all need to work together. Everyone is responsible for addressing bullying. The community, schools, parents, and students all play a role.
2. 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 to obtain 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.
3. Contact your child’s teacher, counselor, case manager, assistant principal or principal to discuss the bullying. Write a letter or email detailing the situation to create a paper trail (if it is not in writing, it does not exist). There is a sample letter in the Resource Section of this Toolkit. For elementary students it is a good idea to reach out to the teacher first to inquire about your suspicions, they see your child throughout the day and would be able to provide insight on changes in behavior or recent activity that may assist in figuring out what is going on. If you do not get help from the first person at the school 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 response. The school must keep your child safe in school, and parents are not overreacting by insisting that they uphold that obligation.



What Can Parents Do?

**SCHOOLS RARELY
DO NOTHING
ABOUT BULLYING,
IT MAY BE THAT
WHAT THEY ARE
DOING IS NOT
WORKING**

4. Be calm. Having your child bullied tends to make parents very emotional. Don't be afraid to have the conversation but be respectful and communicate effectively. This increases your chances of being heard and having your opinion and suggestions taken seriously. Parents can provide important insight; it is important to be specific when discussing possible solutions about what would work or not work for your child and why.

5. Consider calling an IEP meeting. 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 your child while walking through the halls, lunch, and 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. Suppose you believe bullying may negatively affect your child or their performance at school. In that case, you can also submit a written request to have your child's mental and emotional well-being evaluated. This assessment can help you and the IEP team find the right services to support the impact of bullying on your child and their education. Do not allow school personnel to blame the victim or imply that your child brought on the bullying themselves. Every child in school deserves to feel safe.

6. Consider counseling for your child. Bullying can be very damaging to a child's emotional health. The child may become anxious, fearful, distrustful, feel worthless, or suicidal. Choose the type of therapy appropriate for the developmental stage of your child with ASD; traditional "talk therapy" may not be effective for some children with Autism. The Autism Society Inland Empire has a resource list of local mental health professionals who have experience with Autism. You may also request an assessment to determine if your child qualifies for Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) through the school district. ERMHS supports a student's social-emotional needs, as well as help improve academics, behavior, and overall well-being. ERMHS are individually tailored to the student's needs and to their IEP goals. The ERMHS provider meets with the student in the school setting to provide the appropriate services.

7. Know your rights. If the school fails to respond appropriately to the harassment of a student, it may be a violation of civil rights laws, including Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act; therefore, you may wish to file a complaint.

8. Realize that you will not have control over the disciplinary actions against the children involved, nor will they be disclosed to you.





What Not To Do

STRATEGIES TO AVOID

As a parent, it can be hard to know what to do if you suspect your child is being bullied. Some strategies commonly used by previous generations are no longer considered 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, which can be quite contentious and counterproductive. It is far better to go to the school officials, who keep students safe and let them contact the other student's parents.
- 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 valuable 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.
- Instruct 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 provoked. In addition, an aggressive reaction can lead to an escalation of the violence perpetrated by the bully. Children with autism need to be taught to be assertive rather than aggressive. Bullying situations are further complicated if the victim fights back, "bullies" back, or when the victim and bully both have ASD. It can be challenging for an administrator to determine who the bully is, who the victim is, and to conclude if the incident(s) is a conflict or bullying.
- Focusing on the bully. Sometimes parents get so wrapped up in getting justice or revenge that they lose sight of what is essential: helping their child move beyond the bullying incident. Parents need to avoid gossiping and spreading rumors about the bully. This will only complicate things and exasperate their child's already stressful situation. As parents, the main focus should not be on what is happening in the bully's life or the punishment the bully receives. Parents need to allow school administrators to handle the situation according to their guidelines.

What Is Cyberbullying

A 2020 REPORT SHOWED THAT 15% OF STUDENTS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 12 AND 18 WERE VICTIMS OF CYBERBULLYING WITHIN A 12-MONTH PERIOD.

Cyberbullying is willful and repeated harm, harassing, humiliating, or threatening text or images, inflicted through the internet, interactive technologies, or mobile phones. It can occur 24/7 and go viral instantly throughout a school, community, or worldwide. Cyberbullying can happen via email, text messaging, voicemail, social networks, and chat boards. Cyberbullying often involves spreading rumors, revealing secrets, threatening the victim, posting private photographs, and other harassing behavior.

Examples of Cyberbullying

- Threatening to kill someone
- Harassing someone online by demeaning, humiliating, and shaming them
- Texting inappropriate content
- Issuing threats to physically harm someone
- Stalking someone digitally
- Extorting someone sexually
- Sending sexual photos and videos
- Committing hate crimes
- Capturing someone's photos when they expect privacy (like when they are in bathrooms or locker rooms)



Cyberbullying: What About Sexting and Sending Nudes?

COMMON TERMS USED IN CYBERBULLYING

Characteristics such as difficulty in correctly interpreting interpersonal cues (signaling their contact with a person as unwanted), a perseverative focus on the desired person, and a tendency to ignore social or legal consequences put them at risk of engaging in:

Cyberflashing - Cyberflashing is a form of online abuse that is becoming increasingly common. Cyberflashing is the act of sending unsolicited, explicit, sexual pictures to strangers online. This includes over a mobile phone, Bluetooth or AirDrop, a dating app, or social media. CA Law: The bill applies to senders 18 and older and defines obscene images as anything that depicts a person engaging in sexual acts, including masturbation, or photos of genitals "in a patently offensive way, and that, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."

Cyberstalking - Cyberstalking involves using technology (the Internet and social media) to make someone else afraid or concerned about their safety. Generally speaking, this conduct is threatening or otherwise fear-inducing, invading a person's relative right to privacy, and manifests in repeated actions over time. Facebook "stalking" a crush for a few days isn't stalking, but targeting someone repeatedly on Facebook or other social media sites through messages or comments, even when asked to stop, is stalking and is a crime.

Sexting - Sexting refers to the act of sending a nude or revealing photo via the text messaging feature of a cell phone. It is legal if everyone is over 18 and has consented to not only the photography but also the distribution of the images. However, sexting with a minor is illegal and between two minors, regardless of whether they gave consent, is illegal. Under Penal Code 288.2 PC, it's a crime to send, distribute, or offer, using electronic communication, harmful matter to a minor with the intent to sexually gratify, seduce, or arouse. This means it's illegal to do any of the following acts:

- Send a minor a sexually explicit picture or pornographic video,
- Send text messages to a minor with sexual content, hoping to have sexual activity with them or to arouse sexually.

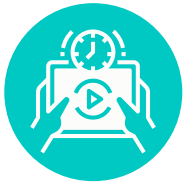
Revenge porn - Revenge porn is when an individual initially consents to sexual images being taken of them with the expectation that they are kept private. Then, another party shares the photos without the individual's consent.

Revenge Porn - California's Sexting Laws - What You Need to Know- California's Sexting Laws - What You Need to Know (robertmhelfend.com)



Cyberbullying: Learn the Signs

Cyberbullying can be hard to notice because teachers and parents may not overhear or see it taking place. Some warning signs to notice include:



Noticeable increases or decreases in device use, including text.



Child exhibits emotional responses (laughter, anger, upset) to what is happening on their devices.



Child hides their screen or device when others are near and avoids a discussion on what is on their device.



Social media accounts are shut down or new ones appear.



Child becomes withdrawn or depressed. Loses interest in people and activities.



Cyberbullying: What Can Parents Do?

- 1** Stay calm. Finding out your child is being bullied is hurtful, but the most important thing is that your child feels supported with words and action.
- 2** Make sure your child feels heard and safe. Take time to listen. Don't minimize or make excuses for the aggressor.
- 3** Collect evidence. Do not delete messages or posts from cyberbullies; save everything as evidence. Print screen shots of everything that relates. Ensure you keep a written record of whom you talk to throughout the investigation process.
- 4** Avoid the Bully's Parents. Many parents naturally want to confront the bully's parents, but this is unhelpful. They can become defensive if confronted about their child's actions, which won't help resolve the bullying. Only engage with them if the school or another authority is mediating.
- 5** Report cyberbullying to the website or app where the cyberbullying took place. Every platform has a term of use policy and cyberbullying violates it.
- 6** Report it to the school if it involves another student or if the incident can cause a disruptive environment at school.
- 7** Report it to the police if it involves threats of violence, child pornography or sexually explicit photos or messages, a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy, stalking and hate crimes.
- 8** Consider counseling. Therapy can help victims of bullying notice, share, and process painful feelings, which left unattended can negatively impact one's personal well-being. Some people who are victims of bullying may internalize the role of victim, which can cause challenges in one's relationships and one's sense of self.





Protecting Your Autistic Child in the Digital Age

How Parents Can Monitor Their Child's Online Activities -Make it a positive experience!



Start a Conversation

Talk to your teen about risky behavior. A teen's digital footprint can impact their college opportunities and future employment. A recent study reports that 30% of college officers view applicants' social media pages. Encourage your child to tell you if they feel they are being cyberbullied or have questions about what to post.



Talk About the Hard Stuff

Sending nudes, sexting, cyberstalking, and cyber flashing are part of today's cyber world. Educate yourself and your child on these issues and your expectations.



Rules & Boundaries

Establish ground rules on the type of behavior you expect to see. Children should be granted access corresponding to their developmental age (as opposed to their chronological age).



Be a Role Model

Many kids are "friends" online with their parents. Being a good role model online is just as important as in real life. Oversharing can be risky. Think before you post photos and information about your life, especially about your child.



Parental Controls

Parental controls and monitoring software can be utilized on all Internet-enabled devices (desktops, laptops, gaming, mobile, and music devices). However, these resources are not a substitute for parental supervision. Parental Controls - Instructions on how to set up parental controls for devices used by children.

<https://internetsafety101.org/parentalcontrols> and info for gaming sites www.esrb.org/tools-for-parents/family-gaming-guide



Monitor

Periodically check search engines and your child's accounts. Have their passwords. Check to see if your child has any hidden apps or accounts. Search their name on the internet. Regularly check your children's online communities, such as social networking and gaming sites, to see their posting information. Consider setting up a Google alert for regular updates of their web mentions, news, etc. Continue maintaining their digital footprint until they are old enough to keep it themselves.



The Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Bullying

Students with disabilities 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 sometimes become an obstacle to receiving that education. The IEP team, which includes the parent, can identify strategies that can be written into the IEP to help stop the bullying. It may help to involve the child in the decision-making process when appropriate.

Consider adding other goals and services when talking with your child's IEP team. Some examples of IEP goals that can directly or indirectly help address bullying issues:

- Improve social understanding by having goals focused on sharing, taking turns, or thinking before acting (PACER Center, 2003). Use concrete “real world” situations. The focus of this goal should not be to teach the child to be less “teaseable” but should be on interpersonal skill building.
- Participate in a social skills group. The child may better identify and understand difficult situations by being allowed to practice social situations, role-playing, social stories, and other techniques, with school peers, under adult supervision. Groups like this can also facilitate friendships and a sense of not being alone.
- Increase self-advocacy skills so the child can say “stop that” or walk away.
- Help the child develop and learn a brief/non-confrontational verbal response to the bully. Practice both direct and indirect ways to react to, handle or avoid bullying behavior.
- Speech and language goals should be set with the help of a speech and language specialist. These goals should focus on articulation, speech intelligibility, and language pragmatics.
- Increase the child's self-awareness about their disability. It is often essential to learn their strengths and feel proud of who they are and their accomplishments while understanding how their disability may impact them, particularly in social situations.
- Help the child identify bullying and how and to whom to report it. Keep in mind that some children may have difficulty determining that they are a target of bullying behavior.
- Goals that help educate the child on the difference between reporting an incident and ratting/tattling, as well as identifying the difference between playful teasing and hurtful teasing/bullying, may be needed.



The Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Bullying

- Teach the child a signal system when needing a friend or adult intervention.
- Identify and facilitate a relationship with a school staff person who can help the child make reports of incidents and who will provide the child with additional intervention and support.
- Allow the child to leave class early to avoid hallway incidents.
- Seek counseling or other supportive services for the student. This can be counseling or informal check-ins with a teacher, guidance counselor, or principal who the student can turn when they are being bullied.
- Determine how school staff will document and report incidents.
- Educate peers about school district policies on bullying behavior/Autism.
- Hold separate in-services education for school staff and classroom peers to help them understand a child's disability.
- Parent counseling and training. Parent counseling may help parents understand their child's needs and help them gain skills to support the child's IEP.
- Shadowing by school staff of the student who has been bullied. Shadowing could be done in hallways, classrooms, and playgrounds.
- The student can receive regular reassurance from the school staff that they have a "right to be safe" and that the bullying is not their fault.



Laws Governing Bullying & Disability at School

WHAT ARE A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S DUTIES TO ADDRESS BULLYING AND HARASSMENT AT SCHOOL?

Harassment

- Once a school knows or should know that harassment between students has happened, it must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate. If harassment has occurred, the school must take quick and valuable steps to try to end the harassment and prevent it from happening again.
- Discipline: In California, a school district can suspend or expel students from school if they engage in bullying, including cyberbullying. Fourth through twelfth-grade students can be suspended or expelled. This can happen if the superintendent or the principal finds that the student has participated in harassment, threats, or intimidation. It must be severe enough to affect class work and create a hostile environment.

Anti-Bullying Policy

State law says schools must have policies against discrimination and bullying in schools. This includes bullying and harassment based on actual traits or traits someone is thought to have, including disability. School districts must also have a complaint process. The complaint process must include a timeline to investigate and resolve complaints. It must also have an appeal process if parents disagree with the school district's complaint resolution.

1. School districts must ensure that people who report discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying in school are protected and their identity is not shared with others. They must also require school employees to take steps to help right away. If a school employee sees an act of discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying, they must help if it is safe to do so.
2. You can request a copy of your school district's discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying policy and complaint process. Your school district might have its policy and complaint process on its website. The complaint process should be translated if your primary language is not English.





Laws Governing Bullying & Disability at School

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU FEEL THE SCHOOL DISTRICT IS FAILING TO PROTECT A STUDENT WITH A DISABILITY FROM BULLYING AND HARASSMENT?

If a school fails to protect a student with a disability from bullying or harassment, parents may

- File a Uniform Complaint Procedures (UCP) with the school district. Please check the District's website or at the District's office for a copy of the District's Uniform Complaint Procedures. Parents may also file a UCP Complaint with the Education Equity UCP Appeals Office at the California Department of Education. The website is www.cde.ca.gov/re/cp/uc/.
- Parents may also file a complaint with the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights regarding allegations of disability discrimination that may violate Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The website is www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html.
- Suppose the school district does not follow special education laws or procedures or has not implemented what was agreed upon in the child's IEP. Parents may file a compliance complaint with the California Department of Education in that case. The website is www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/qa/cmplntproc.asp.
- Also, if there is a disagreement with the school district regarding what should go into the child's IEP, parents may wish to request a due process hearing. You can find more information regarding due process and complaint procedures in the Special Education Rights and Responsibilities publication, available online at: <https://serr.disabilityrightsca.org/>.



Laws Governing Bullying & Disability at School

Bullying and disability harassment can be a form of disability discrimination, which is illegal. Federal laws require schools to provide equal educational opportunities to all students, including students with disabilities.

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination based on disability and applies to any school receiving federal money.
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 also prohibits discrimination based on disability but applies to all state and local entities, whether or not they receive federal money.
- FAPE. Schools must provide free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities with either an IEP or a 504 Plan. Schools must have an IEP meeting to determine the effect of bullying on a student. The school must remedy the situation if a student's services are affected by the bullying. They must make sure that the student is not denied their education.
- Harassment may also break other civil rights, child abuse, and criminal laws.

California public schools must provide equal educational opportunities for students. Students have the right to “attend classes on school campuses that are safe, secure, and peaceful.” Public school students have the right not to be discriminated against or harassed. Harassment at school based on disability puts this right to equal educational opportunity in danger.

School administrators and law enforcement officers play different roles when responding to bullying. Usually, law enforcement is only pulled into the discussion when an incident appears to rise to the level of a violation of criminal law. Assaults or substantiated severe threats of violence would be the most common examples where the police should be brought in.



Resources

LETTER NOTIFYING SCHOOL ABOUT BULLYING - IEP STUDENT

_____, _____

(your address)
(city, state, zip)
(date)

_____, _____
(name of Principal)
(name of school)
(school address)
(city, state, zip)

RE: _____
(first/last name of child)

Dear, _____
(name of Principal)

My child, _____, (first name of child) is in the _____ (grade level) at _____ (name of school). At school _____ (s/he) has been bullied and harassed by _____ (name of harasser(s)). This has occurred on _____ (date or approximate period of time) when _____ (describe as many details of the incident(s) as can be recalled). When this happened _____ (name of witness(es)) heard or saw it and _____ (their response(s)). We became aware of this incident when _____ (describe how you were notified). _____, (first name of child) was hurt by this bullying and harassment. (S/He) had _____ (describe physical injuries, emotional suffering and any medical or psychological treatment required).

As you are likely aware, _____ (first name of child) has an IEP (Individual Education Plan). _____ (I/we) became aware of three federal laws (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act (ADAAA) of 2008, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)) that protect the rights of a child with a disability against bullying behavior that is based on the child's disabilities and that interferes with or denies the child the opportunity to participate in or benefit from an educational program.

Please send _____ (me/us) a copy of the District policies on bullying and harassment, investigate this problem and correct it as soon as possible. Please let _____ (me/us) know, in writing, of the actions you have taken to rectify the situation and to ensure it does not happen again. If this does not resolve this issue, _____ (I/we) will request an IEP meeting to be held as quickly as possible. I expect a response within 5 business days.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this serious problem.

Sincerely,

(sign in this area)

(print your name)

CC: _____ (name of Director of Special Education), Director

(name of Superintendent of schools), Superintendent

(Sign and keep a copy for your records)

Resources

LETTER NOTIFYING SCHOOL ABOUT BULLYING - 504 STUDENT

_____, _____

(your street address)
(city, state zip code)
(date)

(name of Principal)
(name of school)
(school address)

RE: _____
(first and last name of child)

Dear _____,
(name of Principal)

My child, _____, (first name of child) is in the _____ (grade level) at _____ (name of school). At school _____ (s/he) has been bullied and harassed by _____ (name of harasser(s)). This has occurred on _____ (date or approximate period of time) when _____ (describe as many details of the incident(s) as can be recalled). When this happened _____ (name of witness(es)) heard or saw it and _____ (their response(s)). We became aware of this incident when _____ (describe how you were notified).

_____, (first name of child) was hurt by this bullying and harassment. _____ (She/He) had _____ (describe physical injuries, emotional suffering and any medical or psychological treatment required). As you are likely aware, _____ (first name of child) has an IEP (Individual Education Plan). _____ (I/we) became aware of three federal laws (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act (ADAAA) of 2008, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)) that protect the rights of a child with a disability against bullying behavior that is based on the child's disabilities and that interferes with or denies the child the opportunity to participate in or benefit from an educational program.

Please send _____ (me/us) a copy of the District policies on bullying and harassment, investigate this problem and correct it as soon as possible. Please let _____ (us/me) know, in writing, of the actions you have taken to rectify the situation and to ensure it does not happen again. If this does not resolve this issue, _____ (I/we) will request an IEP meeting to be held as quickly as possible. I expect a response within 5 business days.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this serious problem.

Sincerely,

(Sign in this area)

(your name)

CC: _____ (name of Director of Special Education), Director

(name of Superintendent of schools), Superintendent

(Sign and keep a copy for your records)



Helpful Resources

ANTI-BULLYING & RELATIONSHIP TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

PEERS - The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS®) is world-renowned for providing evidence-based social skills treatment to preschoolers, adolescents, and young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, depression, and other socio-emotional problems. www.semel.ucla.edu/peers

Relationships Decoded - Social-Sexual Education for People with Developmental Disabilities. A curriculum designed to teach people with developmental disabilities how to develop healthy and safe relationships while also giving them information about sexual abuse and coercion. The curriculum supports the use of evidence-based practices and is completely free to teachers, therapists, and other professionals. <https://relationshipsdecoded.com>

Social Thinking® Thinksheets for Tweens and Teens - Because social rules and expectations change quickly with age, thinking and behaviors that are appropriate in elementary school can quickly become unexpected and problematic as students move into middle and high school. This book zeroes in on the real and pressing social challenges faced by tweens and teens, such as managing social anxiety, making friends, dealing with bullies, understanding body language, filtering thoughts and blurting, fitting in, and much more. www.socialthinking.com/Products/social-thinking-thinksheets-for-tweens-teens

BOOKS FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN ABOUT BULLYING & AUTISM

Autism, Bullying and Me by Emily Lovegrove

Diary of a Social Detective by Jeffrey E. Jessum

Perfect Targets: Asperger Syndrome and Bullying - Practical Solutions for Surviving the Social World by Rebekah Heinrichs



Resources

BOOKS TO EDUCATE PEERS ABOUT AUTISM

All My Stripes: A Story for Children With Autism Hardcover by Shaina Rudolph

Nathan's Autism Spectrum Superpowers by Lori Yarborough

Uniquely Wired: A Story About Autism and Its Gifts Paperback by Julia Cook

"Why Is He Doing That?" A Children's Book Educating Autism Awareness
by Rachael M Cuellar

PROGRAMS TO EDUCATE PEERS ABOUT AUTISM

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 disabilities and how best to interact with them. The program also includes disability awareness presentations given to classmates by students with disabilities and their non-disabled friends from the program. www.circleofriends.org

Kids on the Block Puppets: Educational programming that uses puppets to teach children about disabilities. An autism-specific puppet set is available. thekidsontheblock.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. www.pacer.org/puppets/count.asp



INFORMATIVE WEBSITES

California Education Code on Bullying - List of educational code that pertains to bullying www.stopbullying.gov/resources/laws/california

Disability Rights California - Free resources on advocating in the school system including sample letters
www.disabilityrightscalifornia.org/publications/bullying-and-harassment-of-students-with-disabilities

Keeping Children Safe on Gaming Sites - Lots of useful tips and advice to parents on how to help keep children safe on gaming sites. www.esrb.org/tools-for-parents/family-gaming-guide

PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. An extremely comprehensive website with many 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. www.pacer.org/bullying

Parental Controls - Instructions on how to set up parental controls for devices used by children. <https://internetsafety101.org/parentalcontrols>

StopBullying.gov: 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 the bullying of youth with disabilities. www.stopbullying.gov

Questions? Contact us.

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**Autism
Society**
Inland Empire



IEAutism.org

Your local Autism connection