



Bullying and Students with ASD

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<http://empowerment.unl.edu>



Thanks

- Sara Gonzalez and Allen Garcia
- Empowerment Initiative
- Bullying Research Network
- Families, students, and teachers who participate in our research projects!



Learner Objectives

- Participants will learn:
 1. The definition of bullying
 2. The social-ecological model of bullying
 3. Research findings on bullying and students with ASD
 4. Resources for dealing with bullying



What Do We Know About Bullying?



Definition of Bullying (www.cdc.gov):

Bullying is any unwanted aggressive behavior by another youth or group of youths that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated

Aggressive Behavior: Bullying can be differentiated from friendly teasing.

An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power (e.g., physical strength, popularity) to control/harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people. It is difficult for the student being bullied to defend him/herself.

Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.



Types of Bullying

Bullying can be categorized into four primary types

- Physical: Hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving
- Verbal: Calling names, saying mean things
- Relational: Ignoring, excluding from a group, spreading false rumors
- Electronic/Cyberbullying: Spreading rumors via social media, sending mean texts

Bullying can also be dichotomized into direct/overt and indirect/covert

- Direct/Overt: physical and verbal bullying
- Indirect/Covert: relational and electronic bullying



Cyberbullying

- Defined as the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person online or via other forms of technology (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2009; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004)
 - Cyberbullying is less a specific type of bullying than a different mode through which to bully
 - It often overlaps with verbal/relational bullying
- It can be anonymous (Low & Espelage, 2012)
- People say things in texts or online that they would never say in person
 - Online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004)
- Cyber-space is one area where, in many cases, adult supervision is completely absent
 - And it can happen 24/7!



Bully/Victim Continuum*

- Bully Perpetrator– reports bullying others
- Victim/Target – reports being bullied by others
- Bully-Victim – reports bullying others & being bullied
- Bystander – reports observing others being bullied
- No Status/Not involved – does not report any involvement with bullying



Why is Bullying a Problem?



The Costs of Bullying

- Bullying is a **social problem** that negatively impacts 3 out of 4 students during their school years
- Bullying is a **mental health problem** - the psychological consequences for students involved in bullying are severe: depression, suicide, antisocial behavior
- Bullying creates feelings of helplessness, anger, and frustration
- Bullying contributes to **negative school climate**, which is connected to lower academic functioning
- Bullying is **expensive** – dropout, suicide, litigation

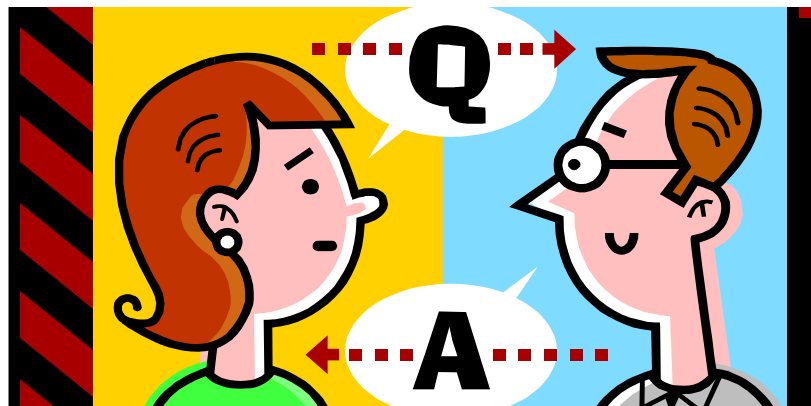


Consequences of Bullying

- Students who are victims and/or bystanders are at-risk for: depression, anxiety, hopelessness, frustration, poor grades, school drop-out, suicide
- Students who bully are at-risk for: anger, social anxiety, depression, immediate school and legal consequences, later incarceration (6/10 adolescent bullies end up in prison by the age of 23!)
- Students who are bully-victims have the worst outcomes; they are at-risk for the same consequences as bullies AND victims
- Bullying costs schools in terms of time, money, AND grades/test scores
- Bullying hurts everybody involved!



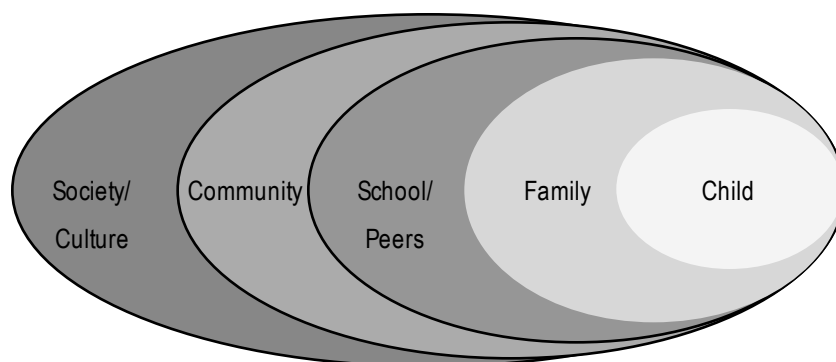
Let's Ask the Right Question



What are the conditions that allow bullying to occur?



A Social-Ecological Model of Bullying



Family and School Risk Factors for Bullying

- **FAMILY**
 - Lack of supervision
 - Lack of attachment
 - Negative, critical relationships
 - Lack of discipline/consequences
 - Support for aggression
 - Modeling of aggression
- **SCHOOL**
 - Lack of supervision
 - Lack of attachment
 - Negative, critical relationships
 - Lack of discipline/consequences
 - Support for aggression
 - Modeling of aggression



Risk Factors for Victimization

- Being perceived as different (#1 reason)
- Social isolation (i.e., having few friends)
- Being perceived as “weak”
- Poor social skills
- Race/ethnicity
- Sexual orientation (e.g., LGBTQ)
- Gender identity
- Disabilities or medical conditions
- Autism Spectrum Disorders



An Overview of the Research on Bullying and Students with ASD

- In two recent published reviews, researchers examined between 17 and 21 published articles on school age children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and bullying involvement.
- There was one common theme in both reviews.
 - School age children with ASD are more likely to be **victims** of bullying.



Prevalence Rates for Victimization for Students with ASD

- Weekly (overall 10-18%)
 - Student self-report (10%)
 - Teacher report (18%)

- Monthly (overall 29-38%)
 - Student self-report (29%)
 - Teacher report (30%)
 - Parent report (38%)



Contributing Factors

- Individual risk factors
 - Social vulnerability
 - Problem behaviors
 - Internalizing problems

- Protective factors
 - Positive social relationships with other peers
 - Communication skills



Comparing Children with ASD to their Peers

- In comparison to typically developing children, children with ASD:
 - are bullied more
 - are more likely to report being victims of physical and relational bullying
 - are more likely to be impacted emotionally
 - and are more likely to be chronic victims of bullying



The Effects Depend on the Diagnosis

- Children of higher cognitive functioning (i.e., Asperger's Disorder) are more at risk for victimization than children with other diagnostic types of ASD.
- Children who have co-morbid conditions are more at risk for victimization.
- Children who have difficulty making friends or have elevated levels of autism traits are more likely to be involved within the bullying continuum.



Autism Spectrum Disorder

DSM-V CRITERIA



Social Communication

- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, manifested by all the following:
 - Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity
 - Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors
 - Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships appropriate to their developmental level.



Restricted/Repetitive Behaviors

- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, as manifested by at least two of the following:
 - Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
 - Excessive adherence to routines
 - Highly restricted interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
 - Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual sensory interests



Additional Criteria

- Symptoms must be present in early childhood.
- Symptoms cause clinically significant limitations and impairments in everyday functioning.



Social Communication

- Level 1: Requiring support
 - Without supports, deficits in social communication cause noticeable impairments wherein they may appear to have decreased interest in social interactions.
- Level 2: Requiring substantial support
 - Marked deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication, apparent even with supports; limiting initiation to social interactions and reduced responses to social overtures
- Level 3: Requiring very substantial support
 - Limited initiation and minimal response to social overtures causing very limited social initiation and minimal responses to social overtures



Restricted, Repetitive Behaviors

- Level 1: Requiring support
 - Causes significant interference with functioning in one or more contexts hindering planning and organization, hence, independence.
- Level 2: Requiring substantial support
 - Appear frequently and interfere with functioning causing difficulty in changing focus and attention in multiple contexts.
- Level 3: Requiring very substantial support
 - Extreme difficulty with change, especially focus and attention, markedly interfering with functioning in all contexts



Factors impacting bullying involvement

Risk

- Mainstream Educational Placement
- Use of public/school transport
- Stage within the Special Education process; level of services
- Increased age
- Increased behavior difficulties
- Comorbid conditions
- High level of autistic traits
- Irrelevant or idiosyncratic judgments of social appropriateness



Factors impacting bullying involvement

Protective

- Positive relationships/established friendships
- Higher levels of parental engagement and confidence



Social Vulnerabilities to Bullying Victimization

- Socially withdrawn
 - Leads to isolation and loneliness
 - Hinders protective factor of supportive peers
- Socio-communicative and behavioral difficulties
- Less aware of risks
 - Less likely to tell an authority figure about bullying



School Commitment for Prevention

- All students should have the opportunity to learn in classrooms that are safe environments.
- Students with ASD, most likely students with higher cognitive functioning, are at risk for being victimized in general education classrooms.
 - There are more students in general classrooms
 - The behavior of children with ASD is more likely to stand out
- This information suggests that educators and schools need to support these youth in general classrooms.
 - Review school policies and rules



Limitations of the Research

- Researchers have sometimes found different findings because they use different methods for collecting data.
 - Different informants— is parent report the best option?
 - Varying diagnostic types of Autism
 - Availability of school age children with ASD
 - Bullying definition



Intervention Efforts: How should they be different

- Intervention efforts should target the core deficits of autism (e.g., specific communication needs, social skills, eye contact, specific academic impairments)
- If social integration into mainstream is occurring, protective peer groups should be established and increasing empathy towards peers with ASD should be established for typically developing students



Opening up Conversations About Bullying

- Bullying in the news
 - Lady Gaga’s Born This Way Foundation
 - The movie, “Bully Project.”
 - Local and national stories of bullying
 - Court cases involving students who bullied
 - Youth literature on bullying
 - Use videos or websites (list provided at the end)
- ***Often, students may be the ones who bring up the topic of bullying, so be ready!

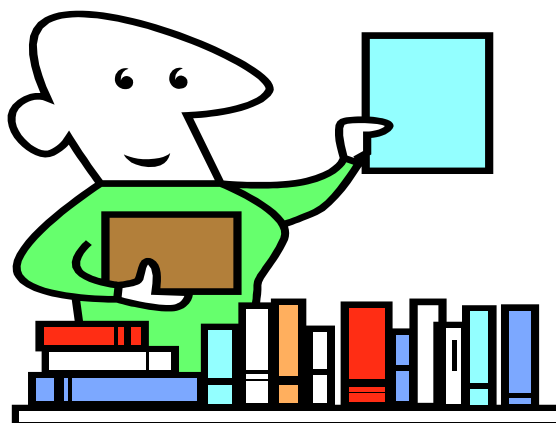


Building a Foundation of Trust

- Active Listening
 - Avoid looking or sounding shocked or disgusted
 - Get students’ thoughts/opinions before expressing your own
 - Summarize to make sure you heard correctly and are focusing on the most critical aspects
- Caring Presence
 - Communicate that you are with your student “no matter what” — you are out to help them, not punish them
- Advocacy
 - You will talk and listen but also, when necessary, help your student take action and/or take action on his/her behalf
- Trust, trust, and more trust!



Resources



Videos & Websites

- Videos
 - “Bully Dance” (www.bullfrogfilms.com)
 - “Stories of Us” (www.storiesofus.com)
 - “Let’s Get Real” (www.groundspark.org)

- Websites
 - www.empowerment.unl.edu
 - www.brnet.unl.edu
 - www.stopbullying.gov
 - www.bornthiswayfoundation.org
 - www.cyberbullying.us



Resources



- Education.com Special issue, “Bullying @ School and Online”
- www.education.com
- www.stopbullying.gov
- www.amazon.com



TOGETHER we can stop bullying!



Empowerment
INITIATIVE

*Supporting Personal, Social
& Cultural Acceptance*

Contact us:

• <http://empowerment.unl.edu>

• Tweet comments and questions!

@DrSueSwearer

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