

Asperger's Syndrome and Bullying

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This presentation is going to look at:

- My own history of having been bullied
- Easy Targets: Why are children with Asperger's and autism more susceptible to being bullied?
- Empowering victims
- Understanding bullies (and those with Asperger's who look like bullies)
- Empowering parents
- Empowering schools

First, I would like to discuss some examples of having been bullied

- "Opening the door"
- "The art teacher"
- "The handcuffs"
- "Foxy Mrs. K"
- "Locker room pranks"

How has bullying impacted me?

- Mild forms of PTSD
- Self esteem was lowered
- Suicidal during adolescence
- Severe depression
- Academic coursework suffered

Easy targets: Children on the autism spectrum

- *Low Frustration Tolerance*
- *Monotropism*
- *Motor Difficulties*
- *Gullibility*
- *Auditory Processing Difficulties*
- *Problems Reading Nonverbal Cues*
- *Special Interests*
- *Lack of Dating Experience*
- *Cultural Illiteracy*
- *Lack of Imagination*
- *Odd Use of Language*

Low Frustration tolerance:

- Results in a decreased ability to function in one's environment. Frustration tolerance is exacerbated by an inability to deal with sensory stimuli, perfectionism, and unpredictability. When frustration tolerance increases and reaches a threshold, it can lead to a meltdown, which makes the person stand out as being different.

Monotropism:

- Makes it difficult for individuals to pay attention to more than one piece of information at a time. This can cause someone to miss important pieces of information and stay “stuck” during a conversation and can have an adverse effect on one’s social skills.

Motor Difficulties:

Result in a decreased ability to perform academic tasks involving writing and drawing. They also make physical education class very challenging. Difficulty with motor issues easily shows up in the playground and in the classroom.

Gullibility:

- Causes a person to believe everything he/she hears, setting her/himself up to be the brunt of a joke.

Auditory Processing Difficulties

- Create slow processing of auditory information that makes it hard to formulate a quick comeback.

Problems Reading Nonverbal Cues

- Make it difficult to read body language and can cause misinterpretation of information from one’s peers. Not understanding what seems obvious to everyone else may frustrate peers.

Special Interests:

May seem out of the norm, and other students may find those interests boring.

Lack of Dating Experience:

May be perceived as someone being gay due to lack of experience in the dating arena.

Cultural Illiteracy:

Becomes a problem because most conversations in adolescence revolve around the popular culture. People with Asperger's may get teased for not knowing about certain topical information.

Lack of Imagination

Creates a problem in playing games that involve pretending. Also, it causes inappropriate responses when telling the truth is not the best option in a social situation.

Odd Use of Language

Will often sound like a "little professor" talking. This makes it hard to relate to others at age-appropriate levels.

Let's look at how we can empower victims:

- First, a sobering fact:
 - Some research suggests that this victims of school bullying more than any other group, has fewer choices about their own surroundings, with the exception of prison inmates.
 - Children with Asperger Syndrome have fewer choices than the average child who is bullied because they sometimes lack the skills necessary to respond to being victimized.

The powerlessness of being a victim with Asperger's:

- Not knowing how to act when confronted by a bully or even being able to recognize when such a situation occurs, drastically impairs one's ability to make appropriate choices. For example, if my boss is abusing me but I don't have that awareness, I probably won't leave my job. If someone is in an abusive marriage and he or she doesn't recognize that it's abusive, that person will not likely leave the marriage or even seek counseling.
- To make choices in our lives, we need to be able to know when we are being victimized. Without that recognition, it is almost impossible to take action.

Further thoughts of lack of awareness

Children with Asperger Syndrome often are not aware when they are being bullied. Parents frequently share their frustration with me about their children not communicating with them about being bullied at school. In all probability, the children themselves don't know they're being bullied.

The paradox of not knowing:

- Although some children aren't exactly aware that they're being victimized, they usually know something bad is happening to them. Intuitively, they have figured out that they are different. Their self-esteem has likely been lowered due to repeated victimization. In other words, even though the totality of being victimized on a daily basis has had a negative cumulative effect, it may still be difficult for the child to discern on a case-by-case basis when bullying is taking place. This lack of awareness exacerbates the powerlessness of the victim.

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- What I have just described would be like having physical symptoms but not knowing what is causing the ailment. For example, if I am having symptoms of mononucleosis but I don't have a diagnosis, I won't know how to treat my symptoms. I may be suffering from low energy and fatigue, but without a diagnosis, I may conclude that my physical problems are psychosomatic or "all in my head". If I am not advised to get rest and avoid strenuous activity, the effects of my illness will only get worse. In the same way, if children with Asperger's do not know they are being bullied, they won't know how to combat it effectively and the effects will only worsen.

Make Bullying Recognition Part of the IEP

- For a student with Asperger Syndrome, the focus should include incorporating the development of social goals into the curriculum.
- Heinrichs (2003) suggests that a child's recognition of this fact (or the lack thereof) should be placed in the Present Levels of Performance (PLEP) section of the IEP. The PLEP quantitatively and qualitatively gives information as to a student's present level of performance in a given area.

Find Role Models

- One of the best ways to empower people with Asperger's is to find an accomplished adult on the spectrum to be a mentor.
- A role model can be extremely worthwhile in helping your child process his experiences of being bullied.
- Having a role model would allow the individual with Asperger's to meet a successful adult who went down a similar road, albeit with some battle scars, and came out alive and well on the other end.

Restructured Settings

- Carol Gray (2004) recommends the use and practice of restructuring settings to avoid bullying confrontations.
- Children who are on the verge of a meltdown will display behavior that makes them appear "different" which in turn encourages bullying.

Examples of restructured settings are:

- Having a buddy eat lunch with the student so the noise of the cafeteria doesn't drain the individual with Asperger's.
- Having a buddy escort the child with Asperger's to his or her next class a minute or two early (very discreetly, so as to not make a big deal out of it).
- Allowing the student with Asperger's to bring in earplugs and go to a quiet place when the fire alarm goes off for fire drills.

False Victims

- Research suggests that there is a state of mind, known as the false victim mentality (Besag 1989; Perry Perry & Kusel 1988), which occurs when a person always feels like a victim, irrespective of circumstances. At school, this would translate to someone complaining all the time to staff about being teased or bullied, even when that was not the case.

Asperger False Victims:

- There is evidence that children with Asperger Syndrome have the potential to fall into this category for a couple of reasons.
 - First, they feel much more comfortable around adults than children their own age because adults are more mature and less likely to abuse them. This fact is well established in the general literature. As a result of feeling uncomfortable around children and more comfortable around adults, a child with Asperger's might try to convince the teacher that someone is bullying him. In this way, the child would be able to elicit the attention and sympathy of an adult while rationalizing the need to remain distant from his peers.

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- The second and perhaps more compelling reason is that children with Asperger's often have trouble distinguishing between good-natured kidding from bullying. Literalness and an inability to understand sophisticated nuances or jokes can cause innocent behavior to be misconstrued as intended to be hurtful. Therefore, attempts to joke around may be viewed by the child with Asperger's as attempts to bully.
- Teachers and parents should be aware of this possible tendency.

Provocative Victims

- Boulton & Smith (1994) coins the term "provocative victim" as someone who *unintentionally* provokes others (in an aggressive way) which then leads to that person being bullied.
- Many children with Asperger Syndrome can be brutally honest (Wing 2001). "Joe's stupid, so I won't work with him," could be a comment that a child with Asperger's might make. These types of comments are highly provocative and can invite criticism and anger. To avoid such situations, it's a good idea to devise a strategy to be included in the IEP about this type of unwitting aggressive behavior. For this youngster, it would be imperative that he learns not to talk badly about people in front of them. This is a simple, concrete, and easy to rule to follow that can help keep someone with Asperger's out of trouble.

The Martial Arts

I recommend that every child with Asperger's be exposed to some martial arts training. Not only would it give them a sense of learning about their own bodies, but it can also increase one's ability to engage in self-defense when necessary to do so.

Encourage Opportunities for Leadership

- People with Asperger Syndrome are interesting and capable people who can thrive when provided with leadership roles. Ideally, good leaders:
 - are dependable.
 - keep their word.
 - stand up for what they believe and not just conform to others.
 - stay focused and determined.
 - are sincere and genuine.
- All of these leadership traits are usually shared by people with Asperger's.

Make Certain Provisions

- It has been stressed that adults should do everything they can so that children with Asperger's can avoid having meltdowns. However, sometimes meltdowns are unavoidable. When they do happen, teachers need to possess the knowledge and expertise to take into consideration environmental stressors, including being bullied, which is likely part of the equation. Heinrichs (2003) talks about the fact that many children who are bullied chronically will react in drastic ways. A child with Asperger Syndrome may sometimes go to extreme measures to defend him/herself when pushed to the limit.
- Zero Tolerance policies can sometimes cause harsh results for individuals with Asperger's who take inappropriate action in order to defend themselves. I recommend that it be written into the IEP that the child who overreacts be viewed in the context of all surrounding circumstances rather than on the sole basis of his isolated actions.

Empowering Bystanders

- We will now look at how we as a community can empower bystanders to help curb the bullying problem.

Bystander Intervention

- Usually when a bystander intervenes, he or she does so without group support. Most bystanders do not want to risk their social standing by sticking up for an unpopular child. Many people fear that if they came to the aid of the victim, other children would assume a friendship exists with the victim. Therefore, bystander intervention is very risky business.

Types of Bystanders

- Coloroso (2003) identified 5 different types of bystanders:
 - Follower Henchman - Takes an active role in bullying but does not start it.
 - Supporter/Passive Bully-Supports the bullying but does not take an active part, i.e., will laugh and cheer but stays primarily on the sidelines.
 - Passive Supporter/Possible Bully - Likes the bullying but does not openly display support.
 - Disengaged Onlooker - Does not take a stand either way and is truly apathetic to the situation.
 - Possible Defender - Dislikes the bullying and thinks he/she ought to help but fails to do so.

Actual Defenders

- Then there are the actual *defenders* who are few and far between. What is interesting to note is most children fall into the "possible defender" category, meaning they do not like to witness bullying. This means that most students dislike bullying and think they ought to help, but don't act according to their own moral compass. Carol Gray (2003) cites that 84 out of 100 children are empathetic to children being bullied, and yet, those same boys and girls are not likely to act as defenders.

Bystander Intervention research:

- Craig and Pepler (2000) conducted a study that further confirmed Gray's findings. Here's what they found:
 - Peers (bystanders) were involved in 85% of the bullying episodes.
 - Peers reinforced the bullying in 81% of the episodes.
 - Peers were friendlier toward the bullies than their targets.
 - Peers intervened in only 13% of the episodes when they were present.

What does this tell us?

These statistics clearly show that most students want to help, but fail to do so. If 84 out of 100 students are empathetic toward the victim and yet most of those same children are "friendlier" toward the bully, something is drastically wrong.

Peer Mentoring Programs

- Peer mentoring is an excellent way to help integrate ASD students into the mainstream social environment. In schools that use peer-mentoring programs, neurotypical students take a specific class that allows them to become basically familiar with ASD and then they can successfully mentor the ASD child. They receive class credit and can put this experience on their resume.

For peer mentoring programs to be successful, a few prerequisites need to be in place. I recommend the following:

- It should be mandatory that the mentor spend some time outside of school getting to know the person he or she is going to mentor. Social life does not end when the school bell rings at 3:00 p.m. Life goes on and for most people in middle and high school, time outside of school is just as social as during the school day. If a potential buddy refuses to meet this requirement, it is likely that he or she would probably not be a successful mentor.
- There should be a minimum time commitment for the mentor to act in that capacity. If a mentor and ASD pupil bond and then in a short time the semester is over, the child with ASD might experience a feeling of great loss. In order for a program like this to truly be effective, the mentor has to make a one or two year commitment to his/her mentored pupil.

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- The mentor should make a commitment to be available by telephone in case any troublesome issues come up for the ASD child, but the ASD child must agree not to abuse this privilege.
- It would be ideal for peer mentoring programs to be established for grades 6 through 12. Middle school is notoriously known as being one of the toughest developmental periods, so extra peer support during this time is crucial. An abbreviated version of a peer mentoring program might be appropriate for the upper grades in elementary school.
- The mentors should meet periodically with a designated teacher or professional in a class setting to discuss their experiences for credit. The mentors would deal primarily with their own issues in the mentoring process rather than disclose what might be confidential information about the ASD child.

The Invisibility of Asperger's and Bystanders

- Children with Asperger's are less likely than their peers to enlist bystander support from others. There are a couple of reasons for this.
 - First, most children with Asperger's have fewer friends due to their social difficulties.
 - Second, Asperger Syndrome is considered to be an invisible disability. In other words, the symptoms displayed by the individual with Asperger's are often "soft signs," meaning that inappropriate behaviors that are displayed may look purposeful. An individual with classic autism or with a more visible impairment would be more likely to be viewed with sympathy because their unusual behavior is so obviously unintentional.

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- Because children with Asperger's look "normal" on the surface, their peers expect them to behave "normally." Expectations of others are generally formed during a first impression. It often takes awhile for the various oddities of Asperger's to make themselves known, so people with Asperger's are often held to neurotypical standards of behavior. Conversely, when first meeting someone with classic autism, it is immediately obvious that there are visible differences in the observed behavior and others' expectations conform to this difference.
- Many children with Asperger's have learned the social skills necessary to project a good first impression. Through social stories, comic strip conversations and other social skills interventions, they may have learned appropriate scripts for greetings and conversational pleasantries. However, there are no "scripts" when the hypersensitive person's sensory circuits are put on overload. When this happens, others are confused.

Empowering Schools

Now we will look at how schools can be empowered to help curb the bullying problem with respect to ASD and Asperger's:

Successful School-Wide Interventions

- Clearly, interventions at the school level can work.
 - In Kansas (Evans, Ewbank, Fonagy, Gies, Sacco and Twemlow, 2001), a program was implemented as part of the physical education classes to teach self-regulation and appropriate social behavior. The school saw a significant drop in disciplinary referrals and suspensions resulting in improved academic performance.
 - In Italy (Menesini and Modiano 2002) at an elementary school, children were introduced to the following interventions: role playing, sharing personal experiences, and the use of bibliotherapy. Bullying decreased significantly.
 - A study in New South Wales (Petersen and Rigby, 1999) looked at schools using Pikas' Method of Shared Concern. Self-report measures from this study indicated a substantial decrease in bullying.

What is a whole school approach?

A whole-school approach for bullying prevention is where the rules and regulations are established by the administration, either on a district-wide basis or by each school. This type of approach is essential because the policies are the same across the board and would eliminate any possible ambiguity. Teachers would not assume responsibility for having to create their own classroom rules. They would simply implement the rules established by the administration or district. This type of policy helps to provide structure that children need in order to feel safe and secure.

Why a "whole school" approach makes sense:

- Imagine living in a county, township, city or jurisdiction where different laws applied to different streets or blocks. This type of system would be absurd. The lack of uniformity would confound citizens as to how to act and stay within the confines of the law.
- If you think this lack of uniformity would be confusing for adults, imagine how it would affect children. Essentially without having a consistent whole school approach, children are placed in a chaotic environment.

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- What if a group of first grade students learns a set of classroom procedures from Mrs. Barnes, designed to ensure that bullying does not occur. In second grade, these same students are placed with Mrs. Carney, who has a completely different set of rules. Mrs. Barnes had a rule that forbids a student to touch another child without his or her permission, but this same rule is not in place in Mrs. Carney's class. As a result, students would suffer from a lack of consistency and continuity.

Bully-Free Declaration as part of the Whole School Approach as adopted by Oleweus :

- *We, the students, teachers and parents of ABC Elementary School, declare that all members of the ABC community are valuable citizens. We agree to treat everyone with respect, honor and dignity. We affirm that no student will ever be teased or bullied with an intention to cause harm. We agree that students who choose to act contrary to this policy should be subjected to consequences for their actions. It is important to stand up for the people who have been bullied and to let the bully know that what he or she is doing is not acceptable. It is in the ABC tradition that we affirm these principles of inclusion and acceptance for every student who is part of the ABC family.*

Sample Contract that goes home to Parents as adopted by Oleweus :

Dear Parents and Legal Guardians,

Please read and review the Bully-Free Declaration with your child. Below you will see a contract that we are asking students and parents to sign. Discuss the contract with your son or daughter the importance of bullying prevention before he or she returns to school with the signed contract tomorrow. ABC Respect Contract:

I _____ agree that I will abide by the principles and policies set forth in the Bully-Free Declaration. If I don't abide by them, I agree to accept the consequences for my actions.

Please Print Name _____

Student Signature _____

Parent Signature _____

Date _____

Obstacles to a Whole-School Approach

- The principal may not be motivated to place bullying prevention as a priority.
- Teachers may not be in agreement as to the degree to which bullying is a problem and how it should be handled. They also may prefer to handle it on their own.
- The rules may not be concrete enough for everyone in the school to understand because of different ages, cognitive abilities and levels of maturity.

Systems-Based versus Principle-Based Approach

- System based approaches to discipline have very specific consequences for certain behavior. In other words, each "violation" has its corresponding prescribed consequence. For example, if you hit someone, you are suspended.
- Principle based approaches examines each case on an individual basis without prescribing consequences for various infractions.

The problem with system based approaches for Asperger children:

- A systems-based approach could be a recipe for disaster for Asperger students because they will often break rules without the intention to do so, but rather due to a lack of social understanding. Merely prescribing a punishment for a "crime" could be humiliating for the Asperger student who may have little understanding of what he or she did wrong.

An example of this.....

- What if Jenny, a girl with Asperger syndrome, hugs Jill and there is a rule at her school that no one touches another person without his or her permission. What happens to Jenny? She ends up getting suspended because of the zero tolerance policy enforcing this rule. Is this fair? Was Jenny's intention to harm Jill in any way? Was Jenny's Asperger syndrome, in terms of not understanding personal boundaries, involved in causing the hug?

Advantages of the systems based approach (or zero tolerance)

- The obvious advantage of the systems-based approach is that it does help in deterring students from bullying. For example, if a child is tempted to bully a classmate and knows there is no consistent enforcement of any policy at school, he/she may be more inclined to proceed with the bullying. Having a clearly defined set of rules with consistent consequences seems only logical for effective enforcement of the policy.

Principle based approach works best with people who may have trouble understanding the rules:

- For example, when the bully is a student with a learning disability, ADHD, autism or Asperger's, or any other condition that might interfere with understanding or complying with the rule or when the incident in question cannot sufficiently be proven, a principle based approach works best.

Video Monitoring

- Many schools have endorsed the use of video cameras to patrol for bullying behavior. The aim here is to actually catch the bullies on monitored, closed circuit TV. Cameras can be strategically placed throughout a school in locations where bullying is most likely to occur.

Success of video monitoring in recent studies:

- In a Toronto school where bullying was out of control, the school board authorized the installation of closed circuit television cameras to be placed in various areas in and surrounding the school. This decision met with great success (Fennell 1993).
- In Solihull, England, cameras were installed that proved to be invaluable in the school's fight against bullying (O'Malley 1993).

Reasons to use Video Monitoring

- If the act is caught on tape, parents can't dispute the facts.
- Ultimately, protection of victims from bullies is a human rights issue. If a convenience store can install a camera to prevent losing money because of theft, shouldn't school districts be willing to invest in the same technology if it helps protect the safety of children?
- The most important reason for these cameras, with regards to those with disabilities or Asperger syndrome, is to give these people a "voice." What if Barry bullied Devin in a certain area of the playground while others witnessed the occurrence? Everyone saw it, but Devin didn't have the confidence to be assertive or to tell someone in authority. Also assume that no bystanders came to Devin's defense or reported the incident to a person in authority. If cameras had been utilized, Devin would have had a voice.

Handling Cyber Bullying

- According to the website (www.cyberbullying.org), cyber bullying can involve making vicious jokes about someone in a public forum, i.e. myspace.com or an online message board, writing threatening emails, posting pictures of someone in a derogatory way, and using a false identity in an instant message or email to obtain private information or to humiliate a person.

Cyber bullying is a cruel form of bullying because:

- As a victim of cyber bullying, one has to not only endure the effects of bullying at school but also at home. The safe haven of one's home suddenly becomes unsafe and dangerous.

Individuals with Asperger's are likely to become targets of this kind of bullying:

- Many "Aspies" spend a lot of time alone at their computers. Also, they tend to be gullible. They may give away private information to someone without asking critical questions as to why that person would want or be entitled to such personal information.

What can be done about cyber bullying?

- A designated e-mail address for a school. A sample email address could be something like NoBullying@SeaholmHighSchool.edu. This address would be available to report any incidents of cyber bullying that could impact the victim's welfare at school.
- Legal prosecution for emails that are threatening in nature and in violation of criminal statutes.

An example of cyber-bullying

- Suppose that Michelle emails Courtney calling her a retard and saying no one at school likes her. These statements are not grounds for legal action, but they could be forwarded to a person in authority at school who could talk to Michelle about why she sent that email.
- Taking this example a step further, what if Michelle threatens Courtney in the email, stating that if Courtney comes to school on Monday, she might never see her dog again. This email should be immediately forwarded to the school for possible contact with law enforcement officials.

The bottom line about cyber bullying:

- Any email or activity on the internet that serves to bully a person, whether or not it is grounds for legal action, should be scrutinized to determine if there is a basis for punishment at the school level.
- Just because someone is not in school doesn't give them the right to electronically bully another person through the Internet, when the threat involves consequences that can occur at school. It is important to remember that if students do not feel safe in the confines of their own home because of cyber bullying, they surely are not going to feel safe at school.

The Media

- Media literacy is vital in order for students to make smart choices as to what they watch with respect to television, movies and video games.
- Wayne Dyer says that the average child will witness thousands of simulated murders on television before adolescence. This totally desensitizes our children to violence.
- Reality television shows glorify contestants manipulating each other so they can "win the game". Examples of such shows are:
 - The Weakest Link
 - Survivor

Media Literacy

- Media literacy is vital in order for students to make smart choices as to what they watch with respect to television, movies and video games.
- Many media literacy groups would welcome the opportunity to visit schools and speak to parents and students about the direct link between the media and bullying/violence.
- One such group is the New Mexico Media Literacy Project, one of the oldest media literacy organizations in the United States (www.nmmlp.org).
- A simple search on the Internet using the keywords "media literacy" would generate many other organizations with guest speakers who would come to schools and speak to students about this subject.

Now let us shift gears a little bit. We are going to talk about understanding bullies or those with Asperger's who can look like a bully.

Can children with Asperger's be bullies?

- Yes, they can. Here's why:
 - Need for predictability creates a sense of needing to be in control. This can create the appearance of bossiness and domineering behavior.

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- Pragmatic lack of theory of mind.
 - This appearance could be due to difficulties with executive function/central coherence as well as high levels of anxiety. . If a person can only focus on one or two details at a time, thereby overlooking the big picture, he may appear not to recognize that others have feelings and could end up offending people.

Example of pragmatic theory of mind.....

- If Stan is so focused on buying a birthday present for his girlfriend that he forgets to be courteous to his boss at work that day, it may not be that Stan is intentionally acting aggressively towards his boss. In fact, intellectually, Stan may know that acting nice to one's boss is appropriate and helps with matters of self-interest like job promotions, but as a result of being poor at multi-tasking, it is hard for Stan to be nice to his boss while he's got the birthday present on his mind. It's almost as if every aspect of his day is compartmentalized and he can't deal with other aspects until he has completed the task of purchasing the gift. Does Stan lack Intellectual Theory of Mind? Not necessarily, but it could certainly could create that impression.

Asperger "bullies" and the types of bullies according the Coloroso:

- **Hyperactive Bully** (usually the Asperger bullying) this type of bully struggles socially, has few friends, and misreads social cues. He reacts aggressively towards even the slightest provocation and is extremely sensitive.
- **Confident Bully**- is a natural born leader who tends to be popular and who likes to exert his superiority over others.
- **Social Bully**- loves to use gossip and rumors to his/her advantage and is socially savvy but not especially trustworthy. Mainly girls fit within this category.
- **Fully Armored Bully**- uses every opportunity to victimize others when no one is looking.

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- **Bullied Bully**- turns his feelings of powerlessness into relief by bullying others (can also be an Asperger bully).
- **Bunch of Bullies**- chooses to target someone but knows that what he is doing is wrong. Usually this type of bully is a nice person.
- **Gang of Bullies**- get together for the common purpose of the pursuit of power.
- *They don't always know each other, but share in their goal.*

Now we will look at ways parents can empower individuals with Asperger's Syndrome.

The Internet

- Children on the autism spectrum are easy targets for this type of victimization because:
- They are often lonely and have very few friends. If a predator shows an interest in them, they are especially vulnerable to that attention.
- They are trusting and gullible by nature. Therefore, they may be more likely to believe an adult who is pretending to be a child than a neurotypical who would be able to discern that the person is engaging in an act of manipulation.
- They are black-and-white-thinkers. They are likely to assume that if a person is an adult, he must be good.

What can parents do?

- **Get Rid of All Webcams**
 - A webcam is a visual advertisement for any pedophile. Particularly, it is imperative for children with Asperger syndrome not to have a webcam. Having this device invites the predator to make contact with your child. A webcam allows the predator to communicate face to face with your child in real time! What could be more dangerous than that?
- **Monitor All Keystrokes**
 - While privacy rights are important, your child's safety is more important. Buy a software program that allows you to monitor every keystroke made on the computer. This is especially necessary if you find that your child is spending an inordinate amount of time on the computer, and you have no idea what he or she is doing. If your child demonstrates sound judgment and clearly understands the risks of using the internet, perhaps you could lift this sanction.

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- **Ban Chat Rooms**
 - **Make Internet chat rooms and message boards off limits for your child.** A child may protest that this deprivation is unfair and insist, "I'm the only kid not allowed to go into chat rooms." Explain that people who visit chat rooms are not all truthful and that a child who visits a chat room puts himself at risk. If a child violates this rule and goes into a chat room, there must be severe consequences. The consequences must be sufficiently harsh to help the child understand the potentially dangerous situation in which he put himself.

Help Your Child Choose His Email Address

- The child with Asperger's should not be deprived of having email access. If a child wants to wish his grandpa a happy birthday, he should be able to do so, but your child's email address must not reveal any personal information. Something that begins with "User" is ideal: For example, "User123467@aol.com". A name that is completely camouflaged is the best possible screen name for a vulnerable child.

Do Not Let Your Child Have an Internet Profile

- Many Internet service providers allow users to create a “profile” or a webpage to describe themselves. In a typical profile, your name, age, address, school you attend, are disclosed. Do not allow your child to have a profile or a webpage for all the reasons previously discussed.

What can parents do to help their children with Asperger’s combat bullying?

Playing Detective-

The game of “detective” helps children with Asperger’s figure out if they are truly being bullied or if the incident was innocent. The aim is to teach children to rely on past experiences as guides toward questionable interactions with bullies or those who may be perceived as bullies.

Some questions an ASD child should ask himself when a questionable incident of bullying occurs are:

- Is this person *usually* nice to me?
- Has this person ever said anything nice to me before?
- Did he continue talking to me or invite me to join in his group, or did he ignore me shortly thereafter?
 - Help your child become a master detective...

Role Playing

A role play might be an effective technique when one child has called another child an offensive name but clearly was not intended to be hurtful. The role play could go something like this:

- Mom: (pretending to be a friend) Hey Johnny.
- Johnny: Hi!
- Mom: I can’t believe you finished your history assignment. You’re such a geek. I haven’t even started mine yet. Hey, want to ride bikes after school?

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- Start off by asking Johnny whether his friend, Tom, meant it when he called him a geek. Would he have asked Johnny to ride bikes if he really felt Johnny was an undesirable person? As a parent, you could suggest some reasons why his friend called him that name.
 - Tom was frustrated because he hadn’t started his own history assignment.
 - Tom was jealous of you and teased you by calling you a creep.
 - Tom was trying to be funny.

The Goal of Role Plays

- Rather, one’s *past* intentions and actions are relevant in interpreting the meaning of one’s present words and actions. The child has to learn how to read intention through past experience.

Spontaneous Role Play

The best way to have this information generalize from practice at home to the school is if these role plays are as spontaneous as possible. Life is not a movie where we can hit the pause button and analyze the situation before hitting the play button again. As human beings, we are constantly asked to analyze life in real time. As William Shakespeare once said, "Life is not a dress rehearsal."

A spontaneous role play means:

- That you (as the parent) say something spontaneously and have your child analyze what just happened. In other words, you are "role playing" but the child doesn't know it until you have explained it to him.

Example of Spontaneous Role Play:

- You might say to your child with Asperger's after he asks you to do something petty.... "You're driving me crazy." After a few seconds, ask him if he thinks that he was literally driving you crazy.
- You could ask these questions:
 - Does he usually drive you crazy?
 - Have you made that statement to him before, especially when he asks you for something and you're busy or not feeling well?
 - Would you really be driven crazy just because you were asked to do something?

Use Movies and Television Shows

- In addition to spontaneous role plays, have your child analyze various movies and television shows. Try to choose movies involving characters who are similar to your child. Pause and rewind so that you can select dialogue and have your child analyze it. Some guiding questions could be:
 - Did he really mean what he said? If not, why not?
 - What do you think he really meant?
 - Was he being sarcastic? If so, how could you tell?
 - Does character A like character B? If so, how could you tell?

Comebacks

- Without the acquisition of a basic verbal self-defense repertoire, the ASD child is virtually powerless in defending himself from being verbally abused. Children on the autism spectrum are entitled to learn how to defend themselves verbally. No doubt, this will not be an easy skill to teach.
- After having been verbally abused, being able to have a verbal comeback might be the toughest challenge the ASD child faces. Impaired auditory processes make it extremely difficult to be able to formulate on-the-spot responses after having been insulted by someone moments earlier. So teaching your child how to use comebacks might be a helpful tool to acquire.

Teaching Comebacks:

- If later on, a parent can go over what the specific insults were, the parent and child can brainstorm appropriate comebacks for the next time that child is victimized.
- For example, if someone says, "You're a retard, Johnny," you and your child can brainstorm specific comebacks.
 - "I know you are, but what am I?"
 - "or "Whoa...I'm impressed! Did you stay up all night thinking of that one?"

The one Caveat of Comebacks:

- It's important to point out that none of these comebacks should be racist, sexist, degrading or profane.

Assertive Scripts

- Henrichs (2002) also suggests that every ASD child have a few assertive "scripts" in their repertoire. Have your child practice saying these scripts with confidence and boldness:
 - "Back off,"
 - "Watch it, pal,"
 - "Don't mess with me."

In conclusion, I challenge all of you to:

- Encourage bystander intervention
- Encourage proactive and creative measures at your schools.
- Encourage the empowerment of children through "bullying recognition" and "assertiveness scripts".

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Thank you!!!!!!