

How to Reduce the Bullying of Children with High Functioning ASD?

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Short Communication

Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine published in 2012 a study showed that 46% of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have been bullied and 63% of students who are bullied are on the autism spectrum (Bullying and Students on the Autism Spectrum) [1]. But the community awareness and understanding of bullying behaviour has improved in recent years and many researches and studies were done to show the psychological reasons and its effects on the bully and the bullied. Nevertheless, student with high functioning ASD remain a soft target and highly vulnerable to bullying behaviour in school setting. What is the role of family, teachers to reduce this anxiety and this behaviour on the child? Bullying is an unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. This intimidating behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time intend to cause fear, distress and/or harm to another persons body, feelings, self-esteem, or reputation [2-4]. Bullying can be verbal, physical, social and cyber bullying. Why are children with autism bullied? Poor social interaction skills may be the reason that makes the high functioning ASD an easy target for bullying. His inability to conform to the social rules and norms can be also a reason to trigger him. Often, the ASD child may tolerate teasing from peers just to have company. They have difficulty understanding whether the comments or actions of others are malicious or manipulative. He may break school rules, steal or engage in inappropriate behaviour just to be accepted. And sometimes the child with high functioning ASD may not even recognize that he is bullied or recognize what bullying is? The great difficulty of communication of his distress may be a cause of the problem. Changes appear on his behaviour due to his inability to communicate and to report his feelings. These changes may be physical, emotional and behavioral. How can we address this problem? It is a common responsibility of family, school and community to protect ASD child from bullying. It is team effort to set successful anti-bullying strategies. School has a primary role in anti-bullying strategies to reduce the frequency of bullying of students with ASD [5,6].

- School's purpose is to educate; education starts by stop bullying. All school staff plays a role and must take action against bullying and they should know that bullying is not acceptable.

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- Develop a whole school approach to bullying prevention and create a safe and caring environment.
- Supervise the areas where the supervision is less like bathrooms, playgrounds, school bus etc.
- Develop a whole school approach about ASD including understanding of the social difficulties experienced by student with ASD, and form a support system for them. Staff needs to be trained to look beyond the behaviour to discover what or who caused the act.
- Develop cooperative home and school links.
- Encourage friendships: more friends and stronger friendships will grow respect and acceptance.
- Develop a report system for incident to a teacher or the school office to address the issue.
- Parent's role is based on the support, education and caring.
- Watch carefully for signs of bullying and be available to talk with the child about their concerns and what they are experiencing.
- Talk to the child about what is a good friend/what is a bad friend.
- Tell the child if someone hurts her or him or makes him feel uncomfortable, unsure or confused, tell and adult. He should not be encouraged to fight back: he needs to learn how to deal appropriately with the situation by stopping the person, walk away and tell a teacher.

- Parents should not approach the child or his family suspecting bullying the child, because this can lead to further problems.
- Parents don't need to overreact or minimize the problem; they need to take it seriously and to listen to the child.
- Educate the child with ASD about bullying; parents need to teach the child about the bullying and the in/acceptable behaviour.
- Parents need to work on child's social skills. ASD is a long

life problem and children with ASD have many challenges [7]. Those challenges can leave them susceptible both to bullying and acts of self-defense that cause the school and parents to punish the child severely. So the awareness and developing strategies of this problem may be a step to reduce the victims in schools. Parents, school staff, students and teachers can play a proactive role by understanding the risk and intervening the moment there is a problem to provide the safest environment for the child to learn and enjoy.

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