

THE DEVOTED PARENT'S GUIDE TO AUTISM

NO-FAIL ANTI-BULLYING STRATEGIES!



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Hello, Mom or Dad!

You know your child with special needs or autism better than anyone, and you want to help her or him to communicate to the best of her or his abilities. Being a parent makes you the most important person for your child!

But where's the help for YOU to understand and empower your child? You've come to the right place.

As an ASHA-certified speech-language pathologist, I've been working with people with autism and special needs for over 20 years. I strive to achieve more, just like you

do, every day. Together, through my articles, videos, and apps, we can significantly help your child in the convenience of your own home.

In this e-book, you'll learn new and effective ways to improve your child's ability to distinguish mean-spirited bullies from those who are genuine friends. My goal is for your child, you, the community, and educators to take a stand using the power of communication when bullying rears its ugly head.

After you've tried a few of my techniques, feel free to email your questions, comments, or concerns to me at karen@icanforautism.com.

☺ *Karen*

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Buddy or Bully? How Your Child with Autism Can Easily Tell Them Apart



Children with autism struggle with interpreting social communication. Due to the complexity of people's behavior and language, children with autism may find it challenging to determine who is genuinely kind versus those who are mean-spirited.

Together, you and your child can discuss the peers in his or her life and make educated decisions on who gets the privilege to be his or her friend!

HOW TO TELL THEM APART

Help your child distinguish these polar opposite personalities using words he or she can understand.

You can show how the word 'buddy' contains the word 'bud', which is the start of a flower or tree that's about to bloom into something bigger, fragrant, and more special. Like budding flowers, being 'buddies' with someone is something very nice and sweet, and other flowers enjoy growing near them. On the other hand, point out how the word 'bull' is in 'bully.' No one wants to be near a bull because he is not nice and sweet, and he can hurt us.

'BUDDY' CHECKLIST

Together with your child, have her or him rate the peers in his life on a scale of 0 (never); 1 (sometimes); 2 (often); 3 (always):

- Gives me happy smiles
- Asks me questions I want to answer
- Likes to help me
- Wants to talk with me at lunch
- Wants to play with me at recess or after school
- Makes me feel happy and nice like a flower in the garden
- Shares her or his toys or school supplies with me
- Helps me understand what he or she is talking about when we have a conversation
- When I talk with him or her, he or she pays attention to me and listens to me

Results:

If this checklist has mostly 1's or 2's, then this person is a friend—like a flower within the garden. If there are any 3s, this person can be considered a closer friend—like a flower that grows nearer to you within the garden. If there are any zeros, refer to the "Bully Checklist" below. Discuss with your child other positive details he or she likes about friends to make this list longer.

'BULLY' CHECKLIST

Same as the Buddy Checklist, have your child rate the peers in his life on a scale of 0 (never); 1 (sometimes); 2 (often); 3 (always):

- Makes mean or silly faces at me
- Asks me questions I don't want to or can't answer
- Doesn't help me
- Says mean things to me at lunch
- Leaves me out of games at recess
- Makes me feel unhappy, upset, or afraid
- Doesn't share her or his toys or school supplies with me
- Doesn't help me understand what he or she is talking about when we have a conversation
- When I try to talk with him or her, he or she ignores me

Results:

If this checklist has any 1's or 2's, then this person should be avoided—like a weed that makes the garden look not so nice. If there are any 3's, this person may be considered a bully and requires adult intervention. Bullies, like bulls, do not belong and are not allowed inside of the garden. If there are any zeros, refer to the "Buddy Checklist" above. Discuss with your child other negative details he or she encounters to make this list longer.

THIS BUD'S FOR YOU!

Even though the words are only distinguished by a pair of D's and L's, that makes all the difference with whom we consider befriending. Providing an organized system like these checklists can help you get to know your child better while helping your child make keen observations for lasting friendships. ❖

8 Ways To Help Your Child Stop Bullying at School



If your child with autism is able to use language to speak, understand, and socialize somewhat, he or she may, in part, have mainstream classes with classmates who do not have autism.

A bully who is skilled at language and socializing can take advantage of students with social challenges and language disabilities.

So, the children with autism who are higher-functioning are at the greatest risk of being bullied.

You as the parent can help school staff members and classmates understand how to support your child with the suggestions that follow...

School's purpose is to educate, and education is the answer to stop bullying! Help protect your child from bullying during school even when you cannot physically be there through teaching better communication, social skills, independence, and self-advocacy.

All school staff play key roles and must take action against bullying. Keep in close contact with your child's school to encourage working together to reduce bullying opportunities with these tips:

1 - Close Supervision

An adult who is educated about autism, along with a trusted classmate if possible, can help in areas where bullying occurs more often. Places where students with autism are able to be bullied more easily due to the lack of supervision include:

Mainstream classroom with only one teacher

On the school bus where the driver is concentrating on driving as opposed to passengers' behavior

- Walking to/from school
- Extra-curricular activities
- Cafeteria
- Playground
- Passing time in hallways
- Bathroom visits
- Any unsupervised or unstructured activity

2 - Counseling and Intervention

The bully himself or herself needs to be informed of school's anti-bullying policy and counseled to stop more bullying.

3 - Overall Education About Bullying

Students and staff will become increasingly involved to report and resolve bullying.

4 - Basic Rule

Tell your child if someone hurts her or him or makes him feel uncomfortable, unsure, or confused, tell an adult.

5 - Teach All Students Responsibility

Talk about the communication and social challenges experienced by kids with autism so that their classmates who don't have autism will understand them more and be more sensitive to their needs. When it comes to a child with autism, being a kind, caring friend can make all the difference to protect them.

6 - Encourage Friendships

More friends and stronger friendships will grow respect and acceptance. But peers without autism might not know how to make friends with someone who has autism. Along with your help, schools should guide students without autism how to reach their peers with autism possibly through workshops or specially-structured activities.

7 - Prevention

Encourage your child to stay with a crowd of people whom he or she likes. Lots of friendly students surrounding your child is like a school of fish that makes it harder for the bully to bust in.

8 - Communicate Confidently

If your child feels that she or he is being bullied, practice scripts like, "Shake your head and say, 'No one likes a bully.'"; "So not cool."; "Some people just don't get it."; "This is so boring."; "Whatever."; "Leave me alone." Afterwards,

to not add more fuel to the bully's fire, it is very important to tell your child to walk away without looking back and immediately report this to an adult. These harmless yet powerful comebacks may leave the bully speechless, especially because it is unexpected out of the mouth of her or his victim.

Working together as a team in partnership with you as the parent, your school's teaching staff, aides, principal, counselors, and psychologists will provide the safest environment for your child to learn and enjoy. ❖

This article first appeared in the American Autism Association blog, October 2015

Parents & Teachers Can Combat Bullying Together



Along with academic achievement, a goal of the educational experience is to learn how to have successful social relationships both inside and outside of the classroom that continue through adulthood.

However, physically seating a student into a classroom - mainstream or self-contained - doesn't automatically ensure social acceptance. Problems with learning and communication can cause a child with special needs to be misunderstood, left out, teased, and/or bullied, leading to behavioral meltdowns and depression.

Parents and teachers working together can promote friendship, values, and comradery within all students. The following suggestions for socialization promote positive emotions and self-concepts for all children and can be used with fellow students, friends, or family members.

TIPS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Decreasing Prejudice While Enforcing Equal Status

Teachers can display a classroom 'flower garden' where students each display their individuality by drawing a flower. On petals and leaves, each child can tell about who she or he is, where she or he comes from, and her or his unique interests.

Identifying Values and Fostering Positive Feelings

After the instructor pulls a student's name from a hat, the other students write "The thing I like most about you is your...", chosen from a list of qualities like honesty, friendliness, helpfulness, etcetera. Their statements along with examples are reviewed by the teacher and then read aloud to the honored student. This fosters a sense of belonging. Proudly, the revered student can take these letters home in a class-decorated folder in order to help with anxiety, depression, bullying, and overall negativity.

With the idea that positivity "sticks", students can write empowering remarks and compliments onto sticky notes to boost self-esteem. After teacher review, each note can be placed on the respective students' desks to remind them of this recognition and caring between one other.

Given teacher guidance, students can create 'Want Ads' for friends. Students can 'advertise' that his or her desired friendship requires emotional traits such as 'being accepted' and 'having patience' and interests like 'enjoying reading' or 'playing baseball.' The student placing the 'ad' would describe his or her strengths and talents such as organization, trustworthiness, love of art, and so on.

Cooperative Learning and Cooperative Discipline

Cooperation is based on relationships, social responsibility, pride, and a strong sense of belonging. Activities like tutoring, mentoring, group studying, board games, group projects, and plays are some examples of cooperative learning. Such activities require each student to depend on the help of one another to accomplish a common goal, so teamwork rather than competition is fostered. As students create more positive interactions between one another, they can learn to better appreciate each friend's similarities and differences.

To benefit the entire class, students can work together to develop their own "Classroom Code of Conduct" and partake in peer-to-peer conflict mediation with teacher guidance. This way, students experience a deeper sense of community, discipline, and social consciousness.

Fostering Team-Building and Connections

A great way for students to connect with other students both individually and as a whole class is creating a 'human web.' Standing in a circle, each student takes turns throwing a single ball of yarn to any classmate while giving him or her compliments (e.g., "You are a generous person because you like to share your pencils with me."), expressing gratitude (e.g., "Thanks for helping me clean up during art class. I couldn't have done it that fast by myself."), or asking personal questions (e.g., "Have you ever traveled to another state?").

Since the yarn is interwoven between throws, everyone's contribution is important to the web, everyone is connected, and there are unlimited interesting designs for the students to create together!

TIPS FOR THE HOME

Non-Threatening Expressions and Positive Responses

Using 'I' messages, teach your child to say things to family members and friends like, "Mike, when you laughed at me, I felt upset and sad. I like when you help me instead of laugh at me."; "Do not take my stuff without asking. I like to share, and I will usually let you borrow my stuff if you ask me."

Explain to all children within the household that any behavior including misbehavior is a choice that each person has control over. Even though we have reasons to feel badly, we can choose positive behaviors. You can say something like, "Feeling grouchy does not give you the right to be disrespectful and make nasty comments."

Have discussions about your child's daily conflicts and how she or he feels. Using role-play of actual or hypothetical social situations, you can both work on scripts and suggestions for a calm resolution.

Help your child make social relationship judgements by examining the people within her or his life. Draw a dart board with concentric circles, different colors, and possibly a point-value. On thin sticky notes, your child can write the names of people he or she knows. Have your child assess how "close to" or "far from" the center each person is, pointing out that the bullseye represents the most trusted relationships (highest point-value) while further circles depict less intimate relationships. People who aren't friendly or act as bullies are placed outside of the circle, earning no value points.



If you feel your child has made inappropriate judgements about the true relationships, discuss the reasons why with your child. Then, together you can re-assign the placement of these people on the dart board.

Sharing some personal experiences and hardships as you were growing up may allow your child to feel more comfortable and willing to share more of his or her daily encounters with you.

PROVIDE WISDOM

Sometimes physical disabilities tend to evoke more sensitivity from others because those limitations are observable. In contrast, classmates may misunderstand the student with special needs who has social, communicative, emotional, and/or behavioral disorders.

Educators along with parents can teach general awareness, kindness, and advocacy. Some general tips for parents to use with family members and friends as well as for teachers to use with the class follow:

“Some children who cannot speak or communicate effectively may feel happy just to have others playing or working near them. There are lots of fun activities that don’t require language such as taking turns at putting puzzles together, playing catch, or playing a memory match card game.”

“Some students with special needs might not know how to make friends or they may feel uncomfortable. Encourage everyone to introduce themselves and show an interest in becoming his or her friend.”

“Since children with special needs have difficulty communicating, sometimes they might misunderstand and/or miscommunicate. Being a good friend to anyone means helping others to understand and get their needs met.”

“The person on the inside matters the most--not the way they talk, look, or move. Good friends accept each other’s differences and respect their unique traits. Remember how important this is, and stand up for your friend if someone is teasing or bullying her or him.”

FRIENDS 'TIL THE END

Developing strong social responsibility and friendships are some of the best ways for all children to build self-confidence along the journey of life. Being part of a tight-knit, respectful community leaves little room for negative behavior. The more time spent successfully learning from each other through teamwork, collaboration, and communication, the safer and happier everyone can feel. :) ❖

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10 Bullying-Prevention Strategies Everyone Can Use!

Negative effects of bullying in school are real and cannot be pushed aside. Peers, staff members, parents, and – most importantly – your child with autism can take control with these anti-bullying efforts.



1. Promote Autism-Friendly Programs

Bullying in schools can sometimes be the result of prejudice against the unexpected ways that children with autism speak and socialize. Not unlike other prejudices, parents and the school can promote social justice, tolerance, respect, and acceptance.

Along with your help, schools should focus not only on integration within the mainstream for education but also provide guidance to all students for how to

better socialize and communicate with their peers who have autism - possibly through workshops or specially-structured activities.

2. Team Work

Working together as a team in partnership with you as the parent, the school's teaching staff, aides, principal, counselors, and psychologists will provide the safest environment for your child to learn and enjoy.

3. Autism Awareness Every Month

Not just during April's Autism Awareness Month, but always, more awareness of autism overall can help prevent bullying.

4. Teach Skills

Teach your child how to identify and deal with bullies through verbal and nonverbal communication like body language and facial expressions, survival skills, civil liberties, and independence.

5. Build Strength

As your child learns defensive skills from you, his friends, and his teachers, he is growing stronger connections with everyone.

6. More Friendships

Discussing the communication and social deficits experienced by kids with autism puts greater social responsibility on their peers who don't have autism. When it comes to a child with autism, being a proactive observer can make all the difference to prevent bullying and protect them. As a result, your child will spend more time with good friends, make new friends, and possibly will want to get involved in different activities with them.

7. Monitor Activity

Monitoring potential bullying activity requires the teaching staff to supervise more and create new interventions to ensure the well-being of your child.

8. Healthy Relationships

Ways to deal with bullying also help your child deal with sibling rivalry, 'stranger danger', or any other personal threat.

9. Self Awareness

With your child's increased communication, survival skills, and independence, she or he will become more aware of the people around her. This makes your child a conscientious citizen and a good Samaritan towards other people who may be in need overall, not just due to bullying.

10. Self Esteem

Ironically, and despite the bully's goal to do the opposite, your child will grow self-confidence and self-preservation esteem.

With everyone's collective efforts, your child can take a negative force and turn it into a positive experience if bad bullying ever strikes! ❖

About the author

Karen Kabaki-Sisto, M.S. CCC-SLP, has been a communication expert for over 20 years. As a certified Speech-Language Pathologist and Applied Behavior Analysis Instructor, Karen has been empowering people with autism & special needs to have more meaningful conversations like never before.

Her highly effective I CAN! For Autism Method™ - perfected for over 10 years and now incorporated within the iPad app "I Can Have Conversations With You!™" is changing lives through improved social and language skills. It is 100% fun for both kids and adults to use! Join the conversation at www.iCanForAutism.com.

