



# Autism and Bullying in School

Scottish Autism Services Network  
Jordanhill November 30<sup>th</sup> 2006

# Gray's Guide to Bullying Part 1 and Part 11


*Carol Gray 2000, 2001*

*‘The unique diagnostic characteristics of children with ASD place them at a high risk for the secondary social symptom of bullying. Little is known about the incidence of bullying and children with ASD, the odds of being a target of bullying are suspected to be much higher among this population.’*

# Autistic response to bullying

- Anxiety / stress
- Shutdown / withdrawal
- Aggression
- Over-reacting
- Vengeance
- Endurance
- Attraction

# Work with...

- The young person
  - The other students
  - The person who is attempting to bully
  - School staff
  - Parents
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# Unique issues related to bullying and people with ASD

- Backhanded Bullying
  - Intent to mislead
- Absurd information and requests
  - Directives to engage in inappropriate activities

# Help identify classic bullying behaviours

- ‘Thinking unkind words, saying friendly words’
- ‘ Making a social mistake here, I’m really out of control’
- ‘ Really unkind statement, same time, everyday’
- ‘ A question you’ve never seen me ask anyone else’
- ‘ An unkind look followed by not-your-name’

# Gray's Guide to Bullying

- The Bully-Proofing Team
  - The Search for Honest Responses to Bullying Attempts
  - How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt
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# The Bully Proofing Team

- Relax – *model calm self control*
- Build a brick wall – *teach critical concepts and skills*
- Select and use a positive, clear and consistent vocabulary – *eg: bullying = bullying attempt,*
- *Creatively enhance instruction* – individualise teaching for every student

# Search for honest responses to bullying attempts

- People with ASD will not be able to use strategies that do not fit in with ‘social logic’ *eg pretend they don’t care or pay a compliment to the bully*
- Straightforward responses that are accurate, honest and logical will make sense to the student with ASD

# How to respond to a bullying attempt

- Step 1:  
Teach student to think calmly about bullying facts
  - Step 2:  
Teach student to say **one** sentence well
  - Step 3:  
Report bullying attempt to a key adult
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## Step 1:

### Teach student to think calmly about bullying facts:

- o ‘It is not my fault that I am the target of this bullying attempt’  
Supporting facts: I am a good and valuable person  
A student should not be bullied
- o ‘The student who is attempting to bully me is making a social mistake / is out of control’  
Supporting facts: Trying to stay calm is an intelligent decision  
Staying calm is the best way for a targeted student to stay mistake-free when a peer is making a mistake.
- o ‘I am not the only student who is bullied’  
Supporting facts: Millions of other students are bullied around the world each day.  
It is not their fault either

## Step 2:

### Teach student to say **one** sentence well:

- Memorise one honest statement beginning with 'I':  
'I hear you'  
'I need you to stop'  
'I don't like that, stop it'
- Ignore the topic of a bullying interaction
- Keep all body parts to self
- Stand straight with head up
- Use a steady in-control voice
- Maintain a safe distance and try to increase it

## Step 3:

# Report bullying attempt to a key adult

- Student must be encouraged to report immediately following a bullying attempt
- They may need support to do this
  - Role play / practice
  - Visual strategies
  - Report forms
- Student should be taught to distinguish between facts and opinions/beliefs when reporting
- Student should be taught difference between ‘grassing’ and ‘reporting’

# Risk times and areas

- Make a map of the young person's world
- Identify risk areas and risk times
- Increase informed adult supervision at these times and in these places
- Find buddies for the student
- Find alternative activities for the student at risk times
- Stay near others


# Working with other students

- Explain autism to the other students – *help them understand how vulnerable to bullying attempts people with autism are*
- Empower the 84% of students who are empathetic to children who are bullied - *exactly how they can support the young person– ‘keeping an eye out’ – the friendly army*
- Encourage them to report bullying attempts to key informed adults

# Working with the person who has attempted to bully

- Explain autism to him/her
- Talk about disability
- Be entirely reasonable
- Explain the impact of their behaviour
- Tell them that you are sure that they would not have done this if they had understood
- Tell them what will happen to them if it happens again
- Take a very long time to do this

# School staff

- Regular awareness raising of ASD among staff and students
  - Good communication
  - Strategies for particular ASD students
  - Training of all supervisory staff
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# Parents

- Successful interventions require the active demonstration of the antithesis of bullying – social understanding, effective communication, and teamwork – among parents, professionals and the community.

*Gray's Guide to Bullying*

