



Helping Your Autistic Loved One with Bullying

Bullying is a pervasive issue affecting many children and adolescents, but those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are especially vulnerable. Research shows that 63% of children with autism have been bullied, a startling statistic that highlights the challenges that children with autism face in social situations. Autism affects communication and social skills, which can make it difficult to understand social cues or express yourself in ways that others expect. This may lead to misunderstandings and can result in children with autism being isolated or targeted.

Sometimes a child might not recognize that they are being bullied or might not have the verbal skills to tell a trusted adult about it. Other times, they may be embarrassed or afraid to speak up. It is crucial for parents and guardians to know the signs that their child is being bullied so that they can intervene. Parents and guardians should be aware of both obvious and subtle signs of bullying. For children with autism, the signs may include:

- New or increased behaviors like wandering, aggression or self-injury
- Unexplained bruises or other physical injuries
- Change in eating or sleeping habits
- Increased anxiety, depression or mood swings
- Thoughts of suicide
- Loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Complaints of illness or faking illness
- Loss of interest in school or attempts to avoid going to school
- A decline in schoolwork or grades
- Lost or destroyed items such as clothing, books, electronics
- Spending more time online or hiding online activity from parents



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Bullying can have serious emotional, psychological and academic consequences. If you suspect that your child is being bullied, it's important to understand the situation and intervene quickly. Early intervention can help prevent further harm by addressing the issue before it escalates. Some interventions include:

- If your child is verbal, talk to them about what they have experienced. Consider their preferences when deciding how to intervene. Reassure your child that the bullying is not their fault.
- Keep documentation of the bullying so that you can share it with supervising adults, such as school staff.
- Know your rights under state and federal law, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.
- Talk to your child's therapist about adding goals to their treatment plan to help protect your child from bullying. Children should learn to recognize, avoid, report and respond to bullying.
- Use peer support, such as finding other children who can serve as positive role models of inclusion. Consider creating a buddy system.

There are a wide variety of online resources to help prevent bullying and respond to it when it happens. Some examples include:

- [American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#)
- [Stopbullying.gov](#)
- [PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center](#)
- [Wright's Law](#)
- [Bully Free World's Special Needs Anti-Bullying Toolkit](#)

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