



The National
Autistic Society

Information sheet

Bullying: a guide for young people with an autism spectrum disorder

This information sheet is for young people with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The information sheet explains what bullying is, what you can do if you are being bullied and how to get support.

What is bullying?

Bullying is something that can hurt you on the inside or on the outside:

- bullying hurts you on the outside if someone hits you or hurts you physically
- bullying hurts you on the inside if someone calls you names or teases you, and hurts your feelings.

Here are some other things about bullying:

- bullying is done on purpose
- bullying is not an accident. If someone hurts you during a game by accident, this is not bullying. If every time you played a game, someone hurts you or your feelings, this is bullying
- bullying happens more than once
- bullying is wrong
- no-one has the right to hurt you or make you feel bad.

How you may feel if you are bullied

- Sick.
- In pain.
- Worried or stressed.
- Frustrated.
- Isolated.
- Lonely.
- Feel like you don't want to go to school.
- Have difficulty eating or sleeping.

Your autism charity

Supported by



The National Autistic Society produces information sheets on a wide variety of topics. The Autism Helpline has advisors available to talk through a variety of issues in depth.

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- Vulnerable.
- Scared.
- Want to hurt yourself or to hurt others.
- Helpless.
- Feel like no-one is listening to you.
- Not feel very good about yourself.

What you can do if you are being bullied

Don't ignore the bullying

Bullying will not go away by itself. The bullying may get worse if you ignore it. Remember, if you are being bullied, it is not your fault. No-one deserves to be bullied.

Tell someone

It can be very hard to talk about bad things that have happened to us. It can also be very hard to talk about how these bad things are making us feel, however, it is very important that you tell someone if you are being bullied. The bullying won't stop, unless you tell someone about the bullying.

If you don't feel you can talk to someone, you could try writing a note about the bullying to your parents or someone who takes care of you. You could write about the bullying in a worry book or you may prefer to send a text or email explaining that you are being bullied.

What you write or talk about should include how the bullying has made you feel. It might be easier to write or to talk to someone outside of your immediate family like a grandparent, cousin, aunt or uncle and ask for their help. If this isn't possible, you can tell a teacher or a doctor, or perhaps a school nurse.

Put your thoughts in a bully box

Some schools have bully boxes. A bully box is to help you tell an adult that you are being bullied, without having to talk to them face-to-face and without worrying about other people hearing. You can write about the bullying or draw pictures about the bullying and put this information in the box. Someone will empty the bully box, take out your information about bullying and get help for you.

Keep safe and keep away from bullies

Try to stay away from bullies or stay with a group of other pupils or friends when you don't feel safe. Ask your friends or someone you can trust to look out for you. Try not to fight back. Fighting back could get you into trouble or you could get hurt.

The organisation, Kidscape, suggests the following ways to deal with one bully or more than one bully, if you can't get away from them immediately. For example:

- With a friend or someone in your family practise 'fogging'. This means having an answer to a taunt or something nasty a bully may say to you. For example:

Bully: 'Your shoes are horrible.'

You: 'That's your opinion.' or 'They are comfortable.'

Practise having answers to things that a bully may say to you, and perhaps write these answers down. The bully may say things about how your look, your family or things you like to do.

For example:

... this is what I will say when the bully says something about how I look.

... this is what I will say when the bully says something about my family.

- Having to deal with a bully or bullies is scary for everyone. It's OK to feel scared. It is important to recognise that you are scared and to get away from the bullying. You may find it difficult to recognise

emotions like fear, so you could ask an adult or a friend to spend some time teaching you more about different feelings and what to do when you experience them.

- You could also ask an adult or friend to help you understand body language and eye contact – your own body language and that of the bully.
- Kidscape also suggest that you practice saying ‘No!’ to the bully, firmly and loudly.

Kidscape has a ‘Keepsafe Code’, which has more ideas about how you can protect yourself from bullies. Go to www.kidscape.org.uk/childrenteens/keepsafe.shtml for advice about protecting yourself.

See also www.kidscape.org.uk/childrenteens/defence.shtml for advice about strategies to help you get away from bullies.

Go to safe places

Try and stay in a group, rather than being on your own. When you are not at school, your local public library, community centre or leisure centre are places you could try because they are usually places with lots of other people in them.

The places you go to don’t have to be places you know or places where the adults in them know you. The important thing to remember is that by going into places such as your local library, you are no longer alone and can ask an adult for help.

Stay safe on the internet

You may get unwanted and nasty emails, texts or have something written about you on a website. This is called cyberbullying. When you are on the internet, you need to follow some rules to make your time on the internet or in a chatroom as safe as possible.

See www.kidscape.org.uk/cyberbullying/cyberbullyingchildrenyoungpeople.shtml for advice on how to stay safe on the internet. See also www.cybermentors.org.uk where you can get help on how to deal with cyberbullying.

What if you are the bully?

If young people around you are bullying other young people and you feel you may be left out if you didn’t join in, you could become a bully yourself.

Some young people think that bullying is a way of getting respect. This is not true. Bullying causes lots of misery for anyone who is bullied. Remember, you have the choice *not* to bully others.

If you bully other pupils, you need to get help. Just like if you are being bullied, it is important to tell an adult you can trust if you have started being a bully. Don’t worry about getting into trouble. It takes courage to admit that you have been a bully and an adult could help you find out why you are bullying other pupils and help you stop being a bully. Sometimes, if you don’t feel good about yourself, you may start bullying other people. An adult can help you find other ways to make you feel better about yourself.

What can you do if your teacher is bullying you?

Your school teachers have a duty to look after you. If they are mean to you and bully you, your teachers are being unfair. You have a right not to be made to feel stupid, be called names or punished unfairly. Talk to another teacher you can trust and tell them what is happening. Or try talking to your parents or another person who cares for you.

Some things you may find difficult

Making friends

One boy with Asperger syndrome says:

“I want to make friends, but I don’t know how. In my last school I was bullied and kicked around and didn’t have any friends. The kids at this school seem to be OK, but I just know I’ll do something wrong”.

You may find it difficult to make friends. You may find it very difficult to start talking to someone you don’t know for the first time and to know what to talk about. You may also not know when to stop talking and allow the other person to speak.

Here is some advice to help you make friends:

- decide who you are going to talk to and what you would like to talk about with the person
- look to see if they can talk straight away and are not doing their school work or other activity
- go up to them and say ‘hello’
- wait for them to say ‘hello’ to you
- ask them how they are
- wait for their reply
- ask a particular question about themselves
- tell them about yourself.

Your conversation may be about, for example, things going on at school, a TV programme you have watched, plans for the weekend or something you have bought. Think about a conversation between two people as a turn-taking activity. During a conversation, it is nice to talk about yourself and your own life, but it is also nice to hear about what the other person has to say.

Sometimes, you may find it difficult to know when to stop talking. You can look for signs that can tell you that the person wants to talk or needs to move on. These signs may include, for example, looking away from you at other things going on around you and showing signs of not really listening to you anymore. When someone looks like they are not really listening to you, you can say, for example, ‘Nice talking to you. Bye.’

You may have a friend or someone you can trust who can support you in understanding the rules of conversations with others. This person can prompt you. See our *Social skills* information for more advice on developing ways of talking to other people (www.autism.org.uk/socialskills or ask for a copy from our Autism Helpline).

What makes a good friend?

You may find it difficult to know when someone is being nice and when someone is being nasty. Ask an adult to help you sort pictures or photographs of people showing different facial expressions, to help you identify different emotions. Take a look also at our *Social skills* information.

A good friend is a person who:

- is kind
- is polite
- offers to help others with their work or offers to carry things for you
- asks others to join in

- is welcoming to new pupils at school
- is willing to share
- will help you
- is fair
- will comfort you if you are upset
- will listen to you.

Breaktimes at school

Breaktimes at school can be difficult. You may not know what to do during breaktimes or what you are expected to do. You may feel isolated and very lonely. You may want to talk to other pupils, but you may not know how to do this. Social stories can be helpful. A social story is a short description of a particular situation that shows you what to do in the situation or what to expect from it. You can ask a friend or an adult to write down what to do in particular situations where you may need to talk to someone. For more information about social stories, see *Social Stories* (www.autism.org.uk/socialstories) or ask for a copy from our Autism Helpline).

Some schools have lunchtime clubs or let pupils go to the library or use a computer during breaktimes. Your school could also set up structured playground activities for you and a friend or group of friends to take part in. Ask a teacher and your parents or the person who takes care of you about setting up structured playground activities. Ask school staff to look at the following websites for ideas about different activities:

- www.gameskidsplay.net
- www.familyfun.go.com/arts-and-crafts/season/feature/famf97playground
- www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/studentssite/playgroundgames.htm

Your school can also set up buddying or befriending schemes in your school playground to help reduce bullying. Your school can ask another pupil to stay with you at breaktimes.

Some schools also have a friendship or a buddy bench where pupils can sit to show that they need someone to play with or talk to. Our *Circle of friends* information sheet includes ways of supporting young people with their social skills.

For more information about bullying, please also see our information sheets:

- *Bullying – a guide for parents.*
- *Self-injurious behaviours.*
- *Bullying – a guide for teachers.*

Further information and contact details

Beat bullying

www.beatbullying.org

Beat bullying is a leading bullying prevention charity. The beat bullying website has a range of resources for young people. The charity launched the cyber mentoring website to tackle cyberbullying (see later).

Bullybusters

Tel: 0800 169 6928

www.bullybusters.org.uk

Bullybusters is an anti-bullying helpline that provides support for people who are being bullied and their families.

Bullying UK

www.bullying.co.uk

Bullying UK gives practical information and advice to young people about bullying.

ChildLine

Tel: 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

ChildLine is a free 24-hour confidential helpline for children and young people and has information about bullying.

Cyber mentoring

www.cybermentors.org.uk

Cyber mentoring is the first nationwide online peer-mentoring social networking site. Young people experiencing cyberbullying can ask for immediate help and advice from other young people – cyber mentors – online at www.cybermentors.org.uk

Kidscape

Tel: 08451 205 204

www.kidscape.org.uk

Kidscape is committed to keeping children safe from abuse. Kidscape was established specifically to prevent bullying and child sexual abuse.

Kidsmart

Tel: 020 7639 6967

www.kidsmart.org.uk

www.childnet-int.org

Kidsmart is a Childnet International project, and provides advice and support on how to help children and young people use the internet and new technology safely.

Mencap

Tel: 0808 808 1111

www.mencap.org.uk/search.asp

Mencap offers support to families with learning disabilities. Mencap has information and personal stories about bullying.

NSPCC

Tel: 0808 800 5000

www.nspcc.org.uk

NSPCC can provide advice for young people who are being bullied.

Stop text bullying

www.stoptextbully.com

Stop text bullying has lots of tips on how to deal with bullying via texting or emails and chat rooms.

References and recommended reading

Freaks, geeks and Asperger syndrome by Luke Jackson. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers**

This book is a self-help guide for teenagers with an autism spectrum disorder and includes suggestions as to what to do about bullying and other difficulties you may have.

Being bullied. Strategies and solutions for people with Asperger's syndrome by Nick Dubin. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

This DVD includes film of people's experiences of being bullied and offers strategies to help.

Different like me: my book of autism heroes by Jennifer Elder. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers**

This book is about gifted people such as Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein who found it hard to fit in.

Keeping safe: a practical guide to talking with children by Kidscape. London: Kidscape
This booklet has ideas about what children need to know to stay safe from a variety of dangers.

Helping children cope with bullying by Sarah Lawson. London: Sheldon Press
This book gives practical advice to help children to cope with bullying.

Martian in the playground by Clare Sainsbury. Bristol: Lucky Duck Publishing**
A personal account that is written by a woman with Asperger syndrome and tells of her experiences at school.

**Books marked with two stars are available to buy from the NAS. Contact:

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