

# Autistic Learners and Bullying

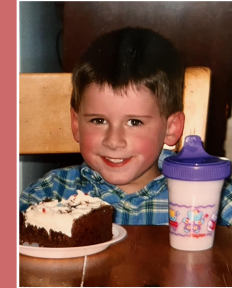


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## Why this topic matters to me

Justus



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## Why this topic matters to me


Noey



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# Autism is a central nervous system difference.

 It starts in the brain.

 Everything connected to the brain is impacted.

- ■ Most behaviors aren't chosen. They're neurologically mandated.

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# Autism is a central nervous system difference.

Sensory perceptive and expressive differences

- 👁️ visual (sight) / 🕶️ photo (light)
  - 🗣️ auditory (sound)
  - 🤲 tactile (touch)
  - 🕯️ olfactory (smell)
- 

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# Autism is a central nervous system difference.

Sensory perceptive and expressive differences

- 🍷 gustation (taste, texture)
  - ❤️ proprioception (spatial)
  - 📶 interoception (CNS messaging)
- 

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# Autism is a social communication disorder.

- Eye contact can be escalatory/threatening.
  - expressive vs. receptive speech
  - verbal processing delay
  - verbal/non-speaking
  - "economy of words"
- 

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# Data re: autistic children and bullying

from the [CDC's National Center for Health Statistics](#)

- Children age 12-17 with a developmental disability (44.4%) were more likely be bullied than teenagers without a developmental disability (31.3%). (2024)
-

## Data re: autistic children and bullying

from the [CDC's National Center for Health Statistics](#)

- Teenagers who were bullied were more than twice as likely to experience symptoms of both anxiety (29.8%) and depression (28.5%) than those who were not bullied. (2024)
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## Data re: autistic children and bullying

from [Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders](#) (2014)

- 3 in 4 autistic youth report being bullied, and most of that bullying is chronic.
  - They report higher rates of physical and verbal bullying than relational.
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## Data re: autistic children and bullying

from [Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders](#) (2014)

- The emotional impact of bullying is significantly higher for autistic (76%) than typically-developing (47%) youth.
- 

## Defining disability harassment

- **illegal discrimination** on the basis of **disability** that creates a **hostile environment** and/or results in **adverse action**
- may constitute a violation of 3 federal laws: **IDEA**, Title II of the **ADA**, Sec. 504 of the **Rehabilitation Act**

# Types of Bullying/Harassment

## Direct: Physical

Just as you'd expect, but also targeting sensory perceptible differences and/or tactile defensiveness.

## Direct or Indirect: Published

Verbal, whether spoken or written/typed, on paper or electronically. Graphic, whether analog or digital.

## Direct or Indirect: Relational

Particularly exclusion, as an individual or group effort. Taunting, as in daring or goading.

## Direct or Indirect: Experimental

More specific to autistic learners, this bets on a child's social communication challenges. "What will happen if ..."

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# Data re: autistic children and bullying

from the [National Bullying Prevention Center](#)

- "when youth are **excluded** from social activities by their peers at school, the outcomes for that student ... will be **just as detrimental** as if they got kicked, punched, or slapped every day." (2022)

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## Becoming a target

- 3 boys during an unstructured class (middle school Phy Ed)
- repeated subtle pokes to Justus' shoulder during warm-up laps
- Justus finally snapped verbally with a loud "threat"



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## Blaming the victim

- I was called by the Phy Ed teacher about Justus' "behavior".
- peer buddy assigned to provide support, investigate the problem
- I agreed not to press charges but requested the SRO be brought in.

## Key Points to Remember

- Autistic learners are at a **high risk** for bullying.
- Schools act *in loco parentis*, and therefore assume a Duty of Care and Protection to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students. This includes responsibility for keeping students safe from bullying and harassment during school hours and at school-sponsored activities.
- **Disability harassment** is a violation of **federal law**.

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## Resources

### [U.S. Department of Education](#)

Information about how Federal laws protect children with disabilities and ensure they receive a FAPE, including 504 plans.

### [ED's "Dear Colleague" letters](#)

OCR upholds Section 504 of the Rehab Act and Title II of the ADA, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability.

### [WI Statute 118.46, Policy on Bullying](#)

All schools must have and post a detailed bullying policy that includes an education and awareness program.

### [Filing a complaint with the OCR](#)

If mediation at the school, district, and/or DPI (state) level fails, parents may wish to escalate by filing a federal complaint through the ED's OCR.

## Resources

### [WI's Department of Public Instruction on Bullying Prevention](#)

School resource toolkit to implement and strengthen their approach to bullying prevention and response.

### [Supporting Neurodiverse Students](#)

Provides professional learning events for WI schools, districts, community organizations, and individuals (educators, family members, or community members).

### [PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center](#)

Bullying prevention resources for K-12 youth, families, and educators

### [Autism Speaks - Bullying](#)

School Community Tool Kit aims to increase autism awareness and acceptance in the school community.

## Creating a Culture of Kindness

### [WI's Bullying Awareness Day](#)

Per WI Statute **Chapter 118**, General School Operations. Special observance days. **.02 (9t): Wednesday of the 4th week in September**

### [PACER's Unity Day](#)

On **Wednesday, October 21, 2026**, wear and share **orange**. Send a visible message of kindness, acceptance, and inclusion to prevent bullying.

### [World Day of Bullying Prevention](#)

STOMP Out Bullying encourages schools to wear a **blue shirt** on the **first Monday of October** to practice bullying prevention.

### [Peer Education](#)

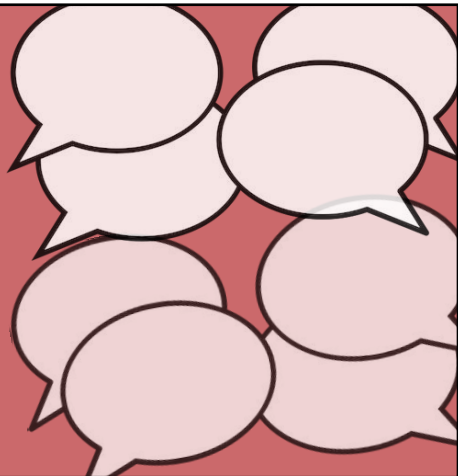
Talk about autism to learners in a developmentally-appropriate way using a multi-media approach to promote understanding and empathy.

Questions

Comments

Takeaways

Talkback



*What will you try differently the next time you observe an autistic learner being bullied?*

