Bullying of children with autism spectrum conditions
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#safefrombullying
Bullying of children and young people with autism spectrum conditions (ASC) – what do we know and how can we help?

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Sharing Manchester Institute of Education’s latest educational research with teachers

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Autism research at the University of Manchester

• Autism research in the Manchester Institute of Education
  – Inclusive education for pupils with autism in mainstream secondary schools (Humphrey & Symes)
  – Development of resource base provision for children with SLI/ASC (Bond & Hebron)
  – Risk factors for exposure to bullying among children with ASC (Hebron)
  – Transition from primary to secondary school for children with ASC (Hebron)
  – Educating persons with ASC: A systematic literature review (Bond, Symes, Hebron, Humphrey & Morewood)
  – Autism and education (Humphrey, Bond, Hebron, Symes & Morewood)
Overview

• What are autism spectrum conditions?
• What is bullying?
• What do we know about bullying of children and young people with ASC?
• What can we do to prevent bullying of children and young people with ASC?
What are autism spectrum conditions?

• “Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them” (www.autism.org.uk)

• Core difficulties (‘triad of impairments’)
  – Social communication
  – Social interaction
  – Social imagination
What are autism spectrum conditions?

- Use of ‘spectrum’ is important – the three areas above affect people in different ways
- ‘Conditions’ increasingly used in preference to ‘disorders’ in recognition of the fact that autism represents difference, not deficit
- The nature of ASC often brings with it areas of considerable strength, e.g. memory, persistence, adherence to routine, attention to detail
- Associated and related terms that have been used to describe people include Asperger’s syndrome, pervasive developmental disorder, Rett’s disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder
- Latest diagnostic framework (DSM-5, 2013) effectively eliminates these in favour of the broad term ‘autism spectrum disorder’
What are autism spectrum conditions?

• School can be a challenging place…
  – …for children and young people with ASC
    • Learning in a social setting, reading social situations, deciphering the unwritten rules
    • Learning in a complex language environment with limited visual support
    • Understanding and communicating with other pupils and adults
    • Coping with change, transitions and unexpected breaks in routine
    • Day to day organisation
    • Generalising learning beyond the setting in which it took place
  – … for staff and parents
    • Gaining, maintaining and refocusing attention
    • Motivation
    • Differentiation of language and/or curriculum
    • Managing behaviour
    • Accommodating special interests
What are autism spectrum conditions?

• School can be a challenging place…
  – …for the peer group
    • Lack of understanding
    • Resenting extra attention
    • Social advances that are ignored or rejected
    • Distraction or disruption
    • Feeling that double standards are applied (‘getting away’ with things)
    • Being nervous or fearful
    • Ignoring, teasing, winding up, bullying (Morewood, Humphrey & Symes, 2011)
What is bullying?

• Features and forms (Olweus & Limber, 2018)
  – Intention, power, repetition
  – Direct, relational, cyber

• Prevalence (Zych et al, 2017)
  – Varies by country, age, informant, response format, and time frame
  – Mean prevalence of 35% reported by Modecki et al (2014) in their meta-analysis of 80 studies

• It is a major educational and public health priority in the UK and internationally
  – All schools in England are required to demonstrate evidence of their actions to prevent bullying by the school inspectorate, Ofsted, as part of the ‘personal development, behaviour and welfare’ strand (Ofsted, 2015)
What is bullying?

- Social-ecological model (Espelage, 2014)
- Predictors of bullying and victimization (Kljakovic & Hunt, 2016)
- Bullies, victims, and bully-victims (Hymel & Swearer, 2015)
What is bullying?

(Wolke & Lereya, 2015)
Bullying of children and young people with ASC

• Why might children with ASC be considered ‘perfect victims’?
  – “Children with ASD may be particularly vulnerable to involvement in bullying” (Schroeder et al, 2014, p.2)

Bullying frequency

Humphrey & Symes (2010)
Bullying of children and young people with ASC

Kloosterman et al (2013)
What proportion of children and young people with ASC are bullied?

• Anywhere from 7% to 94% has been reported
• Some children may be ‘bully-victims’
• Parents reliably report higher rates than teachers (Humphrey & Hebron, 2015)
• Meta-analysis of 17 studies by Maiano et al (2016)
  – Overall pooled prevalence of bullying perpetration (10%), victimization (44%) and both (33%)
  – Physical (33%), verbal (50%) and relational (31%)
  – Sources of variation: country, school setting, informant, measurement, time frame and frequency criterion
  – Significantly higher than typically developing peers
Risk factors

- Peak at age 13
- Boys
- Asperger syndrome
- Social vulnerability (e.g. getting tricked into things)
- Mainstream school
- Behaviour difficulties
- Using public transport to get to school
- School Action Plus
Risk factors

Rowley (2012)
Cumulative risk

Bullying as a function of exposure to cumulative risks among students with ASD

Hebron, Humphrey & Oldfield (2017)
Experiences and outcomes of bullying among children with ASC

Humphrey & Lewis (2008)
Experiences and outcomes of bullying among children with ASC

Humphrey & Lewis (2008)
Experiences and outcomes of bullying among children with ASC

- Experience of being bullied
- Relationships
- Patterns of behaviour
- Role of school in managing child’s vulnerability
- Parental attitudes towards school

Hebron, Humphrey & Oldfield (2015)
Experiences and outcomes of bullying among children with ASC

- School refusal, changing/missing school
- Diminished social skills and relationships
- Mental health difficulties and damaged self-esteem
- School work suffered (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014; Reid & Batten, 2006; Zablotsky et al, 2013)
What can we do to prevent bullying of children and young people with ASC?
What can we do to prevent bullying of children and young people with ASC?

• Use what we know from general bullying intervention research, and think about the specific needs of those with ASC
  – Meta analysis by Jiminez-Babero et al (2016) found moderate effects of school-based programmes on bullying frequency, victimization frequency, attitudes and school climate

• Approach taken needs to be comprehensive
  – Bullies
  – Victims
  – Bystanders
  – Other members of school community
  – Family and broader community (Whitted & Duper, 2005)

• Ways of reducing risk
Intervention at the level of the child

- Developing understanding of bullying to prevent over/under reporting (Moore, 2007)
- Developing understanding of social cues in order to prevent social vulnerability/naivety (Sofronoff, Dark & Stone, 2011)
- Identifying areas in which child is most vulnerable to bullying and providing avoidance strategies
- Role playing bullying situations to teach response strategies
- Teaching generic prevention strategies (e.g. safety in numbers)
### Intervention at the level of the child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Things to Do</th>
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| Step 1. Plan and develop a bullying prevention program for students with ASD | Cooperative work between teachers and parents of students with ASD either by direct meeting with parents (e.g., regular face-to-face meeting) or indirect meeting with parents (e.g., survey, interview, phone meeting)  
Identify an individual student’s needs (e.g., behavior, communication, or social skills)  
Plan and develop a bullying prevention program based on the individual student’s needs  
Create multiple scenarios using ABC recording systems (i.e., antecedent event–behavior–consequence event)  
Develop antecedent-based, behavior-based, and consequence-based intervention plans  
Design a school and home environment to meet the needs of students with ASD |
| Step 2. Educate the individual student about bullying | Provide students with ASD education about bullying  
Discuss with these students what bullying behavior entails in a concrete approach  
Provide multiple examples to promote understanding  
Assess the student’s knowledge to ensure comprehension |
| Step 3. Teach how to cope with and report bullying to adults in a controlled environment and practice | Introduce to the skills explicitly and systematically in a controlled environment.  
Provide multiple learning opportunities and examples in the controlled environment  
Utilize various types of behavior strategies (e.g., video modeling, social story, role-play, etc.)  
Train students with ASD on how to report potential bullying incidents, modifying reporting procedures as necessary |
| Step 4. Teach controlled generalization | Provide opportunities to practice skills in a less controlled small group and finally in a larger group environment  
Include other students and siblings as a practice partner in practice  
Break down the skills into components taught explicitly and systematically  
Plan how to monitor the program |
| Step 5. Implement a monitoring system | Develop a monitoring system (e.g., self-monitoring system, parents’ daily report card)  
Check regularly the student’s progress |

Hong et al (2015)
Intervention at the level of the peer group

- Developing peer awareness and understanding of ASC
  - e.g. explanatory information (Campbell et al 2004), positive role models
- Reducing barriers to productive and positive social interaction
- Thinking about how the child with ASC is viewed by peers
Intervention at the level of teachers and support staff

- Quality of teacher-pupil interactions and relationships (Raskauskas, 2010; Richard, Schneider & Mallet, 2012)
- Key teacher attributes that have a positive impact
  - Tolerance, acceptance and encouragement of differences and individuality rather than conformity
  - Recognising that the ‘usual’ will not work
  - Empathy, respect and liking for pupil with ASC
  - Taking the time to understand individual needs (Sciutto et al, 2012)
- Changing teacher beliefs (normative, avoidant and assertive) (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008)
- Deployment of teaching assistants (Symes & Humphrey, 2012)
Intervention at the level of school culture and climate

• Respect for diversity/difference
  • Don’t avoid it – celebrate it!

• Staff have to model values

• Challenge stereotypes and raise expectations

• Maintaining a positive focus (Humphrey et al, 2006; Humphrey, 2008; Morewood, Humphrey & Symes, 2011; Zablotsky et al, 2013)
Whole-school ‘saturation’ model

The Agent of Change

- Developing the school environment
- Flexible provision
- Direct support and intervention
- Policy development and embedding practice
- Training and development of staff
- Peer education and awareness
- Creating a positive ethos

Morewood, Humphrey & Symes (2011)
The bottom line

Bullying a Factor in Autistic Teen's Suicide

by Kristina Ockery | April 18, 2012 | 6:22 am

107 people like this.

Gareth Cates was 16 years old when he killed himself by standing in front of a train in West Yorkshire on March 2, 2010. At an investigation, his mother, Glenny Ockery, told a coroner that her autistic son had been "routinely bullied" and called "suicide boy" by some of his fellow students for years, says the Independent. Gareth was also bullied in public in what his mother called "bullying of a disabled person deliberate targeting." Police in Suffolk in the U.K. where the family lives had even apologized to her for dealing "more robustly" with the attacks that Gareth suffered.

Kansas Dad Says Bullying Led To Autistic Son's Suicide

Posted: Oct 05, 2013 0:36 AM BST
Updated: Oct 05, 2013 4:47 PM BST

Teen Mourns, News On 6 - email

Autistic teenager who killed himself suffered years of intimidation at the hands of college bullies

1. I leave a note, but his parents said the suicide was fueled by his father, Zach, said the mistreatment wasn’t addressed by the administration and was the major factor out of several that led to his death.

2. Schoolboy, 12, found hanged after he was ‘bullied by girl gang for being autistic’

3. "NDENCE, Kansas - A Kansas community is grieving the loss of a 6th-grade boy. Maxwell Webb took his own life this week.

4. A 12-year-old boy found hanged at his home was being bullied by a gang of girls, it has been claimed. Michael Ramey, believed to have been autistic, was found in his bedroom in Kansas. Lasselsbold at around 3:30am on Wednesday.

5. The boy, a pupil at Bethesda Christian Church of England Academy in Wiscasset, was said by a family friend to have been bullied by girls. The school has denied the claim.

6. Prisoners were seen on Middle East TV Jimmy Kimmel Live! in the Middle East.

7. Michael Webb, 12, was found dead in his bedroom.

8. Family friend said the boy was being bullied by girls.

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Further reading (please email me for copies)
Thanks for listening!

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men”
(Frederick Douglass)