

Addressing Bullying In Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorders: Research And Strategies



Jonathan A. Weiss, Ph.D., C.Psych. &
M. Catherine Cappadocia, M. A.
York University, Department of Psychology

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Learning Objectives

- The different types and rates of bullying experienced by youth with ASD
- Best practices for counselling youth with ASD who have been bullied
- Strategies for brief and effective consultations with families/schools to address bullying

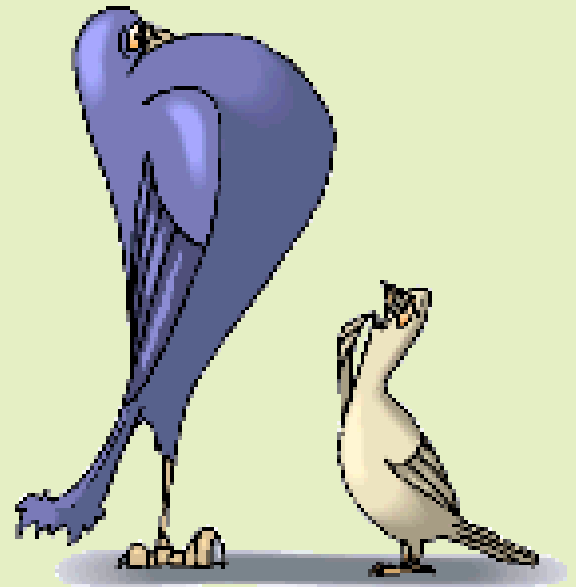
Bullying: A Relationship Problem

Bullying is a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions (Pepler et al., 2006)

- The child who bullies is learning to use power and aggression to control others.
- The child who is being victimized becomes trapped in an abusive relationship and needs help to stop the bullying.

Bullying and Power

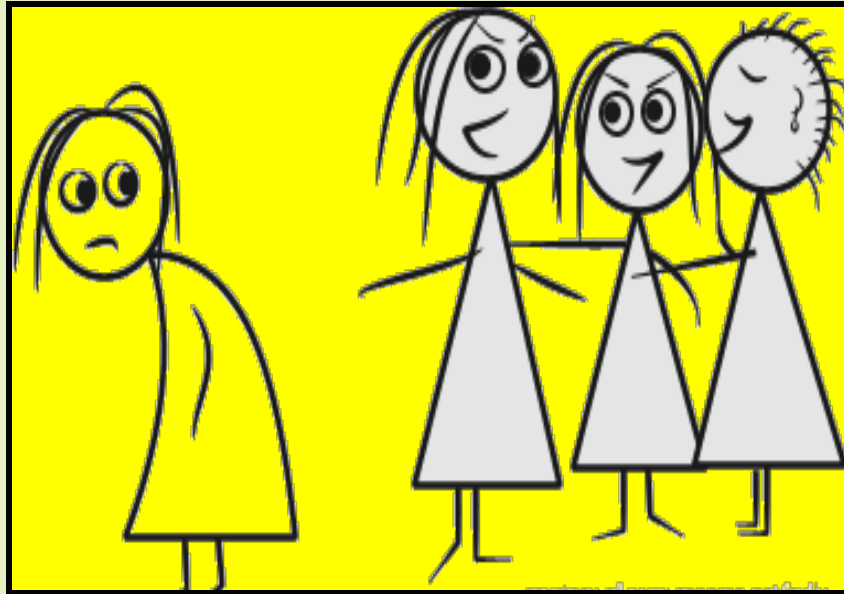
- Children and youth can acquire power through:
 - Social status
 - Size, strength, age
 - Number of friends/allies
 - Membership in socially defined dominant group



Forms of Bullying

- Physical
- Verbal*
- Social*
- Cyber
- Racial
- Religious
- Sexual
- Disability

* most common forms



Additional ASD-specific Forms of Bullying (Gray, 2004)

- Backhanded Bullying
 - Seemingly friendly (but actually disingenuous) gesture is used to “reel in” the child before being mean or manipulating
- Absurd Information or Requests
 - Directions to engage in silly or inappropriate activities or to make inappropriate remarks

What Does Research Tell Us?

1. Examine rates of various forms of bullying experienced by children with ASD
2. Explore relationships between bullying and mental health problems
3. Investigate individual and contextual variables as predictors of victimization and perpetration

Cappadocia, M. C., Weiss, J. A., & Pepler, D. (2012).

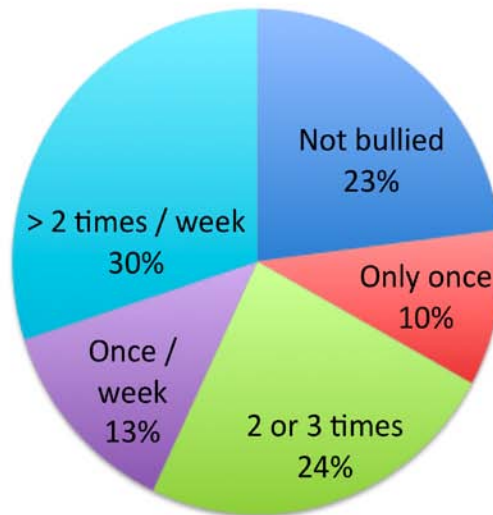
Bullying experiences among children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 42, 266-277.

Participants

- 192 parents of children diagnosed with ASD
- Children:
 - 5-21 years and enrolled in school
 - M = 12 years; SD = 3.55
 - 85% male
 - Diagnoses:
 - Asperger Syndrome (50%) & High Functioning Autism (14%)
 - PDD-NOS (13%)
 - Autism (19%)
 - Full Inclusion majority of time (80%)

Rates – Overall

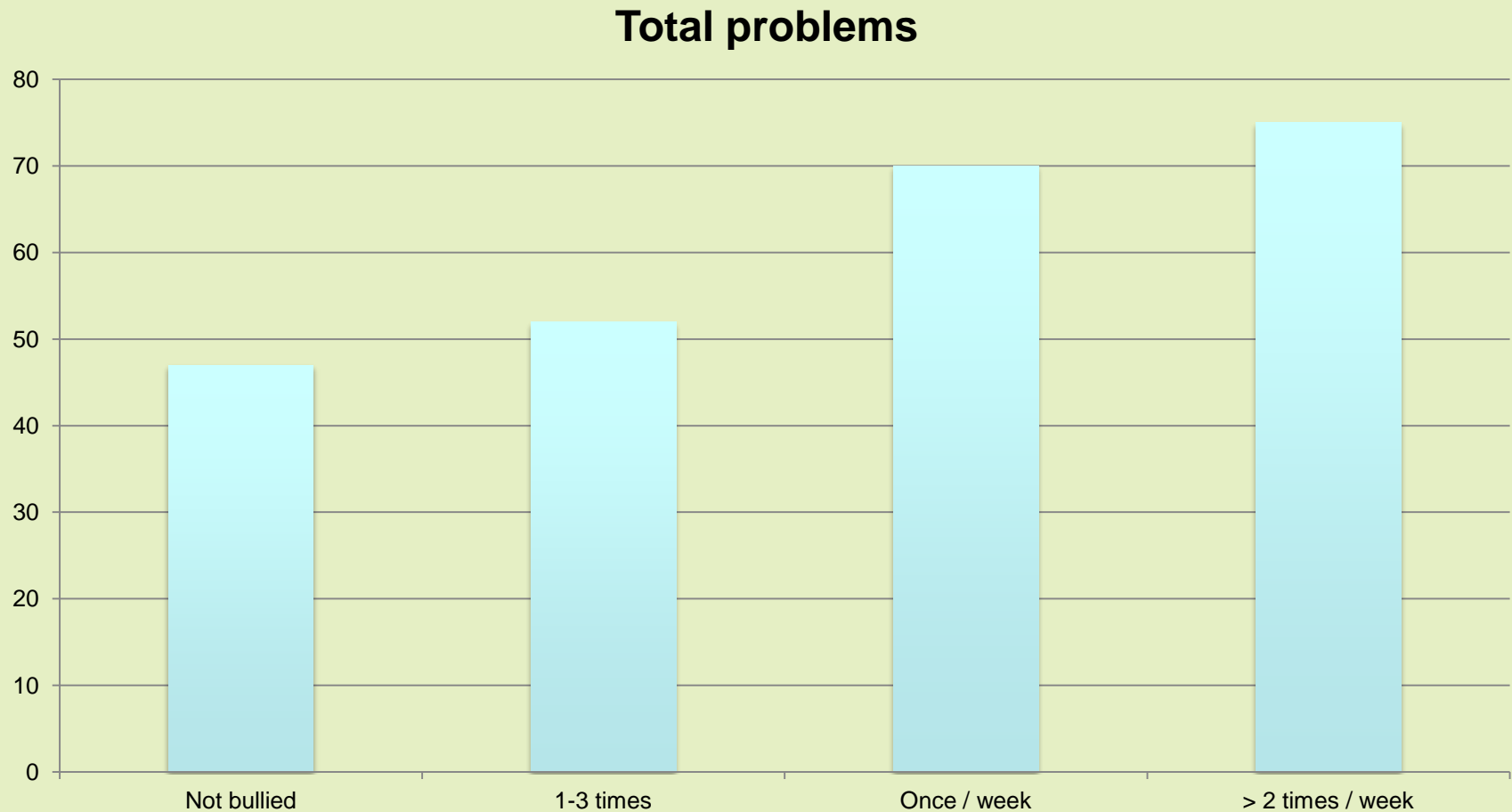
- 77% reported that their child was bullied at school within the last month
 - 54% of this group reported that bullying has persisted for over one year



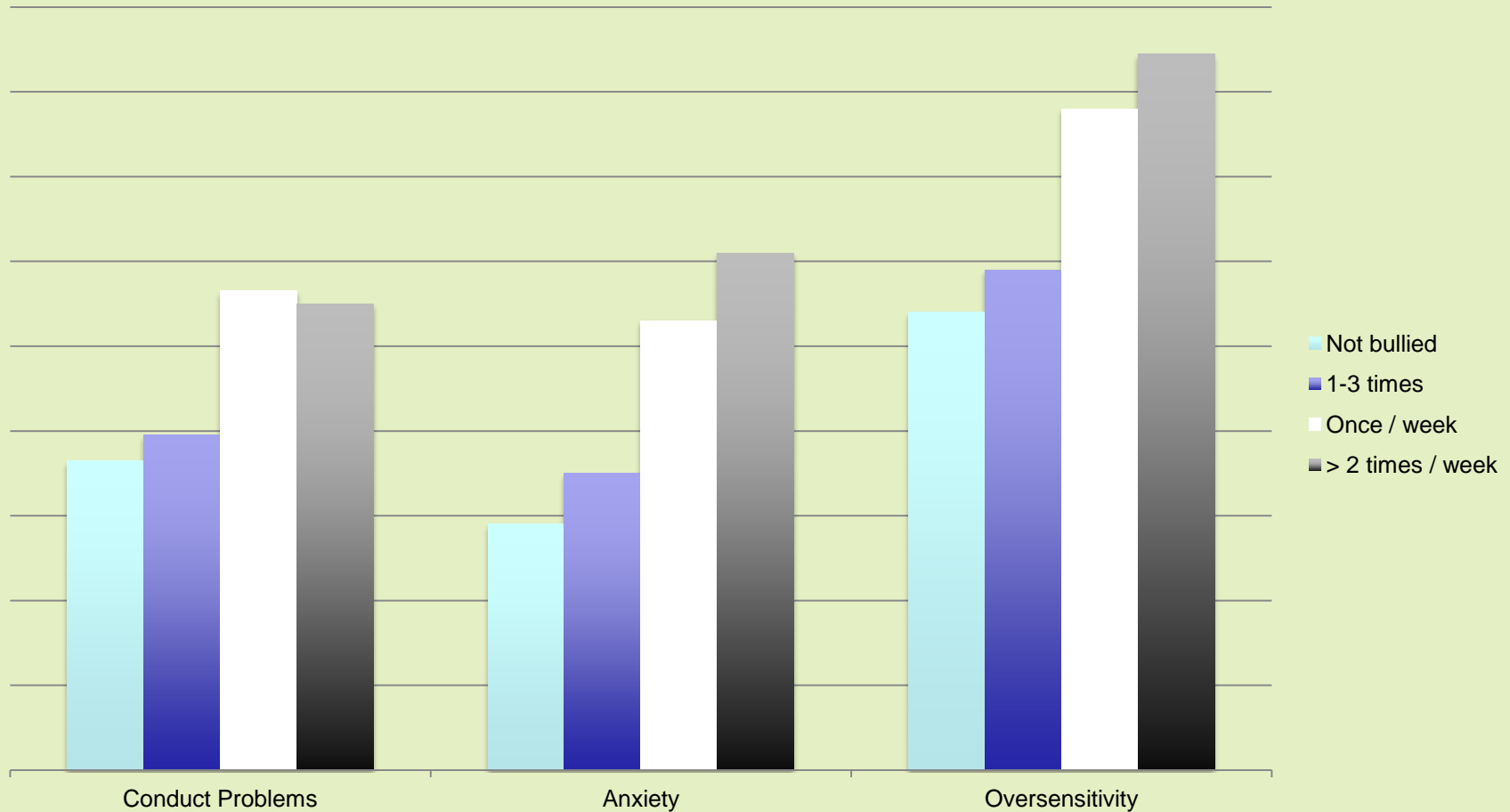
Prevalence – Different Forms

- Verbal and social bullying were most common - 70% reported at least one of these forms in the last month
 - 28% reported that it occurred 2-3 times per week
- A sizable group reported physical victimization at least once in the last month(41%)
- Few (10%) reported cyber victimization at least once in the last month

Overall Mental Health Problems Are Related to Bullying Frequency



Severity of Specific Problems are Related to Bullying Frequency



Relationship Among Victimization and Mental Health Problems

- High victimization was significantly greater than None and Low levels
 - Conduct problems
 - Insecure/Anxious***
 - Hyperactive**
 - Self-injury*
 - Self-isolated/ritualistic
 - Overly sensitive***

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Relationship Among Victimization and Mental Health Problems

- Compared to youth who were not bullied, those who were bullied had significantly
 - Less positive social behaviours**
 - Lower ratings of happiness in school*

* = $p < .05$ & ** = $p < .01$

Rates of Perpetrating Bullying

- Victimization and perpetration of bullying is related, Chi square = 24.40, $p < .001$
 - 53% of youth who were victimized also perpetrated some bullying
 - 14% of youth who were not victimized also perpetrated some bullying

Strategies



Address ASD-Specific Myths

(Gray, 2004)

1. Some children are doomed to be bullied because of their ASD symptoms
2. The content of the bullying represents the reason for the bullying
 - E.g., just because Sam is teased because she loves fish, doesn't mean her love for fish is the reason she's teased
3. Children should change things about themselves (e.g., love for fish) to be accepted

Address ASD-Specific Myths

(Gray, 2004)

4. Once a child with ASD and/or his/her peers have received anti-bullying programs at school, it's up to the child and there's only so much that can be done to help
5. Increased adult supervision at school means increased protection
 - Some teachers won't understand the child with ASD and will hold them accountable

Address ASD-Specific Myths

- Interventions are needed for the child, family, and system of supports
- “Increase awareness of bullying as an issue with roots, and solutions, that are much broader than the education system”

Safe Schools Action Team. (2005). Shaping safer schools: A bullying prevention action plan. Ministry of Education, p.33



Tips for Parents



5 Intervention Tips (www.prevnnet.ca)

1. Take time to process your feelings
2. Respond caringly to your child
3. Gather information about bullying and how to respond
4. Collaborate with other adults in your child's life to keep your child safe
5. Monitor the safety plan and stay connected with other adults involved

Tips for Parents

- Help your child write a letter to his teacher and principal (see handout example) and hand it to the teacher
- Follow-up with the teacher and principal about next steps... foster accountability and team approach
- Provide teacher with concrete steps that they can take (see '10 things that teachers can do' handout)

Date: _____

Dear _____ (name of your Principal/Teacher/Counsellor/Coach)

I have a serious bullying problem. I have been trying to make it stop for the past
_____ (length of time). I have:

☐ been bullied ☐ bullied ☐ seen others being bullied

This bullying problem includes: (Check everything that applies).

☐ Physical Bullying ☐ Social Bullying
☐ Verbal Bullying ☐ Cyber Bullying

After thinking about the bullying for a long time, I want you to know that I feel:
(describe your feelings here)

I have tried to make things better by: (describe ways you have tried to stop the bullying)

I would also like: (list changes would you like to see)

It is important to me that the bullying stops and I need your help. I want to meet with you to
talk about ideas you have to make the bullying stop and help me get along with my classmates.
I am writing you this letter because I hope you can help me feel safe.

Thank you,

(your name)

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CB Intervention #1: Increase Awareness of the Bullying

(Gray, 2004)

- Draw a Map of the School
 - Circle high risk locations and time periods, as well as safe places and time periods

	In class	In the lunch room	On the playground	In the library
1 st period	EASY	EASY	MEDIUM	HARD
Recess	EASY	EASY	HARD	EASY
2 nd period	HARD	EASY		EASY
3 rd period	EASY	EASY		EASY
Lunch	EASY	MEDIUM	HARD	MEDIUM

CB Intervention #2:

Identify a Support System (Gray, 2004)

- Develop a diverse team of individuals who want to support the child in staying safe
 - Parents, teachers, social workers, neighbours, etc.

Potential Goals of Team:

- Identify and improve bullying situations and problematic relationships
- Facilitate understanding of the child among those who interact with him/her (e.g., teachers, other school staff, neighbours, etc.)
- Model positive conflict resolution skills
- Facilitate inclusion of the child within the larger peer group
- Foster self-esteem for the child

CB Intervention #3:

Teach Communication Skills (Gray, 2004)

Cross-context communication skills are especially important

- It is important to develop the child's ability to communicate experiences that occur in one environment to people in alternate environments

CB Intervention #4:

Individualize Response Strategies for Bullying (Gray, 2004)

Help the child develop an understanding of what bullying means, and how to react when bullying occurs according to a person's developmental level.

Defining Bullying (Gray, 2009)

What is bullying?

- Some students try to bully others by making them feel uncomfortable, frightened, or sad...
- They try to bully others (examples)...
 - Calls me a name that is unkind
 - Hurts me
 - Tells other students not to talk or play with me

The TEAM

- The TEAM: Help child identify safe places and people
- What can the child do when confronted with bullying?
 - Provide a list of possible options, and find ones that work for the child (see hand-out)
 - Can develop Social Story (see hand-out)
 - Practice through role play, at home and school
 - Learning WHAT TO THINK, WHAT TO SAY, & WHAT TO DO

If You Are Bullied

What you can do if you are being bullied...



- ☑ If it's hard to stand up for yourself, ignore the bullying and walk away...then tell someone who can help
- ☑ Talk to someone who can help:
 - an older student, your friends, classroom teacher, guidance counselor, school principal, sports coach, parents, or any adult you trust
- It really does work when you talk to someone and get help.*
You may have to tell more than one person...Don't Give Up!
- ☑ If you're scared to talk to an adult on your own, ask a friend to go with you
- ☑ Go to areas where you feel safe
- ☑ Stay close to students you can count on to stick up for you
- ☑ Look confident and tell the child who bullies to back off...bullying is NOT cool!
- ☑ Stay calm...try not to show that you are upset when being bullied
- ☑ Get funny...humour shows you're not bothered
- ☑ Be assertive, not aggressive...fighting back often makes the bullying worse
- ☑ No one deserves to be bullied
- ☑ YOU help to make your school a better place by seeking help to stop bullying
- ☑ If these tips work for you, pass them on to others

For more tips and info,
visit www.preynet.ca

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What to *THINK* About Bullying

Stay calm

Think about bullying facts

- It is not my fault that something is trying to bully me
- The student who is trying to bully me is out of control
- I am not alone. Other students also get bullied.
- There are safe adults I can talk to

Think about a peaceful picture

- Imagine happy thoughts
- I am a good student
- I have some nice friends
- My parents will help me

What to *SAY* About Bullying

Pick sentences to say

- Don't get drawn in
- I need you to stop
- I'm outta here
- Whatever

How to say it

- Say it in control
- After you say your sentence, the bully may keep going. Now it's time to leave
- It is ok to leave even if the bully is still talking

What to *DO* About Bullying

- Walk away is hard to do
- Adults are likely not there for every instance... Report it – is not tattling.
 - Reporting gets someone out of trouble, tattling is trying to get someone into trouble
 - What to report (where did it happen, when did it happen, who did it, what was the content)
 - How to report it (use the template? Write it down)
 - Who to report it to (specific member of the team)

CB Intervention #5: Build Self-Esteem

(Gray, 2004)

- Give specific praise...a lot!
- Recognize and acknowledge the child's talents
- Encourage the development of new or known talents
- Discuss heroes with similar characteristics (e.g., Bill Gates)
- Ask the child for their expert opinion on topics s/he is knowledgeable about
- Reframe the child's negative attitudes and attributions
- Counteract the child's negative self-talk with contradicting evidence
- Share that it's OKAY TO HAVE ASD!

Strategies for Prevention



Prevention Tips for Health Professionals

- Keep an Eye Out!
 - The different types of bullying
 - The high rates for youth with ASD
- Help make parents and other professionals aware
 - Encourage parents to share their perceptions, observations or concerns with you
 - Reassure parents about using the doctors' time for these types of conversations and encourage them to ask questions.

ASD-Specific Prevention Tips for Parents (Dubin, 2007)

- Talk with the teacher about accommodations that your child needs
 - This is not “special treatment”
- Be present within the school environment when possible
- Practice playing detective with your child
 - Run through possible social situations of possible dialogues with peers, and practice “read between the lines” with your child
 - (see example on next slide)

Playing Detective: Example I

(Dubin, 2007)

“Look, here comes Johnny, the coolest kid in school”

- Who said it?
- Has s/he been nice in the past? Or mean?
- How did others react when s/he said it?
- What happened after s/he said this – did s/he continue talking to you or walk away?

Playing Detective: Example 2

(Dubin, 2007)

“I can’t believe you finished your homework. You’re such a geek, I haven’t started mine yet. Want to hang out after school?”

- Is this person a friend?
- What do they mean when they call you a geek? Do they mean it in a hurtful way?
- Why else might they have said that?
- What does their invitation to hang out mean?

Prevention Tips for Children

- Teach social skills
- Connect children with positive peers
- Foster a positive classroom environment
- Plan for the playground

Summary

- Bullying is an addressable problem and a critical issue for people with ASD
- We need to intervene before and after bullying occurs to reduce bullying experiences and associated mental health problems
 - Health professionals, parents, and children all play important roles

Thank You! Questions?

Jonathan Weiss, PhD, CPsych
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Psychology
York University
jonweiss@yorku.ca
Tel: 416-736-5891



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