



INFORMATION SHEET

Age Group: **Children / Adolescents and Young Adults**

Sheet Title: **Bullying**

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is not always easy to define. It can be **Physical, Verbal, Emotional, Racist or Sexual**. Bullying can include:

- Constant hostility and aggression towards the targeted individual over time.
- An imbalance in the power between the bullies and the bullied person.
- An outcome which is always painful and distressing for the person being bullied.

WHY ARE CHILDREN WITH AS MORE LIKELY TO BE A TARGET?

Generally, there are two types of target:

- Passive Targets – physically weaker, shy, low self-esteem, solitary, academic.
- Pro-Active Targets – perceived as irritating & provocative, socially clumsy, inappropriate behaviour, attention-seeking, not know when to stop.

Thus, some of the characteristics of Asperger's Syndrome make them an obvious target for bullying. Also:

- Children with AS may seek solitude in break times – this makes them an obvious target.
- Children with Asperger's Syndrome are perceived as naive, gullible, eccentric, low status, and 'poor' in the currency of social status and friendship. They are not



'cool', macho or popular and are perceived as 'soft', having few friends prepared to come to their defence.

- Children with AS do not have the "radar" instinct which tells them who are the likely bullies in their peer group.

WHO IS LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN A BULLYING ACT?

When asked why they might bully, children replied:

- to feel better
- to scare others
- to have more power and control
- to be cool
- to get what they want

Other, more complicated reasons include:

- A need to be in control
- A lack empathy for the target
- A tendency to defy authority
- A need to create self-esteem through the exercise of malicious power and authority over peers
- A need to be a popular comedian

THE SIGNS OF BEING BULLIED

Children with Asperger's Syndrome may not be able to recognise that the act is one of bullying and therefore may not report it to an adult.

Adults and carers at home need to be aware of the child being a target by using other forms of evidence:

- **Physical evidence:** lost or damaged possessions or torn clothing



- **Medical evidence:** bruising or injuries
- **Psychological evidence:** an increase in anxiety affecting the gastro-intestinal system with stomach-aches and other stress related conditions, as well as problems with sleep, reluctance to go to school and avoiding certain areas.

Other signs:

- A change in the special interest from relatively benign topics to an intense interest in weapons, the martial arts and violent films.
- Drawings may express violence, retaliation and retribution.
- The child may mimic the acts of the children who are bullying them when they are playing at home.

THE EFFECTS OF BULLYING ON CHILDREN WITH ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

- Psychological consequences of bullying last longer.
- Paranoia can develop once they have understood they are being bullied i.e. thinking all children are bullying them.
- Inability to recognise when teasing or sparring is friendly.
- Insults can be taken literally and a passing comment could have life-long implications.

STRATEGIES TO REDUCE THE FREQUENCY OF BULLYING

All strategies must include:

- the target of the bullying
- the school administration
- the teachers
- the parents
- the psychologists
- the other children
- the child who engages in acts of bullying



FOR THE SCHOOL:

1. Create a Code of Conduct.
2. Staff Education: How to supervise situations where bullying is likely to occur.
How to respond to the observations.
How to investigate the observations thoroughly.
How to report acts of bullying.
How to provide true justice.
3. Identify vulnerable places – avoid them.
4. Identify safe places – create more of them.
5. Ask other children at the school to help with strategies.
6. Ask other children (the witnesses) to both rescue the victim, and to discourage the perpetrator.
7. Encourage the children with a “high social status”, a strong sense of justice and natural assertiveness, to intervene.
8. Instigate a system of group responsibility for acts of omission – for not intervening.
9. Create a “buddy” system (recruiting from the “high social status” group of children)
10. Reward this “buddy” system.
11. Teach the child with Asperger’s Syndrome avoidance techniques i.e. safety in numbers.
12. Provide supervised break time activities – chess club, science groups, etc.

FOR THE TARGET:

- Try to stay calm (use self-talk strategies to help with this).
- Try to maintain their self-esteem (remind them they are not at fault).
- Try to respond in an assertive and constructive way, for example:

“I don’t deserve this, stop it”

“I don’t like that, stop it”

- State clearly that the act of bullying will be reported.
- Try to walk away from the situation, towards an adult or a safe group of children



If the child with Asperger's Syndrome is unsure whether the actions of the other person are friendly or not friendly, they will need to explain their confusion and feelings. A reply could be:

“Are you teasing me as a friend or not as a friend?” or
“What you are doing/saying is making me feel ...”

Once the incident has ended, one strategy is for the target to write down the events, and for the child to be able to make three copies of the grievance report: one for the class teacher, one for the school principal and one for a parent.

Once incidents of bullying are recorded and registered in 'the system,' it is less likely that such incidents will be ignored.

AWAY FROM SCHOOL:

Comic Strip Conversations can be used to discover and explain the thoughts and feelings of the child with Asperger's Syndrome about the incident, and Social Stories to determine what to do if similar circumstances occur again.

When new positive responses have been identified, it will help to rehearse these responses in some role-playing activities that focus on other aspects such as body posture and voice control, and to report back when a particular strategy has proved effective.

Some children with AS may have often learned that a violent act can be effective in ending someone's behaviour. The perpetrator may not be aware that he has overstepped the AS child's final boundary, and may not be prepared for the ferocity of response.

Sometimes such a response is what the child who committed the acts of bullying actually wanted in order to appear the virtuous victim; or sometimes they want to manipulate a situation to their advantage, such as avoiding a class test.



COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY

Children know that a toolbox usually includes a variety of tools for repairing something.

Discussions and activities can be used to identify different types of 'tool' to deal with a particular situation. The types of tool can include:

- **Physical tools**, perhaps represented by a picture of a spanner. This category of tool can include actions such as walking away from the situation.
- **Relaxing tools**, represented by a paintbrush. Include activities to stay calm such as counting to ten or slow breathing exercises.
- **Social tools**, represented by a two-handed saw. Use activities that involve another person, such as finding a friend or guardian, or joining a group of children.
- **Thinking tools**, perhaps represented by a tape measure. Create self-talk comments such as, "I am too smart to get upset by this", or "he/she will get into trouble if they do that again because I will report them".
- **Inappropriate tools** or responses, perhaps represented by a picture of a hammer. To suggest as using violence to end the situation.

There are specialist books on bullying strategies for children with Asperger's Syndrome.

Research indicates that changing school has little effect on reducing the likelihood that a child will be a target.

Parents are essential members of the team approach to reducing acts of bullying and they will need to be aware of the school policies and strategies.

Parents can encourage the child to have the confidence and ability to disclose their experiences as a target, and to talk to a friend, teacher, parent or counsellor. Some education authorities have also created a bullying helpline for children to seek advice and support.