



# JENISON AUTISM JOURNAL

Creative Ideas  
in Practice

## Gray's Guide to Bullying



The Original Series of Articles, Parts I - III



# JENISON AUTISM JOURNAL

## Creative Ideas in Practice

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# Autism Spectrum

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## Quarterly

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# Gray's Guide to Bullying

## The Original Series of Articles Parts I – III

- Carol Gray, Editor

Welcome to the last Jenison Autism Journal, or more accurately, the last *before* appearing with a new look, format, articles, ideas, and *title: Autism Spectrum Quarterly*. We've provided plenty of information for you about this "roll-over" in our previous issue, with additional details in this one. Please feel free to contact us with any questions: Jenison Public Schools, 616-457-8955, [cgray@remc7.k12.mi.us](mailto:cgray@remc7.k12.mi.us), or Starfish Press at 860-345-2155 or [www.starfishpress.com](http://www.starfishpress.com).

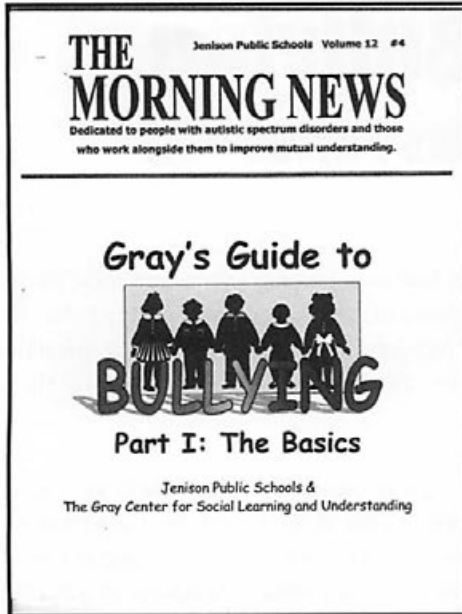
In response to your many requests, this edition of The Jenison Autism Journal features *Gray's Guide to Bullying: Parts I-III* under one cover. Originally, this series of articles appeared in the Winter 2000, Spring 2001, and Summer 2001 issues of *The Morning News* (our name prior to becoming the *Jenison Autism Journal*). Parts I and II sold out quickly. Based on the demand of Parts I and II, we printed extra copies of Part III: *How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt* to ensure its continued availability. Unfortunately, that did nothing to address the frustration of those wishing to secure copies of the complete series. Even people who did have the complete series were a little frustrated, sharing with us that it would be helpful if the articles were contained under one cover.

This special edition contains all three articles, and the corresponding workbook, as they first appeared. We've made every effort to retain the original text and illustrations. While it was very tempting to update the content, it quickly became apparent that it wouldn't be "Gray's Guide" anymore; those who have tried for so long to secure copies of the original articles *still* wouldn't have them! Gentle editing has been limited to decreasing the size of the text (and subsequently page numbers), correcting typographical errors, and making a few, slight revisions to improve clarity. The content, ideas, and the use of childhood silhouettes to illustrate and organize the text remain unaltered.

Keeping with our desire not to "mess with" the original articles, we have used their Morning News covers (pages 2, 20, and 51) to organize this special edition. A silhouette of children hand in hand appeared on two of the three covers as it does on this edition. Their linked hands are a wonderful reminder of what can be accomplished when people work together. It's a fitting representative of the collaborative effort that resulted in Gray's Guide to Bullying. Many parents, professionals, and children and adults with ASD shared their experiences, concerns, questions, and ideas. Originally, their names were acknowledged on the opening page of each issue. Unable to list their names again in this edition due to space limitations, we wanted to again express our sincere appreciation for the value of their individual contributions. Collectively, their insights resulted in ground breaking information that gave rise to new theories and vocabulary. We continue to be grateful for their care, concern, and enthusiastic participation.

It was interesting to read through the articles as they were being prepared for this issue. Revisiting them made me aware of their accuracy and value today; it is gratifying that the research that is reviewed - and the ideas that are shared - are holding up well to "the test of time". It is heartening, too, that concern related to bullying is resulting in new programs. For example, *Solution #8: Review Bully-Proofing Curricula* (pages 38 - 41 in this edition) describes a peer-violence prevention assembly at Pinewood Elementary School, Jenison Public Schools, in Jenison, Michigan. That assembly has now been replaced by *No Fishing Allowed*, a peer violence prevention program that is tailored to children in middle elementary grades, including children with ASD (Williams and Gray, currently in press). Other new resources have been developed as well by other authors and publishers, and we encourage you to explore them.

Welcome to this special, final edition of the Jenison Autism Journal. Have a safe and fun summer. We look forward to coming to you soon as the Autism Spectrum Quarterly.



# Gray's Guide to **BULLYING** Part I: The Basics

## PREFACE



A year ago I attended a Christmas party. Barbara, a physician, was describing one of her colleagues, Andrew, a radiologist, to a group of guests. She shared anecdotes about his many idiosyncratic behaviors and mused how she and her hospital colleagues would often talk about his odd ways. For example, she described how Andrew arrives and leaves at exactly the same time each day, rarely chats with other staff, and how he sometimes misses "the gist" of what someone says or does. After the small group had disbanded, I approached Barb. I indicated Andrew's behaviors were similar to people diagnosed with high functioning autism. I offered to loan her my book, *Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* (Attwood, 1998). Her response was immediate and self-assured. She did not want the book. Then she explained, "If we understood him, it would take all the fun out of it." I was shocked, void of any suitable response. By January of 2000, I had found my response. I began studying bullying as it relates to children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), and during the following spring began writing *Gray's Guide to Bullying*.

# JPS

Jenison Public Schools

*Gray's Guide to Bullying* is a joint project of Jenison Public Schools and The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding. Jenison Public Schools has a long-standing international reputation in the field of autistic spectrum disorders, and has published and distributed *The Morning News* for the last decade. In addition, Jenison Public Schools has fostered the development of many educational interventions, for example, Social Stories.



The Gray Center

The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding is a non-profit organization serving people with ASD and those who work on their behalf. Services of The Gray Center include sponsoring workshops, funding of special projects and programs, and the development of educational resources (this collaborative edition of *The Morning News* is one example).



*Gray's Guide to Bullying* addresses bullying in light of its frequent targets: children with ASD. From the unprecedented response to our request for help collecting information about bullying interactions, it is apparent we have identified an immediate concern. Parents, professionals, and people with ASD shared a wealth of information and experience; making us keenly aware that bullying touches all ages (childhood to adult) and all environments (home, school, community, and workplace).

**A quick overview of *Gray's Guide to Bullying Part I:***

*Gray's Guide to Bullying* opens with a review of Bullying Past, looking at changes in attitudes and the development of current anti-bullying programs. Will these programs meet the needs of children with ASD?



Next, a closer look at unique diagnostic characteristics of **children with ASD**. Do these characteristics place them at "high risk" for a secondary social symptom: bullying?



How bullying is defined is important; it influences decisions regarding interventions. Traditional definitions do not represent the needs of children with ASD. We need a new definition.



The **incidence** of bullying, and its **impact** on children is alarming. While little is known about the incidence of bullying and children with ASD, the odds of being a target of bullying are suspected to be much higher among this population.



Children play a variety of roles in a bullying interaction. Understanding children in the **social majority**, **targets of bullying**, and **children who bully** is an important step. Who are they?

Bullying has many forms. When children with ASD are involved, bullying frequently assumes one of **two unique profiles**.



Once a typical child encounters a child who bullies, effort is made to avoid future contact. In contrast, some children return to a bullying context. **Why?**

Myths surround the topic of bullying. What are the **current bullying myths** that encumber efforts to assist children with ASD?



Bullying is a part of **The Real World**. In the next *Morning News*, a new definition of The Real World makes effective interventions for bullying possible.



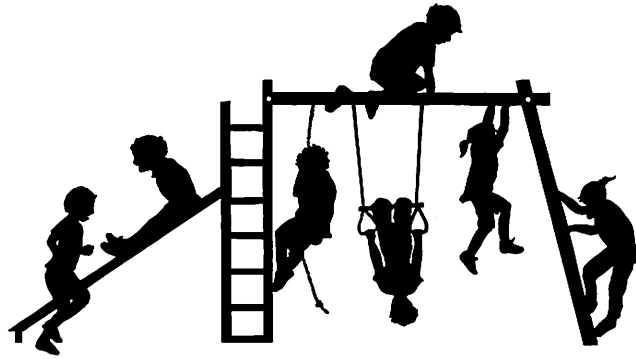
The goal of *Gray's Guide to Bullying* is to share information while raising new questions. **Knowledge is possibility, and people give knowledge power.** It is our hope that we may begin to equalize the imbalance of power that is characteristic of all bullying interactions.

**Welcome to this special three part edition of *The Morning News*.**



## INTRODUCTION

Bullying is an old problem with a *new* face - new because attitudes are changing rapidly; with bullying at the center of its own social renaissance. Parents and professionals have taken an important "double take" of tired misconceptions. As a result, bullying is beginning to reflect a new image in our social mirror.



Bullying has our attention. Some of the most comprehensive studies of bullying are summarized in the book, *Bullying in Schools: And What to Do About It*, by Ken Rigby (1996). His opening words sketch the bullying of our own childhoods, and that of our parents and grandparents: "...For countless generations children have been teasing, harassing, bullying one another, sometimes in fun, sometimes in deadly earnest, to the amusement, horror or indifference of others, whether they be parents, teachers, or other children. To many this has been simply the way things are, a natural course of events, human nature, unchangeable." (p. 11)

To generations raised on advice to "ignore it", it's a relief to learn it didn't work for anyone else, either. These cherished pieces of inaccurate wisdom are becoming the social heirlooms of "Bullying Past". Research is confirming what we have known all along: "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me" had an interesting rhythm, but it did nothing to protect us from the kid with the red hair and blue bike that lurked between the safe ports of home and classroom.

Now, adults nod in agreement in response to children who share that name-calling *does* hurt. In turn, adults inform children that tossing an unwarranted sneer is a social mistake worthy of correction and consequences. From the intimidating childhood shadows of bullying emerges a new optimism, based on the belief that people on all sides of a bullying interaction can learn new social responses. Rigby, quoted above, continues: "...But now something new is happening. We are at last beginning to see that bullying among children at school is a quite intolerable social evil; that the consequences are much greater than we had ever imagined, and more importantly, something can and should be done about it." (1996, p. 11)

Among all the children who will benefit from the bullying renaissance, perhaps none are more deserving than children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). It is little news that involvement in bullying interactions is a frequent "side effect" of autistic spectrum disorders. Parents assess their child's deficits in social "savvy" and "street smarts" and sadly conclude that s/he is "...a natural victim". Cumine, Leach, and Stevenson (1998) echo this concern in a discussion of children with Asperger's syndrome, stating that they "...may appear to be naïve and trusting, unable to discriminate between friendly approaches and those approaches which are intended to 'wind them up'. Their peers seem to take on the role of 'buddy' or 'bully'" (p. 39). Parents and professionals who work on behalf of children with ASD may also be concerned with those bullying interactions where the child with ASD is the aggressor, or initiates the interaction. From nearly every angle, bullying emerges as a prevalent, *severe* social consequence of autistic spectrum disorders. It is a consequence that exists beyond the innate, defining characteristics of autism; one that to a great extent lies at the discretion of – as we will discover - *all* those who surround the child with ASD.

The intent of this guide is to begin an effort to ensure that children with ASD are included in – *and benefit from* - the important international efforts to address bullying. A typical fourth grader walks into a bullying assembly readily equipped with background social information, enabling her to understand and apply the information that is shared. For the child with ASD to benefit from the same information, he will likely need assistance to understand and apply the same material. Some of the information that is clear and understandable for a typical child, may seem

misleading, deceitful, confusing or even contradictory to a child with ASD. It creates a situation where a child who is “at risk” of being the target of bullying has an equally high risk of being “missed” by educational programs and preventative measures. Bullying as a curriculum is a newcomer at the educational dock. Parents and professionals working on behalf of children with ASD are the only people who can ensure that no one misses this boat, most of all the children who need it the most.

*Gray’s Guide to Bullying Part I: The Basics* opens with a review of the communication and social characteristics of children with ASD, and is followed by an overview of the “bullying basics” in light of children with ASD.

## SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS

Autistic spectrum disorders are defined by a “triad” of symptoms. Children with ASD demonstrate delays or differences in three areas: communication skills, social skills, and imagination (Wing, 1996). Causing the greatest challenge is the overall impairment in social communication; with difficulty communicating with - and relating to - family members, teachers, and friends. Children diagnosed with ASD struggle to identify, “read” and interpret the communications and social cues that surround them. As adults, people with ASD describe childhoods that are full of elusive and often missed social meanings, events where they could not fully understand what people *meant*, or wanted them to do.



Children with ASD have complex impairments in communication. They may interpret information literally, and without direct instruction, may miss the intended meaning that is carried by intonation, gestures, facial expressions, and the social context. Making inferences, the ability to readily apply previously learned information to interpret novel cues, is impaired in children with ASD. In conversation, this can place them at a serious disadvantage. For example: “...Dr. Gary Mesibov cited an excellent example of impaired ability to make inferences in a young man with autism who was taking advanced college courses. In seeing this individual carry a copy of the book *War and Peace*, Dr. Mesibov inquired as to how he liked it. The young man responded, “How did you know I was reading it?” (Twachtman-Cullen, 1998, p. 212). Coupled with - and not limited to - other communication challenges (difficulty initiating, maintaining, and terminating conversations; a detailed, precise interaction style; and impaired reciprocity), children with ASD are often exhausted and overwhelmed by what should be the most relaxing and fun parts of the school day: playtime, recess, lunch time, and getting to and from school. In contrast, typical children can’t wait to return to each other’s company to engage in seemingly effortless conversation. The child with ASD requires direct assistance, time, and effort to learn basic communication exchanges and their accompanying social sequences.

Children with ASD negotiate through a social world without the advantage of the “intuitive map” of their peers. This “map” is comprised of many social concepts and skills that are present early in a child’s development, and gain complexity as a child matures. One of the earliest emerging social skills is joint attention, the ability to simultaneously focus and share attention to a topic or activity with another person. By pre-school, children can make complex inferences about the mental states of others, referred to in the literature as *Theory of Mind* (Leslie, 1987, Baron-Cohen et.al., 1995). This, along with other cognitive and social communication skills, enables a child to empathize with others, understand the need to take turns, predict even novel social sequences, and to appreciate what it means to be part of a social group.

By definition the word “social” requires more than one person, rendering any “social impairment” the equal responsibility of all of the parties involved. Bullying brings this shared social impairment into a sharper - but often



more confusing - focus. In an interaction where a socially vulnerable child encounters a child seeking negative control, marked differences - and shocking similarities - emerge. Whereas the child with ASD is most frequently passive and overwhelmed, the child who bullies others is aggressive and confident. However, both have difficulty empathizing - for very different reasons. Both have difficulty taking the other's perspective - for very different reasons. Both seek predictability and control - for very different reasons. Their similarities meet amidst a collision of striking developmental, cognitive, social and emotional differences.

In the next section, we'll explore the surprising "ins" and "outs", the facts and their fictional shadows, as we discuss the basics of bullying in light of children with ASD.

## BULLYING: A NEW INCLUSIVE DEFINITION



What is bullying? The definitions of bullying vary from one resource to the next. All share common elements, but a close second look suggests these definitions do not represent the unique needs of children with ASD. The definition is important. Like a foundation to a house, the efforts of parents and professionals to create bully-free, safe environments rest on the definition. In this section, elements of a traditional definition are discussed, and a new definition inclusive of all children is proposed.

**The Traditional Definition** The definition of bullying directly impacts how information is gathered and interpreted. It determines the content and implementation of anti-bullying programs. Often confused with friendly teasing or the myriad of conflict situations that occur between children, bullying is distinguished by three characteristics:

- 1) Repeated, intentionally negative actions toward a targeted individual over time;
- 2) an imbalance in the power (physically, verbally, socially) within the interaction; and
- 3) marked, contrasting differences in the affect of the individuals involved as a result of the interaction (Garrity et.al, 1994; Voors 2000).

**The Inclusive Definition of Bullying** Like most definitions of bullying, the above definition fits the needs of a typical child. It's a one-size-fits-all pattern from which effective bullying interventions can be designed. Yet when we lay down that pattern, cut out the pieces, sew them together, and try them on the child with ASD, it just doesn't fit. This requires a tailored definition - one that fits *everyone*. Specifically, alterations along the "seams" of *repetition*, *intent*, and *differences in affect* are important to consider. Below, each of these elements are discussed.

**Repetition** Some experts indicate that while bullying *most frequently* is repetitive and continual, it may *also* occur as a single event. Including single events in the definition of bullying has increased importance for a child with ASD who may be confused to learn that a prerequisite encounter is necessary. Understandably, parents and professionals are likely to cringe at the implications for a child who interprets the repetition requirement literally - following the bullying definition to-the-letter - waiting to be kicked and pulled to the ground a *second* time to report it. How does a parent or professional explain the repetition criteria to a child who has a strict, clearly defined sense of repetition?

**Intent** Due to the characteristic (and uniquely expressed) difficulties that children with ASD have assessing the motivation of others, the defining criteria of intent makes confusing twists and turns when their needs are considered. Specifically, sometimes intent is an educationally important part of the bullying definition, and at other times it doesn't apply.

The ability to assess the intent of another person is important in any conversation; in a bullying situation it's critical. A child with ASD may make mistakes in this area. For example, he may interpret statements and actions exclusively at face value, missing the bullying "warning flag". Or conversely, he may be keenly aware that others are constantly having fun at his expense, though unable to quickly sort friendly from unfriendly communication. In this case, he may become hyper-sensitive to the most innocent nudge or friendly overture, leading to an apparent paranoia - and equally overly vigilant in letting others know they should leave him alone. A child with ASD needs individualized assistance to learn the socially elusive faces of intent. For these reasons, the inclusion of negative intent in a bullying definition is important to the design of educational programs for children with ASD.

But should negative intent always be required? For example, often children with ASD become exclusively focused on a peer. This is often a classmate who extends a friendly gesture and subsequently has a new, unexpected shadow. The child with ASD adheres and follows. In his enthusiasm, he calls the home of New Friend repeatedly, failing to pick up on New Friend's polite but frustrated attempts to "get some room to breathe". The repeated calls and contacts begin to have a negative - even frightening - impact. There is the characteristic imbalance of power, with New Friend struggling for social air and needing assistance to handle the situation. In this case, negative impact occurs without negative intent; the child with ASD has no desire to harm. To New Friend, however, that makes no difference. Interactions of this kind are not tolerated and can have swift and severe consequences. For this reason, the definition of bullying cannot *require* negative intent, as parents and professionals may unwittingly exclude important objectives of a child's bullying curriculum.

There are two other considerations related to the intent criteria. First, reports from parents and professionals indicate that there are situations where a child with ASD is targeted by others who may have little or no direct negative intent. Second, well-intended educational efforts may hold an unanticipated negative impact for a student. Both of these are described in more detail in the sections of this article titled, "Social/Relational Bullying" and "The Bullying Backdraft: Educational Bullying" respectively.

**Differences in Affect** Some definitions of bullying omit the reference to a difference in affect, others include it. Difference in affect is ultimately an important defining criteria for children with ASD.

Differences in affect in a bullying interaction are closely tied to the ability of those involved to assess the feelings and intent of one another. A child with ASD is at a serious disadvantage in this area. She may "mis-read" the situation, or may be unaware of the intent of the child who bullies - not experiencing the negative feelings as readily as her peers. Hours or days later, with the advantage of replay and hindsight, the negative aspects may become apparent for the first time. Or, *several years later*, when an adult with ASD considers (often several) childhood events with increased social maturity and insight, the characteristic "difference in affect" may be devastating. In other cases, a person with ASD may never independently recognize, or emotionally respond to, the negative intent of children who bully. If no one feels badly right now, during the interaction and immediately following, is it not bullying?

In a definition of bullying, it's important to keep the differences in affect criteria to bring attention to its unique expression and impact for people with ASD. At the same time, requiring that the targeted individual *must* feel badly is impractical. Such a requirement could - simply via a loophole in the definition - effectively eliminate a naive child from individualized assistance with anti-bullying curricula and efforts.

With these considerations in mind Gray's Guide to Bullying defines bullying as:

- 1) repeated negative actions (possibly coupled with negative intent) toward a targeted individual(s) over time (may occur as a singular event);
- 2) an imbalance in the power (physically, verbally, socially, and/or emotionally) within the interaction; and
- 3) the possibility of contrasting differences in the immediate or delayed affect of the individual(s) involved.

With minor revisions in the three frequently cited defining criteria of bullying, this definition acknowledges a large population of children who are frequently its target. It is submitted *not* as a definition of bullying for people with ASD, but as a definition of bullying that includes all children.



## INCIDENCE AND IMPACT

The incidence of bullying is measured as the numerical risk of being the target of bullying. That risk varies according to a number of factors, including the type of bullying, the age, and/or gender of the children involved. For example, studies on bullying in Australian schools suggest that with increasing age the level of physical bullying gradually decreases as verbal and indirect bullying via exclusion increases. Bullying is most likely to occur among students eight to fourteen years of age; at any age, girls are less likely to be bullied than boys (Rigby, 1996). According to estimates by the National Association of School Psychologists and the National Crime Prevention Council, in the United States 10 - 15% of all children are bullied frequently (as cited in Beane, 1999).

The incidence of bullying among children with ASD is most likely to be significantly higher. Each year Willie Wallis, a consultant for students with ASD for the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District in Michigan, and I teach a social understanding course for adolescents. Last year, the topic of teasing was discussed with our junior high (ages 12-14) and senior high (ages 14-18) students. It was a "high interest" and emotionally charged topic. Most students reported several first hand experiences as the targets of bullying. Their extensive experiences and expertise in this area suggests that children with ASD may have an increased risk of being the target of bullying interactions over their peers, throughout their school career.

A child who is bullied feels as though he is "on his own". His fears are founded. If targeted by a bully, a child is more likely to be avoided by *all* children. In addition, by nine years of age most children are convinced that reporting bullying to teachers or administrators will do nothing to increase their safety. In fact, their concern is that to take such action will increase their chance of becoming the target, or the severity or frequency of current bullying. This may explain why 160,000 children in the United States miss school each day to avoid bullying encounters (Lee, 1993).

Stephen, seven years old and diagnosed with ASD, found himself as a target after defending a friend. Stephen's mother writes:

*In the fall there was a third grade boy who was bullying some of the younger children during recess. One of the children who had been subjected to this conduct was a boy Stephen's age who lived in our neighborhood. He was a friend of Stephen's and a classmate. When he told Stephen about the bullying conduct of the third grader, Stephen told him that they had "to tell that boy to stop that."*

*That is exactly what Stephen did at the next playground opportunity. For several weeks after that, Stephen became the victim of this boy's aggression. Eventually the school discovered the situation and took steps to correct the problem. I did not find out about the matter until some weeks later, when Stephen shared the incident with the mother of his friend."*



The negative impact for children who are frequently involved in bullying interactions is no longer disputed. The consequences can be serious for children who bully and those who are their targets. Children who bully others often learn bullying has intermittent and minimal consequences, leading to an increased likelihood of trouble with the law in adolescence and/or imprisonment by adulthood. Those targeted by bullying suffer diminished self-esteem, increased absenteeism, depression, and/or lower academic performance. For *all* those negatively influenced by bullying, the impact can be lifelong, reflected in difficulties with goal setting, challenged relationships and poorer conflict resolution skills, and diminished earning potential.

## ROLES IN A BULLYING INTERACTION

Understanding the identifying characteristics of children “at risk” of participation in bullying interactions helps parents and professionals intervene early and increases the odds of “turning the situation around”. In addition, the *terms* that are used to refer to children involved in bullying interactions influence attitudes and the accuracy of interventions. This section identifies and discusses the roles children may assume in a bullying situation.



When it comes to bullying, how should people refer to one another? This guide adopts two terms first submitted by a clinical social worker and author, William Voors, in *A Parent's Book About Bullying* (2000). He suggests using terms that focus on a child's behavior and role in a given interaction. Therefore, Voors refers to instigators as *children who bully*, and their victims as *targets of bullying*.

Another group of children are given minimal attention in bullying studies, though their numbers are larger and their role, especially in terms of their characteristics and potential for intervention, are important. These children rarely bully others and are rarely targets of bullying. In this guide they are referred to as *children in the social majority*, referring to their relative strength in social skills and large numbers. In this section, the three different roles children play in a bullying interaction are described, with the largest group of children described first.

**Children in the Social Majority** Children in the social majority are approximately 84% of a school's student population. As young children, they frequently align with others who they proudly announce as their friends, changing those alliances quickly and with relative social ease. As they grow older they begin to form long term friendships and cluster in social groups. These children possess social and emotional insight and are often successful in their encounters with children who bully. In many cases, they are able to avoid bullying interactions. Learning security is in numbers, they discover that the best place to hide is within a group - to disappear into a friendly crowd. When approached by a child with negative intent, their social skills, self-esteem, and confidence balance the power within the interaction. They develop a desire to minimize or downplay their own exceptional talents or traits, demonstrating a strong desire and ability to “fit in”. They are identified by the following characteristics in their interactions with peers (adapted from Garrity et al., p. 46):

- They do not insist on their own way arbitrarily. They give a reason for disagreeing. They apologize.
- They compromise, offer a cooperative position, bargain and/or negotiate
- They share or offer to share something later..
- They change the topic. (list from Garrity et al., p. 46)

In addition, they frequently demonstrate:

- Healthy self esteem
- The ability to establish and maintain friendships
- Positive attitude, optimism, and a good sense of humor
- Sense of “what's right” and often a *desire* to report bullying incidents

There is little research on the immediate or long-term consequences of bullying on this group of children. Rigby (1996) suggests that there is little more than informal, anecdotal evidence. He adds, however, that there is a wide range of reactions among this group. "Some are amused, some are sad and apprehensive, feeling that it may be their turn next. Some are angry; some feel ashamed or guilty for doing nothing; some simply don't care" (p. 65). These children often report a fear of events they observe and the repercussions that may result if they decide to take action in defense of a targeted child. Their social strengths - and the strength of their sheer numbers - provide this group of children with the potential for tremendous impact as part of the solution to bullying.

**Targets of Bullying** Targets of Bullying are children who are frequently bullied by others. They are on the social periphery, "framing" but often not a connected part of the larger social picture. There are two basic groups of targets of bullying, *passive* and *proactive*. Provocation becomes an important factor in distinguishing between the two basic targets of bullying. Where passive targets are often in the back rows of a social theatre, proactive targets are an unexpected and unwelcome part of "front row center".

Passive Targets of Bullying (Voors 2000) in the general school population are the children most likely to experience chronic bullying. Characteristically they do nothing to provoke it. Passive targets of bullying are children who frequently demonstrate the following social characteristics:

- shy, quiet
- anxious
- insecure
- low self-esteem
- spend a lot of time engaged in solitary hobbies and interests that do not involve a lot of interaction (reading, writing, computers, collections)
- serious, highly creative, gifted
- limited participation in sports, physically small, clumsy
- non-existent or limited friends and/or social alliances within the classroom
- often do not initiate interactions
- do nothing to invite or provoke children who bully
- more likely to "reward" bullying by relinquishing money, food, property
- more likely to show outward distress in response to a bully
- often lacking social confidence or social skills
- feel embarrassed, overwhelmed by children who bully

Proactive Targets of Bullying (Voors 2000) are smaller groups that, while they share similarities with their passive counterparts, demonstrate distinctive characteristics of their own. Like passive targets, proactive targets also struggle with friendships, social skills, and the interpretation of social cues. What sets them apart is their relative activity and tendency to provoke and irritate others, often without negative intent.

Ultimately proactive targets are overwhelmed and ill equipped to handle the anger they generate in others, or the consequences. Most notably these children have difficulty identifying when someone has "had enough", and are seemingly unaware that a situation has turned from humorous to irritating. In layman's terms, these children "don't know when to stop" and seem to "bring it on themselves". Often highly distressed or emotional in response to an interaction gone awry, a proactive target may find little support or sympathy among those who believe he "got what he deserved", or conclude, "...that'll teach him." For example, Alastair, age 9, diagnosed with Asperger syndrome has several characteristics of a proactive target:

- He found interacting with other children very difficult.
- He wanted to have friends and would approach other children, but his approaches were clumsy, perhaps pushing or kicking someone - then being surprised and distressed at the retaliation.

- He was extremely sensitive to teasing, and felt he was the sole butt of teasing. (Cumine, Leach, & Stevenson, 1998, p. 7)

All targeted children need assistance and support to handle children who bully, either through instruction in preventative measures and rehearsal of effective responses, direct adult intervention, or both.

**Children who Bully Others** Children who bully others comprise approximately 4% of the student population and frequently instigate aggressive interactions with others. They use direct confrontation (verbal threats, physical aggression) or indirect gestures, rumors, or exclusion. Adults often believe that a child who bullies is a lonely child with low self-esteem, and one who is low in academic achievement. This is not always true. Of all of the roles described in the bullying literature, there seem to be more misconceptions surrounding children who bully than any other. Children who bully others:

- need to be in control or in charge
- may have advanced verbal skills, and *may* be among the most intelligent – though not necessarily highest achieving – children in a classroom.
- lack empathy for others
- continually bully another child or children
- succeed at hiding own behavior from adults
- do not follow rules, frequently defiant and non-compliant
- tend to lack guilt, may believe the target of the bullying provoked the attack
- needs to win every time, focuses on getting what s/he wants
- frequently demonstrate average to just below average intellectual achievement
- have a few alliances, supporters, or friends who either empower the child who bullies or who are empowered by association with him/her
- demonstrate consistent “thinking errors”, for example, including but not limited to: believing they are superior, convinced “everyone is against them”, believe the target of the aggression “had it coming”, or understand fear as respect and vice versa
- tend to come from unstable homes with inconsistent parenting, for example: homes where there is significant stress between the mother and father, where discipline varies according to the mood of the parent over the needs of the child, or where conflict resolution skills are poor

The characteristics of the social majority, children targeted by bullying, and children who bully help parents and professionals define and discuss bullying interactions. Similarly, a broader understanding of children is important to bullying solutions. Understanding that the listed characteristics *are not necessarily negative* traits is important: it is okay to be quiet, shy, and gifted. In fact, most of those traits that *are* negative have potentially positive counterparts. For example, stated positively, “needing to be in control or in charge” is “leadership potential”. An awareness of the talents, strengths, and skills of each child regardless of the role they play in a bullying situation, has practical implications. These positive characteristics hold promise for the bullying solution.

## THE BASIC CATEGORIES OF BULLYING

Bullying takes a variety of forms, falling into three main categories: *verbal/written*, *physical*, and *social/relational*. Within any bullying interaction, elements of one, two, or all three categories may be used simultaneously.

**Verbal and Written Bullying** Verbal/written bullying is the most prevalent type of bullying throughout a child’s educational career. It is often fleeting and easiest to “get away with” - unknowingly occurring within a few feet of a caring adult -





making it difficult for parents and professionals to detect it and respond accordingly. Verbal bullying includes but is not limited to: name-calling, negative comments, intimidation, placing frightening telephone calls, and/or sending negative email. The severity of verbal bullying can range from a single, hurtful word to complex verbal or written intimidation.

**Physical Bullying** Physical bullying refers to interactions where there is direct harm to another person's body or property, or a physical gesture is used to convey negative or demeaning intent. Physical bullying includes but is not limited to: pushing, scratching, shouldering, hitting, tripping, biting, pulling hair, kicking, slapping, unwanted sexual touching, harming with any object, damage to personal possessions, a disapproving roll of the eyes, and/or gestures that carry a specific derogatory meaning. The severity of physical bullying can range from a fleeting intimidating glance to physical assault with a weapon.

**Relational/Social Bullying** Relational/social bullying refers to group generated efforts - which may have elements of real organization - to emotionally harm one or more targets for reasons that are arbitrarily cruel. Relational/social bullying includes but is not limited to: verbal and written gossip, making personal information public, setting someone up, and exclusion. Social bullying is prevalent in adolescence, occurring at a time when affirmation and the acceptance of peers are critically important. Consequently, the impact on the targeted individual can be devastating.

Sometimes, relational/social bullying may start as a disagreement between two parties, with others quickly taking one side; agreeing to make the life of the targeted person miserable. Or, a person may be selected seemingly at random and ostracized due to appearance, association with other individuals, ethnicity, or individual talents or traits. Often, those in the group that bullies may be unable to identify the reasons behind their actions, or individuals within a group will cite a rationale for their behavior that is inconsistent when compared with others in the group.

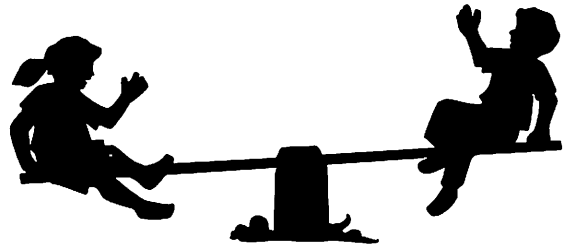
**Bullying as a Social Experiment?** The bullying anecdotes submitted by parents and professionals suggest that there is a form of social/relational bullying that comes close to the analogy of a "social experiment". In these cases children in the social majority suddenly and spontaneously assume a bullying role. There is no malice intended. Instead, these children are motivated by social curiosity. Their activities may be based in a desire to bring predictability/control to that which is not understood. In fact, they may have stumbled across the topics of these interactions entirely by accident: amazed by the reaction *or non-reaction* of the child with ASD. They may gradually figure out how to trigger a specific reaction with 100% accuracy. Or, the total non-reaction of the target excuses their actions as they conclude there is "no harm done". Puzzled, or discovering a unique form of social control, they return with a series of events that are variations on a theme. Examples of experimental bullying include:

- Playing tic tac toe with chalk on the back of the shirt of the child with ASD, the next day attempting to write it on his shoulder, the next day writing it on his jacket as he sits on the bus.
- A group of children spontaneously form around a child the first day of school. If they tell her to bark, she barks. If they tell her to quack, she does. Hey, what if you tell her to scream?
- Eight children nervously look to Robert as the time for the math test approaches. Time is running out. Robert whispers, "Cats are better than dogs" in Jason's ear. Result? Jason has a tantrum; the test scheduled for today has to be postponed to tomorrow. Robert is elevated to class hero.

When confronted by adults with the inappropriateness of their actions, "experimental bullies" are genuinely surprised and sincerely embarrassed and apologetic. In the *back* of their minds, they *suspected* what they were doing was wrong. At the *front* of their minds were intentions new to the bullying arena: curiosity and control of that which is socially unpredictable. Understanding experimental bullying raises the urgency to answer questions about atypical behavior to ensure the classroom does not become an unethical "social laboratory".

## BULLYING CATEGORIES AND CHILDREN WITH ASD

Parents and professionals contributed incidences of bullying involving children with ASD to assist in the development of this guide. Many of these carefully described anecdotes shared similar characteristics. The children who bullied demonstrated an understanding of the desire for friendship and/or severe social vulnerability of the targeted child with ASD. This was coupled with a cruel “negative creativity”. With an eerily predictable sequence, social patterns became apparent. It was as if two unique bullying profiles emerged from between the lines of the reported incidences and *introduced themselves*. The vast majority of all bullying incidences involving children with ASD as the target, reported to *The Morning News* over the last four months, fall into one of the following categories: *Backhanded Bullying* and *Absurd Information and Requests*.



**Backhanded Bullying** *Backhanded Bullying* is similar to its insincere cousin, backhanded compliments. These “social relatives” share a family trait: a marked difference between what is said and done vs. the thoughts behind it. Backhanded Bullying involves the use of kind gestures, statements, and offers of friendship (that may readily appear stereotyped and/or “over-stated” to most children), and/or offers of assistance, with the intent to mislead. This type of bullying is initiated with a readily recognizable friendly gesture, for example a handshake, greeting, or invitation. It proceeds in one of two ways. Either the friendly posture immediately and dramatically disappears, or it continues for a period of time (a day, several days, weeks, or even months) then vanishes. Consider this example:

*One Wednesday, two boys on the playground saw Doug walking around by himself. They told him to shake their hands to “be friends”. When he complied, they pulled him to the ground. Two days later, Doug was on his own once again. This time, three boys approached him. One boy pushed him down and hit him in the face. The boys walked off and left him. Doug cried but did not seek help. Instead, he went off into the field crying and that is where I found him when I arrived to pick him up. When I inquired why he was upset, he said he would not tell me until we reached the car. When he finally told me what happened, he said that he got “beat up”. I have never seen him so upset.*

A typical child on a school playground would be skeptical of an offer to “shake hands”. Shaking hands is *adult* social currency, not something children do waiting for a turn on the slide. Where social warning flags rise in the mind of a typical child; the child with ASD welcomes the opportunity for friendship. In addition, he’s been taught that when someone offers to shake your hand, it’s polite to respond accordingly. No one mentioned the exceptions.

Sometimes, both a parent and child may be initially misled. The child who bullies may expertly employ friendly pragmatics. Without close scrutiny a bullying incident may be missed. Consider these two incidents shared by professionals:

*A parent told me that her son had invited a “friend” over. The mother was excited at the possibility of a play date. The “friend” stole the mouse to the boy’s computer and the next day at school tried to sell it back to him for five dollars.*

*I was observing one of my clients in a fifth grade class when another student approached him with a plan. He wanted my client to give him a dollar for two quarters. My client thought this student wanted to be friends.*

This bullying may take a while for parents or professionals to detect - and even longer to be confident of their assessment. In contrast, the child with ASD enthusiastically perceives his new friend without the benefit of social insight. Once convinced of the exploitive nature of a relationship, a second challenge emerges. As the parent attempts to intervene, the child feverishly protects the relationship with his new friend like The Crown Jewels.

**Absurd Information or Requests** *Absurd Information or Requests* is a category of bullying that involves directions to engage in out of context, silly, or inappropriate activities, gestures or tasks; including directives to make inappropriate statements (often to a selected individual). Here are two examples, the first from a professional:

*Randy is eight years old and in the fourth grade. He became intrigued in the concept of "good luck" and talked a lot about it at school. One day, two of his classmates told him during a bathroom break that if he took off his clothes and spun around on the floor it would bring him lots of good luck. Randy found this perfectly reasonable and followed their instructions. Eventually a teacher discovered this activity.*

The second example from a parent:

*At the time this occurred, Jesse was attending high school. Each day, a student who claimed to be collecting lunch money approached him, and Jesse complied. At lunch, when the cashier asked Jesse for his money, Jesse's teacher would immediately come to his rescue by purchasing his lunch. I learned of the problem when the teacher approached me one day when I came to pick Jesse up from school. He said, "I want you to know we have programs for families who cannot afford to provide lunch for their students." Confused, I shared that money for lunch was sent every day. An investigation revealed the daily theft of Jesse's lunch money. Jesse was unaware that the student who approached him each day was being dishonest. From Jesse's perspective, that was the routine for lunch: a student collects the money and the teacher in turn pays for the lunch.*

Many parents and professionals report bullying interactions that contain elements of both Backhanded Bullying and Absurd Information or Requests, with the interaction usually occurring in that order: a friendly gesture followed by an out of context or unusual request, for instance:

*The typical bullying situation with Bennett is when a group of boys (or girls) approach him and act like they are interested in what he is doing (gain his trust). They then tell him to do something a typical child would know never to do, and then tell the teacher on him. For instance, a group of girls told my son to pull his pants down, which he did. Then they ran to the yard duty who immediately pulled my son in and called me, hysterical that a child would do such a thing.*

## THE BULLYING BACKDRAFT



**The Attraction of Bullying?** Those who saw the movie, *Backdraft*, have etched in their minds the elusive way a fire can form an unexpected "backdraft" that catches firefighters by surprise. The fire seems to be momentarily subsiding, but returns with renewed energy. That phenomenon provides an analogy for an important question that emerges from descriptions of bullying incidents involving children with ASD. Specifically, this *Bullying Backdraft* applies to targeted children who return to situations or settings that other children, having experienced the first bullying attempt, would actively avoid. A mother writes:

*I have two sons, Bert, age nine, and Sam, age 6. Both have experienced their share of bullying. Sam will go around three extra blocks to avoid walking past the house of a child who has given him a hard time. If a child bullies Sam, he will keep diligent - almost obsessive - track of that child's whereabouts. Wherever that child is, Sam isn't. At times this can cause Sam - even the entire family - considerable inconvenience.*

*It occurred to me the other day that Bert actually returns to bullying situations (same time, same place, same person), even those that have caused him a lot of distress. When I ask Bert why he goes back, he tells me he doesn't know. Why does he do this? I don't understand.*

Many concerned parents and professionals describe children who return to bullying situations. Compared to the variability of childhood interaction, bullying has structure and predictability. Could the characteristically repetitive nature and exaggerated delivery of bullying attract a child with ASD?

One of the defining characteristics of bullying is that it repeats itself. In the example cited previously the collection of Jesse's lunch money quickly became "routine"; at face value it was a helpful interaction with a predictable sequence. Similarly, the "good luck" ritual suggested to Randy by his peers contained the same friendly, repetitive quality. In both of these situations the "topic" of the bullying was repeated (lunch money, good luck). In addition, "good luck" was also an interesting and highly motivating topic for Randy. In contrast to the wide variation of childhood interactions, bullying has a characteristic predictability in terms of time, location, sequence, and topic.

Another trait often observed in children who bully is the stereotyped, "highlighted" delivery of statements and actions. Whether their statements are overtly negative (as in the case of physical aggression), or if friendly statements are used to disguise negative intentions, there is often greater emphasis (either via increased intensity of facial expressions, gestures, or intonation) placed on key words in the interaction. For students with ASD who miss subtle cues, or have difficulty recognizing faces, these exaggerated cues may seem clear in comparison. This may be especially true in cases where the bullying is subtle but nonetheless cruel, or, as with Jesse and Randy, the child is not aware of the negative intent or the exploitation that is occurring.

Gunilla Gerland is an adult with autism. In her book, *A Real Person* she describes a bullying relationship from her childhood that serves as an example. At school, Gunilla was approached during an outdoor playtime by a group of older boys who informed her that they were going to hit her once a day. She considered it a strange rule, but complied, going with the boys to the restroom each day where they would punch her in the stomach - once. This went on for some time, until it was reported to the teacher. Gunilla writes:

*They hit me every day until someone suddenly told our teacher. I didn't like that. She had nothing to do with me and I thought it insulting. It was now clear that I had been deceived in some way, so I felt stupid. Hadn't I gone and found those boys myself, in case on some days they had forgotten to hit me? I thought that was the way it should be. (Gerland, 1996, p. 92)*

Not only does it raise the question regarding whether children with ASD may at some level be attracted to repetitive, predictable interactions, but the research indicates children who bully are seeking the same: targets who do not present unexpected or novel responses, responding in a similar fashion each time they are approached. Gunilla Gerland (1996) describes how she was frequently bullied on the way home from school. Initially, any first grader was prey to older students, but soon the situation changed:

*...my different way of reacting seemed to make me the most interesting one to go on bullying. When they took my cap, I just went on home. ...If they took my schoolbag, which I needed, I just stood there and waited. I didn't run after them. I didn't start crying. My lack of reaction seemed to drive them on, but I carried on waiting until they had finished doing what they were doing (p. 99).*

Here, it's important to step a little off topic to bring attention to two side notes. First, in this situation, Gunilla's "text book" response of providing little or no reaction serves to single her out from her peers. Her experience echoes the experts on bullying who report that "ignoring it" is ineffective - and may increase the severity of - a series of bullying interactions. Second, many children with ASD have difficulty recognizing and distinguishing faces; a face does not readily identify a person. The relationship of this to bullying is described by Gerland (1996) as she completes her description of the above event:



*I didn't know who they were, the boys who were nasty to me on the way back from school. I didn't recognize them. They had empty boy faces that simply flowed into each other. I thought they were different boys each time. I didn't know it was a question of my finding it difficult to recognize people. I wondered how these boys, whom I had never seen before, could possibly know that I was the one they were to bully. Did I look peculiar in some way? Had I any special characteristics? Something only they could see? How otherwise could it be that it was just my bag they took and not the other children's, the children who were walking ahead along the road? (p. 99)*

The repetition that is characteristic of bullying coupled with its stereotyped and exaggerated delivery may in part explain why some children with ASD return to "the scene of the crime" when, in contrast, their peers in similar situations take extraordinary measures to avoid potential danger. The Bullying Backdraft presents an additional challenge that typical parents and general education staff rarely encounter; the challenge of the attraction of bullying.

**Educational Bullying and the Bullying Backdraft** *Educational bullying* is a term used by Rigby (1996). He confessed a mistake he made while attending a course on research methodology at the University of South Australia. A fellow student read a paper to the class on the scientific method that, in Rigby's opinion, was not very good. Rigby proceeded to challenge many aspects of the paper, exposing its limitations. He was surprised when the student's response was a defiant request that Rigby quit "picking on" him. Rigby, convinced that he was doing nothing of the kind, appealed to the group. The verdict? Rigby had the student in a situation with an imbalance of power, the student was unable to defend himself, and there was a marked difference in the affect between the two. Citing this example, Rigby described educational bullying as "...another kind of bullying in which there may be no hint of malice, no conscious desire to hurt, still less any exultation at another's misery. Indeed, to those who practice this kind of bullying – and even to some who observe it – the bullying may be seen as for the victim's own good." (p. 18)

In light of educational programming for children with autistic spectrum disorders, Rigby's comments deserve serious consideration. Some educational interventions frequently used with children with ASD incorporate the elements of highly structured, repetitive formats - at times to the exclusion of other methods - to teach basic skills. These strategies are characterized by continual repetition, an imbalance of power in the instructional interaction, and at times a marked difference in the affect of teacher and student. At face value, their characteristics mirror the defining elements of a bullying interaction. There is a sharp contrast between the two, however. Unlike bullying, the child's compliance is systematically reinforced and praised in this type of instructional format.

It raises the question as to whether educational bullying may unintentionally exist in programs for children with ASD. Could rigidly structured repetitive interventions that have characteristics so similar to those that bullying inadvertently teach children with ASD to be targets? In terms of the bullying backdraft, could these educational formats increase the likelihood a child might seek out or return to bullying contexts because they are more easily recognized social sequences? Admittedly, it's important for children with ASD to learn social skills and cooperation, as well as the acquisition of basic skills. To parents and professionals concerned with a child's ability to apply social meaning and make sense of interactions, how we teach may hold serious, unexpected implications.

## **BULLYING MYTHS AND CHILDREN WITH ASD**

As I raised the topic of bullying during the last year, many parents and professionals expressed concerns and advice. Occasionally, I have replayed those conversations and re-read the letters and emails. Like a Polaroid photo that gradually becomes clearer, I have identified five myths that surround the topic of bullying and children with ASD. Many were some of my own that didn't survive the development of this guide. As I learned and considered new information, they began to look like myths when placed in competition with the facts.



1. *Just wait until Angie gets to the junior high – they will eat her up.* This one tops the list both in terms of prevalence and social danger for children with ASD. It represents the myth that it is inevitable that this child will be bullied. While parents and professionals predict with incredible accuracy when and where bullying situations may occur, that precision is matched by an implied acceptance of “horrible things to come”. Bullying is not a tornado, earthquake or its social equivalent. Bullying, regardless of the vulnerability of an individual, can be effectively addressed. To believe otherwise is to ensure that bullying is an inevitable secondary social symptom of ASD.

2. *If Angie wouldn't insist on talking about fish or wearing those clothes with cartoon characters all the time, she wouldn't be targeted by children who bully.* Many of those working on behalf of children with ASD confuse the reason a child is targeted with the *topic* of the bullying. Though not discussed in the general bullying literature, distinguishing between the two terms is critically important, especially with a population of children who have such unique social characteristics, mannerisms, or areas of interests.

A *bullying topic* is the subject matter of a bullying interaction. For example, bullying topics include (but are not limited to!): aspects of appearance, mannerisms, personality, personal interests, personal relationships, and distinctive characteristics, skills, or abilities. Thus, the topic behind the statement, “You fish nerd!” is an extensive knowledge of fish. Many parents and professionals believe these traits - these topics - are the reason a child is bullied. This isn't true.

The reason Angie is bullied is similar to the reason every other child is bullied: she is frequently alone. Every expert on bullying agrees: the majority of children who are bullied struggle with social skills and have difficulty establishing friendships. Over the last several years, this author has observed several students with ASD as they have progressed through their school career. Despite outstanding and in some cases irritating traits, a few have sailed through the years untouched by bullying. In each and every case the student has had a friend who is well-liked, respected, and free from close association with peers “at risk” of getting into trouble or confrontations. Dr. Liane Holliday-Willey, an adult with Asperger's Syndrome, writes about a friendship like this in her book, *Pretending to be Normal*:

*I am amazed my peers put up with me and my peculiarities. Truth be known, they may not have, had it not been for a very good friend of mine named Craig. This friend was very bright and very funny and very well-liked. With him by my side, I was given an instant elevated status among our group and even beyond. He had been my friend almost forever and over the years he had become almost like a guardian to me. ...In subtle and overt ways, he would show his support for me by saving me a seat at lunch, walking me to class, or picking me up to take me to a party. He fixed me up on dates, made me laugh when my nerves started to twitch, and kept me company if I was all alone in a crowd. ...Craig jumped to my rescue even before I knew I needed to be rescued. (1999, pp. 40-41)*

3. *That's interesting...still, let's get Angie new clothes and teach her not to talk about fish.* There's a children's book that every parent and professional concerned about bullying should read. *Pinky, Rex, and the Bully* (Howe, 1996) challenges our tendency to respond to targets of bullying with advice to change, to “...don't do that...”, “...don't wear that”, or “...don't take that to sharing time.” Here, another important distinction between terms must be made: the difference between *Target Coaching* and *teaching social understanding*.



*Target Coaching* refers to efforts by adults that are well intentioned but carry an underlying message that “who you are is not okay”. For example, consider Angie with backpack stuffed with fish books and eight pamphlets from Chicago’s Shedd’s Aquarium. That’s okay. It’s also okay for Angie to move her hands in a unique way when she is excited, or to decide each day to wear cartoon clothing. Efforts to make a shy child an extrovert, to get Angie away from the classroom aquarium during indoor recess, or to make anyone less “tease-able” by changing a characteristic that is based on personal choice are all examples of Target Coaching. Target Coaching can diminish self-esteem, especially among a population that may be unaware of the good intentions of adults.

Teaching social understanding refers to instruction in social concepts and associated skills, for example, helping a child to first understand the need for turn-taking in a conversation, and then teaching and practicing those skills. For Angie who desperately wants friends and loves fish, one social understanding objective is to help her understand that to keep others engaged in conversations it is important to balance their high interest topics with her own. Sharing information about fish is o.k, it may lead to a career. Knowing when and how to share that information with others is an important social understanding concept.

4. *Angie attended the anti-bullying program at school and she’s better now at reciprocal interactions. It’s her problem if she’s still bullied.* Adults may assume that there is just “so much they can do” to ensure a child’s physical and emotional safety at home, school, or in the community; beyond a certain point, it’s up to Angie. The inaccuracy lies in what adults define as “...a certain point”. Adults have to get directly involved throughout Angie’s life. “A certain point” exists at the end of a lifelong effort to ensure comprehensive anti-bullying education programs, sensitive supervision, and individualized instruction. In addition, the research indicates that the profile of bullying - its format and content - is likely to change as Angie grows. Without command of the intuitive social information of her peers, Angie is not likely to independently identify the changing “face” of bullying, or modify her responses accordingly.

5. *The school needs to increase supervision on the playground at Angie’s school.* The research is very clear on this one. Olweus, one of the most well respected international experts on bullying, has concluded that increased adult supervision is the single most powerful factor to deter bullying. Logically, a parent may request that supervision in areas prone to bullying: hallways, bathrooms, lunchrooms, and playgrounds, be increased. An important consideration may be overlooked. A child with ASD may be misunderstood by adults who, without background information or training, respond to her at face value. For example, unaware of the characteristics of a proactive target of bullying (described earlier), an adult may respond with statements or consequences that are likely to be ineffective if not prone to “add insult to injury”. Consider this example:

*I am a special education teacher. The other day during lunch, I noticed the lunch room assistant marching Jacob to the office, pulling him by his shirt. Jacob was guilty of “circulating” too close to other students. They asked him three times to “go away”. Giving up, they tripped him. Jacob fell to the floor and cried. The lunchroom assistant “saw the whole thing”. When I asked her which child had tripped Jacob, she wasn’t sure. It didn’t matter. “Jacob,” she said, “had no right to irritate the other students.”*

In Jacob’s case, increasing adult supervision may increase the likelihood of being misunderstood. Providing trained and sensitive supervision, placing an increased number of people who understand bullying and its unique profile and implications for children with ASD, is likely to achieve the results Olweus described, for children with ASD.

The trouble with some of the common myths and assumptions surrounding bullying and children with autistic spectrum disorders is that, if believed and acted upon, they may actually increase the likelihood that bullying will increase. For example, believing that: 1) bullying is inevitable; 2) the child with ASD has to learn to be less “teasable”; 3) general education anti-bullying curriculums alone will effectively teach children with ASD new responses to use with children who bully; and/or 4) increased supervision will fix everything, is counterproductive. Where bullying myths can enable inaction, information makes inaction inexcusable.

## SUMMARY OF GRAY'S GUIDE TO BULLYING: PART I

"Ignoring it" didn't make bullying go away. The generations-old myths that clung to the topic of bullying are becoming the faded photographs of our social history. Now, bullying is regarded with seriousness. The unkind roll of the eyes is a social error and no longer a rite of childhood.

Caught in the midst of this social renaissance are children with autistic spectrum disorders. They bring to the bullying arena a unique social perspective, along with challenges in communication, social skills, and imagination. They require our careful consideration. These factors place them at what is suspected to be a much higher risk of participating in bullying interactions. At the same time they could be easily missed by the international efforts to address bullying.

General education programs can include children with special needs with information and understanding. The definition of bullying can include them via the same process. Looking closely at the traditional definitions of bullying, and the defining factors most likely to have implications for children with ASD: repetition, intent, and affect, a new definition emerges that meets the needs of all children. Similar to its traditional counterparts, this definition defines bullying via three criteria: 1) repeated negative actions (possibly coupled with negative intent) toward a targeted individual(s) over time (may occur as a singular event); 2) an imbalance in the power within the interaction; and 3) the possibility of contrasting differences in the immediate or delayed affect of the individuals(s) involved. This definition includes all children and provides a sound and flexible foundation for anti-bullying curricula and programming.

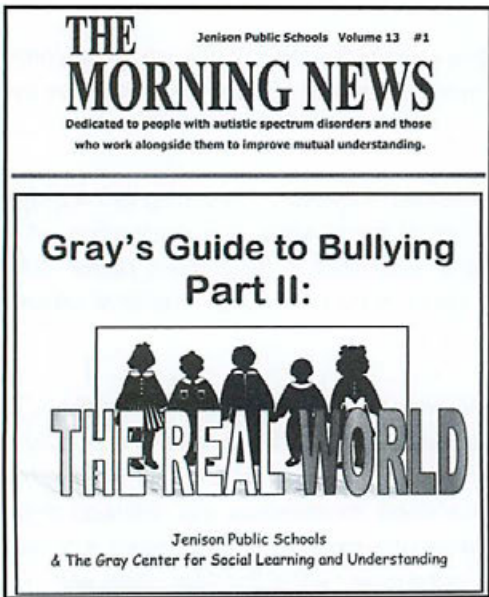
The roles in a bullying interaction are defined by frequently demonstrated characteristics. Traditionally the terms *bully*, *victim*, and *bystander* have been used; for the purposes of Gray's Guide the terms *children who bully*, *children targeted by bullying*, and *children who bully others* are used. These terms avoid name-calling and unnecessarily labeling, and promote the attitudes and vocabulary needed to teach social understanding.

Bullying can take many forms, including verbal/written, physical, and relational/social. Among the reports of bullying incidences shared by parents and professionals, two forms of bullying occur with such frequency that they warrant identification: Backhanded Bullying and Absurd Information and Requests. Both begin with a friendly gesture that leads to a negative interaction. The child with ASD is likely to be initially unaware of the negative intent behind the directives of these peers. Backhanded Bullying and Absurd Information and Requests "zero in" on the desire of children with ASD to have friends, while at the same time capitalizing on their social challenges.

Some children with ASD return to bullying situations that other children avoid after the first confrontation. Identified as the Bullying Backdraft, why does this occur? Whether it is due to the repetitive nature of bullying, the predictability of these sequences, the exaggerated delivery, or other factors is not understood. Research suggests that children who bully are seeking targets who have predictable responses. Children with ASD initiate and are drawn to predictable social exchanges. Could children who bully, and children with ASD discover within one another traits they find to be rare in the general population? If so, what implication does this hold for parents and professionals?

Gray's Guide to Bullying Part I: The Basics concludes with five bullying myths surrounding children with ASD. The trouble with some of the common myths and assumptions surrounding bullying and children with ASD is that, if believed and acted upon, they may actually increase the likelihood that bullying will occur. In contrast, information brings effective solutions closer to the light.

The spring 2001 issue of *The Morning News*, *Gray's Guide to Bullying Part II: The Real World*, continues to explore the topic of bullying and children with ASD, with a focus on intervention. Beginning with general suggestions for setting the stage for effective solutions, it continues with specific ideas and activities. Gray's Guide to Bullying will conclude with the inclusion of a student workbook.



# Gray's Guide to Bullying

## Part II: The Real World

**JPS**

Jenison Public Schools



### PREFACE: A review of *Gray's Guide to Bullying Part I:*

*Gray's Guide to Bullying: Part I* begins with a look at the changes in attitudes toward bullying and the development of anti-bullying programs. In their efforts to include children with ASD in these anti-bullying efforts, parents and professionals need accurate information and effective, individualized strategies.

The unique diagnostic characteristics of **children with ASD** place them at a high risk for the secondary social symptom of bullying. While little is known about the incidence of bullying and children with ASD, the odds of being a target of bullying are suspected to be much higher among this population.

How bullying is **defined** influences decisions regarding interventions. In terms of children with ASD the definition must account for their unique social characteristics. *Gray's Guide to Bullying* defines bullying as: 1) repeated negative actions (possibly coupled with negative intent) toward a targeted individual(s) over time; 2) an imbalance in the power (physically, verbally, socially, and/or emotionally) within the interaction; and 3) the possibility of contrasting differences in the immediate or delayed affect of the individual(s) involved.

Children play a variety of roles in a bullying interaction. Understanding children in the **social majority**, as **targets of bullying**, and **children who bully** is important to effective intervention:

- 1) *Children in the social majority* demonstrate effective social skills and the ability to establish friendships; they are 84% of a student population.
- 2) *Targets of bullying* are children frequently bullied by others. They often lack a positive self-esteem and the ability to readily form relationships. There are two



identified types of targets: passive and proactive. Passive targets are often reserved and in the background, spending a lot of time in solitary activities. Proactive targets often irritate others, unaware of the negative impact they are having and not knowing "when to quit". They are often surprised and unprepared for the negative responses they receive.

3) *Children who bully others* frequently instigate aggressive interactions. They need to be in control or in charge, lack empathy for others, and often defy authority. To intimidate others, children who bully use direct confrontation (for example, verbal threats or physical aggression) or indirect gestures, rumors, or exclusion to intimidate others. They comprise 4% of the student population.

**Bullying takes many forms.** *Verbal and written bullying* are the most common forms, including (though not limited to): name-calling, negative comments, frightening telephone calls, notes, and email messages. *Physical bullying* involves direct harm to another person's body or property, or negative, demeaning gestures, such as: pushing, scratching, shouldering, hitting, tripping, shoving, kicking, breaking personal items or intentionally misusing them or placing them out of reach, a threatening gesture or a disapproving or discrediting roll of the eyes. *Relational/social bullying* refers to group-generated efforts, including exclusion, spreading rumors, and/or spreading gossip.

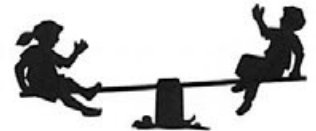
When children with ASD are involved, **bullying frequently assumes one of two unique profiles.** First, *Backhanded Bullying* involves the use of kind gestures or statements with the intent to mislead. Another type of bullying, *Absurd Information and Requests*, involves the use of directives to engage in out-of-context, silly, or inappropriate activities, gestures, or tasks. Both forms seem to capitalize on factors directly related to children with ASD: for example, their limited friendships and tendency to interpret information literally.

Some children with ASD return to bullying situations that other children avoid after the first confrontation. Called the *Bullying Backdraft*, one theory is that the repetitive nature and predictability of bullying interactions coupled with the characteristic exaggerated delivery may "attract" children with ASD. Understanding more about the possible attraction of bullying will assist parents and professionals in their efforts to help children with ASD.

Many **myths surround bullying and children with ASD.** If believed and acted upon, these myths increase the likelihood of bullying. For example, believing that: 1) bullying is inevitable; 2) the child with ASD has to learn to be less "teasable"; 3) general education anti-bullying curricula alone will effectively teach children with ASD new responses to use with children who bully; or 4) increased supervision will fix everything, is counter-productive. Where bullying mythology enables inaction, information makes inaction inexcusable.

New information creates new opportunities. In light of the research that has dissolved the credibility of the traditional assumptions surrounding bullying, what's next? How can parents and professionals **protect** and **educate** children who are most vulnerable to being the targets of bullying?

Those who feel there isn't a solution are right; **at last count there were ten.** Welcome to the Spring 2001 issue of *The Morning News*.





## A quick overview of *Gray's Guide to Bullying Part II - The Real World*:

*Gray's Guide to Bullying Part II: The Real World* describes ten solutions to decrease or eliminate bullying interactions from the lives of children with autistic spectrum disorders. These solutions *do not replace* the wealth of bully-proofing information that is now available. Instead, they are designed to *work with* existing resources for children in general education. Here is a brief overview of each solution.

**SOLUTION #1: DRAW A MAP** ...and circle "high-risk" locations and **time slots** where bullying is likely to occur. This defines a problem that may seem overwhelming.



**SOLUTION #2: PLAY LEAPFROG TO SET A SAFER STAGE** Gone is the *Lone Ranger* and with him the effectiveness of solo efforts. It **takes a team** to solve bullying.



**SOLUTION #3: ORGANIZE A TEAM** A team will work on several fronts to ensure that the child with ASD benefits from a school's bully-proofing curriculum.



**SOLUTION #4: ~~HIDE AND SEEK~~** Parents of children with ASD face unique issues in determining whether their child with ASD is a target of bullying.

**SOLUTION #5: PLAY TELEPHONE THE RIGHT WAY** An efficient way to discover if a child is being bullied is for the child to report it. Here are a few ideas.



**SOLUTION #6: SIMON SAYS... DO THIS** Adults may unintentionally assume the role of a bully. There's an option to **correcting, confronting, or conceding**. It's **teaching**.



**SOLUTION #7: WE'RE NOT ALL FRIENDS HERE. THIS IS OKAY.** It's important to work from both sides of a social equation. A curriculum that is socially accurate, and efforts to "mess with the social hierarchy" help address the needs of all children.

**SOLUTION #8: REVIEW BULLY-PROOFING CURRICULA** Many school districts are implementing bully-proofing curricula. They hold a wealth of information and direction for a team working on behalf of a child with ASD. Come and see.



**SOLUTION #9: "I CAN DO THIS!" SELF-ESTEEM & CHILDREN WITH ASD** All bully-proofing research and curricula agree: positive self-esteem is a formidable opponent for a child who bullies. Here's how to promote positive self-regard in a child with ASD.



**SOLUTION #10: USE TEN CRAYONS TO COLOR THE REAL WORLD** The final solution places details on the Real World Map. The issue closes with a summary and glimpse of the Summer 2001 issue of *The Morning News*.



## INTRODUCTION



The best places to play are those that are discovered, and the research on bullying has created a playground of opportunity. As Marcel Proust (2000) says, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes".

The traditional myths surrounding bullying have not survived the onslaught of information of the last decade. *Gone* is any evidence that bullying is an inevitable part of childhood or a recess rite of passage. *Gone* is the singular advice to "ignore it". *Gone* is the coaching of innocent children to not "...wear that", "...say that", or "...do that" just because "...others will tease you." Parents and professionals have been handed an accurate understanding of an old and misunderstood problem, causing them to look at the same playgrounds and hallways with a renewed perspective.

This article translates bullying research into ten general solutions tailored to the unique profile of children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). The solutions *do not replace* the vast information available in new bully-proofing resources. They should be used *alongside* existing resources to ensure that children with ASD are included in bully-proofing efforts. Each solution is numbered 1-10 in the text. These solutions are intended to be used simultaneously and creatively like a brand new set of crayons, nothing dot-to-dot or sequential about it! With the simplicity and straightforward honesty of childhood as an attitude, and a brand new set of drawing tools, parents and professionals can "make a better picture". It is their turn to draw.



### Appendix A

*Gray's Guide to Bullying Part II: The Real World* uses childhood as a "backdrop". Childhood is a universal perspective and a shared frame of reference. It provides a great canvas for ideas. For example, this article uses childhood experiences as analogies to clarify and enhance the information. Silhouettes of children, like the one in the upper left hand corner of this page, announce and illustrate main sections (Clip Art, 2000). Since this article is long, the "kids" throughout make it easy to find and

refer to information. In addition, a box containing a small symbol indicates the information is expanded in a related Appendix. For example, *Appendix A: Activities for Cross-Context Communication* is represented with a telephone (above left). Together, the childhood analogies, silhouettes, and symbols serve as guides to the information.

After all is said and done, let's at least be realistic. We *can* eliminate bullying from the lives of children with ASD. Here's a new set of ten crayons. The first solution is to draw a map.

## SOLUTION #1: DRAW A MAP



Real results are the best kind. Professor Dan Olweus is a well-respected pioneer in bullying research and author of the classic book, *Bullying at School* (1993). He was the first to bring attention to the negative impact of bullying in Scandinavian schools. He gained the cooperation of the educational authorities in Norway to launch a nation-wide campaign to reduce bullying in schools. Two years later, follow-up studies revealed a fifty percent reduction in the incidence of bullying, a drop in antisocial behavior (vandalism, intoxication, truancy), and marked improvements in the "social climate" and student satisfaction with school life. The efforts of Olweus and the Norwegian school system significantly changed the social-emotional experience of an entire student population.



In terms of bully-proofing, parents seek genuine, positive results for their child. A professional seeks the same for a group of children. What is in their way? *The Real World*. In December of 2000, Dr. Tony Attwood and I asked a workshop audience to complete this sentence: "When someone says, 'In the real world', what they mean is...". Their responses described a phrase used to dismiss or avoid. For example, "...that is not the way I do things;" "...the world that doesn't include our friends, family, and familiar situations;" or "...you're asking me to do something I am too lazy to do!" Among adults, a reference to the Real World can discredit or disarm... an idea, dream, or inspiration.

In contrast, to a child at age eight the Real World contains a school, a place of worship, a playground, the homes of family and friends, a grocery store, and the people and (largely predictable) events within those settings. *It is so small*, the size alone could explain why positive or negative influences on a child's Real World have a significant impact. Parents and professionals concerned with addressing bullying in the Real World... *can*. A child's Real World is seven blocks long and two blocks wide.

Compared to the manageable physical size of a child's Real World, the topic of bullying is huge and hazy. It's easy to feel overwhelmed. Parents and professionals can bring it into focus by *drawing its limits*. A pencil and paper or a computer are all the tools needed to make a child's *Map of the Real World*. It contains the places, events, and significant people in a child's life. Places where bullying is occurring - and those with a high probability for bullying interactions - are circled. Specific problematic time slots are identified. Details are added as work progresses, helping to organize efforts and resources.

A Map of the Real World can also help a child define a bullying issue. Recently, students in my elementary social understanding group each drew their own map. Identified on each map were the "...places you visit or go to a lot." They drew their maps while I read aloud *Pinky, Rex, and the Bully* (Howe, 1996). Once the maps were completed, I asked them to circle their safest place(s) using their own "safest" color. I learned that children with ASD find the most unique safe places! Using a different color, each student circled dangerous places. The colored circles made it clear that a few very specific times and places are "dangerous". Most of each day is safe. There is nothing like a map to compare a perception of a situation with its accurate counterpart. Defining a problem is the first step to solving it. For parents, professionals, and children alike, a map in hand places other solutions within reach.

## SOLUTION #2: PLAY LEAPFROG TO SET A SAFER STAGE

Leapfrog is a childhood game that cannot be played alone. Rigby (1996) cautions those who may consider using a solo *Lone Ranger* approach to address bullying:

*It is often unwise for a parent or teacher to go on a One Person Crusade about bullying... The 'agitator', so-named, can in some circumstances become quite isolated and consequently disregarded. It is better to find out unobtrusively what staff members think about bullying at the school and to identify those who will support doing something new about bullying - seek to work with them (p. 118).*

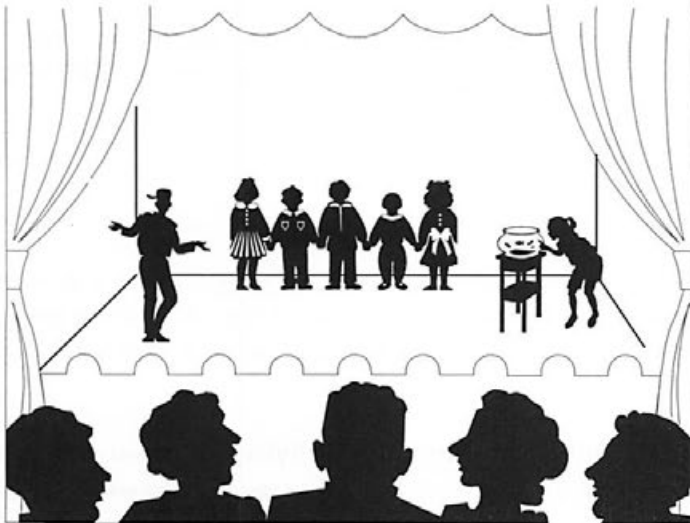


A parent or professional is likely to encounter traditional attitudes while creating a bully-proofing team: "Bullying is an inevitable part of childhood," or "A child develops character handling these situations on his own." How have these attitudes survived without the research to support them?

After a year of continually bumping into bullying myths, I have developed a theory. Generation after generation has come to very sincere childhood conclusions based on limited information. The adults of today are the children of the past. They discovered first-hand the loopholes in the traditional advice to "ignore it". Sean Connery, as William Forrester in the movie *Finding Forrester*, states: "Whenever there is something people don't understand, they rely on

their assumptions.” In other words, it’s hard to abandon a dusty childhood conclusion until there is information on the table. Toward the goal of developing a strong anti-bullying team, Ken Rigby, a noted Australian researcher, has developed a chart matching traditional myths with accurate information. It is a tailored guide to positive responses; an anecdote for those times when bullying mythology threatens to derail progress (see Rigby, 1996, pp. 119-121).

There are many books on the topic of bullying. They vary in focus and style. Still, among them there’s an echo: *Successful interventions require the active demonstration of the antithesis of bullying - social understanding, effective communication, and teamwork - among parents, professionals, and the community.*



This social ill requires a *social* cure. Like a play production involving teams coordinating behind the scenes and on stage, a child’s Real World isn’t much different. To a large extent his role depends upon the adults who surround him, with the script emerging from their efforts.

The play is going to start. It is inevitable that each child *will play* some type of role – *with or without* guidance and help from adults. It’s up to those involved and uninvolved whether the play proceeds via the efforts of positive teamwork, or “Otherwise”. Most people who have seen the play titled “Otherwise”, don’t elect to see it again.

The first two solutions in this article create the set and identify the stage crew. Solution #1 draws a map of The Real World. Solution #2 gives the Lone Ranger a rest and finds the concerned company of others. Solution #3 organizes the team and the task from this point forward; it is the admission booth through which all the other solutions (#4 - #10) must pass. Curtains up.

### SOLUTION #3: ORGANIZE A TEAM



An *Individualized Educational Planning Committee* (IEPC) meeting is an opportunity for a child’s parents and professional team to organize goals and services. For children who have an increased risk of participating in a bullying interaction, an IEPC is an excellent opportunity to identify the members of a child’s bully-proofing team. This team may include the child’s parents, a teacher, a social worker, a concerned neighbor, the principal, and/or a paraprofessional. This team may be affiliated with the district’s larger bully-proofing initiative. The team works throughout the year to:

- Improve discovery of bullying interactions and problematic relationships (Solution #4, pp 26 - 28).
- Develop and maintain effective cross-context communication skills (Solution #5, pp 28 - 30).

- Provide the training and tools that parents and professionals need to improve understanding of the child's challenges, and to model positive conflict resolution skills (Solution #6, pp 30 - 34).
- Include curricula, programs, and activities to help children in the social majority understand and socially include the child with ASD (Solution # 7, pp 35 - 37).
- Review a school's existing anti-bullying program to develop a program for the child with ASD (Solution #8, pp 38 - 41).
- Foster self-esteem in the child with ASD (Solution #9, pp 41 - 45).
- Develop a bully-proofing program for the child with ASD based on the anti-bullying curriculum and policies at his school. (Solution #10, pp 45 - 50).

All children are included in a school's bully-proofing curriculum. The team does not wait for a child to be the target of bullying to begin work. Instead, the team proactively ensures the meaningful inclusion of the child with ASD in the school's anti-bullying program.

## SOLUTION #4: ~~HIDE AND SEEK~~

How can a team working on behalf of a child with ASD know for sure if s/he is being bullied? *Gray's Guide to Bullying, Part I*, identifies the characteristics of children at risk of becoming targets of bullying. This section goes a step further to describe the warning signs demonstrated by typical children who are being bullied and considers them in light of autistic spectrum disorders.



**Discovering a Typical Child Targeted by Bullying** A child with good communication skills - who also feels adults are helpful - will readily seek assistance with a bullying concern. However, many parents and professionals discover a typical child is being bullied after a lengthy process wrought with frustration. Since targets of bullying characteristically have a lower self-esteem and lack social and communication skills, their hesitance in seeking help is not surprising. In addition, many children feel adults won't be helpful and proceed in trying to handle the situation alone.

For these reasons, parents of a typical child may become aware of bullying *indirectly*. A *change in a child's behavior* is often the first indication that a child is the target of bullying. This requires both parents and professionals to be sensitive and observant. Here are some behavioral warning signs of a potential problem (Voors, 2000, McNamara & McNamara, 1997):

- Torn clothing, 'not knowing' how bruises and scratches occurred, damaged belongings.
- Reluctance to attend (or talk about) school, drop in performance, choosing an illogical route to school.
- Avoiding playgrounds, staying close to adults during unstructured times, no friends.
- Taking more personal money than needed from home to school, stealing money.
- Sleep disturbances, waking frequently, having nightmares.
- Unusual sadness or depression, irritability, sudden outbursts of temper.

**Discovering Targeted Children with ASD** The warning signs that a child with ASD is a target may be confusing and misleading, often resulting in a delayed discovery of a bully-target relationship. First, behaviors characteristic of ASD confuse the issue; sensory, communication, and social factors may all play a role. In addition, a "warning sign" may be demonstrated as a unique behavior. An awareness of these complicating factors is important to improving identification of targeted children with ASD.

**The Similarity Between ASD and “Target” Warning Signs** Many of the warning signs that indicate a *typical* child may be a target of bullying are also behaviors frequently demonstrated by children with ASD; for example, a lack of friends and sleep disturbances. This makes it difficult to interpret the *meaning* of the behavior of the child with ASD: is he being bullied or is this behavior a result of autism or Asperger's Syndrome? Looking closer, sensory, communication, social factors and/or unique factors may each play a role.

**Sensory Factors** Sensory factors may cause a parent to suspect bullying where there is none, or miss it when it is occurring. A child may be hyper or hypo sensitive to sensory feedback, or both. For example, Amy may report that, “John is *hitting* me again!” What is really happening? John is six and like all six-year-olds moves continually, occasionally touching Amy. The opposite may occur. Brent continually hits Trevor. Trevor never reports the aggression because it causes Trevor no *pain*; the hitting affects him far less than it would a typical child. Another example: To Beth, the distortion of sound in the gymnasium “bullies” her each week. On edge and defending herself against the sounds in the gym, she struggles with the pain caused by the children shouting. She responds to others with an irritated and impatient posture as if *they* are bullying her. They're not.

**Communication Factors** Several communication factors hinder discovery of a targeted child with ASD, from lack of speech, to difficulties with organizing information, to poor timing or impaired pragmatics. Although there are numerous possibilities, here are a few examples:

- Carl has limited speech.
- Benny communicates exclusively via pictures and symbols.
- Stephanie struggles to organize ideas; she can tell four stories... simultaneously.
- Lindsey reports a bullying incident to her teacher using advanced vocabulary, detail, and accuracy, without first establishing the attention of the teacher. Lindsey's report goes unnoticed.
- Taylor reports to the principal that Charlie is being bullied. Taylor first establishes the attention of the principal and uses precise vocabulary and detail. Taylor's report is stated matter-of-factly and without any sign of emotion. His report is not taken seriously.

One of the most critical communication challenges directly impeding discovery of a targeted child with ASD is *Cross-Context Communication*, the sharing of information between environments. In the following section, *Play Telephone the Right Way*, cross-context communication is addressed in further detail.

**Social Factors** In addition to sensory and communication factors, social factors can impede discovery of a targeted child with ASD. A child may be: unaware of *intended meanings*, unable to emotionally sort present from past *experience*, or *misunderstood* by others. This section describes a few examples.

*Theory of Mind* (Leslie, 1987; Baron-Cohen, 1985) is the ability to make accurate guesses about what a person thinks, feels, and believes. Many children with ASD have difficulty applying Theory of Mind information, especially in the course of a fast-paced school day. Henry, age 8, is unaware of the negative intent of his peers who ask him to sing the National Anthem at lunch. Henry's peers are careful to “schedule” these patriotic recitals during times when adults are not around. The activity is not discovered.

Understanding negative intent doesn't always end the challenge. When Jed was younger, he was frequently bullied. Now he can identify negative intent, and is determined not to be anyone's fool. Lately, a few students have seemed friendly. Jed wants to be friends with them, but can't risk it. The slightest *genuinely friendly* teasing results in a negative reaction that Jed's peers do not understand. Friendly faces can hide hidden agendas. Choosing to “pass” on their friendliness in favor of being “no one's fool”, he is frequently alone. Jed does not report his confusion or feelings.



Finally, a child with ASD may be *first* a target of a child who bullies and *second* a target of adult misunderstanding or misguided responses. For example, a peer has been poking Eric with a pencil for an hour. Eric jumps up, grabs the pencil and breaks it. Eric - *and only Eric* - is firmly reprimanded. Another example: Three boys in woodworking class have targeted Todd. *Todd* is removed from woodworking class because he “can’t handle the social aspects” of the class. In both cases, the adults “miss” identifying the targeted child, while indirectly condoning the bullying behavior. A teaching opportunity is lost.

**Unique Factors** The team working on behalf of a child with ASD may discover a child’s involvement in bullying interactions via a unique factor, such as a new focused interest. One example from a parent:

*Casey went to day care before and after school, during summers and school breaks. After one week-long stay there he spent the entire weekend lifting weights. We finally found out why he was so obsessed about the weight lifting. He had to be prepared to fight the “bullies” at day care.*

Another example from a teacher:

*I am a special education teacher in middle school. My students were doing a unit on career development. At home and in several classes at school Angelo demonstrated a heightened interest in making money and the stock market. Angelo’s mom began paying him for jobs around the house. His counselor discovered by accident that Angelo was paying a student \$2.00 each morning. Once paid, the student would not call Angelo “Stupid” for the entire day.*

A focused interest is a frequent characteristic of children with ASD and could easily go unnoticed as a warning sign of bullying. In Angelo’s case, the new interest in money could have mistakenly been attributed to the start of the new unit on careers. Note that in adolescence, the special interest may be in the area of revenge, defense, weapons and/or the military (Attwood, 2001).

The challenge of determining if a child with ASD is a target of bullying requires adults to be informed and alert observers. An awareness of the typical warning signs coupled with an understanding of the factors that may cloud discovery is a start.

## SOLUTION #5: PLAY TELEPHONE THE RIGHT WAY



Many people remember the group childhood game of *Telephone*. A message is whispered child to child around a circle. This game frustrated me as a child. Although I repeated to the child on my right *exactly* what I heard from the child on my left - as the message was sent along through the ears and minds of several other children - the result was predictably an unrecognizable version of the original message. My experience with Telephone is an example of *cross-context communication* at its *worst* - the message couldn’t survive intact across a distance of eight feet!

*Cross-context communication* is the *recording* of information in one environment and the subsequent sharing of that same information in another. To help children with ASD live in neighborhoods free of bullying, it’s important to teach children with ASD cross-context communication skills so they may be able to effectively share their experiences with others.

Parents and professionals know that children with ASD often have difficulty describing situations that occur elsewhere due to several social-communication challenges. Add these obstacles associated with cross-context communication to the issues described surrounding the *discovery of a bullying interaction* (described previously), and the “level of difficulty” of reporting bullying interactions from one context to another becomes readily apparent. Consequently, teaching a child to share incidences of bullying will optimally begin early. This section shares a few ideas, starting young and proceeding through adolescence. Appendix A details several cross-context activities and is available for download: [www.TheGrayCenter.org](http://www.TheGrayCenter.org).



**Cross-Context Communication and Young Children with ASD** Good communication habits are prerequisite to teaching a young child with ASD to communicate across contexts. Linda Hodgdon, M.Ed., CCC-SLP (1998) identifies ten general guidelines to support communication with young children:

- 1) Get on the child’s level.
- 2) Establish attention.
- 3) Prepare the child for what is going to be communicated.
- 4) Use gestures and body language meaningfully, and not excessively.
- 5) Support communication visually.
- 6) Speak slowly and clearly.
- 7) Limit verbalization.
- 8) Include “wait time” in interactions.
- 9) Guide or prompt the child to respond *if needed*.
- 10) Stay with the interaction, modify adult communication as needed.

A new program for young children with ASD can enhance a team's social communication efforts. *More Than Words* (Sussman, 1999) is a video and workbook that identifies four early stages of communication (the *Own Agenda* stage, the *Requester Stage*, the *Early Communicator* stage, and the *Partner* stage). The program provides activities to enhance communication at each stage. The philosophy of building skills using an enjoyable, socially rewarding format with the emphasis on activities tailored for a child’s communication skills, provides a wonderful base for encouraging cross-context communication. As a side note: Another excellent resource that echoes the same philosophy is *It Takes Two to Talk* (Manolson, 1992). This book contains a wealth of information and easy games and activities to build communication skills in young children.

With an understanding of a child’s ability and good communication habits in place, parents and professionals can encourage communication between environments by: 1) making it routine, 2) modeling, and 3) making it fun. First, in the busiest schedules it’s the routines that survive (brushing teeth, taking a bath, communicating across environments). Carefully selecting and adding one cross-context activity for the daily routine will increase the likelihood for success. For example, a preschooler is taught to find mom or dad to announce that “My bath is finished!” each morning or evening. Second, adults can model how to share information from another environment using visual props. For example, Dad has lunch at *Burger King*. He brings the Burger King bag home and shares a few details about that activity. To ensure that this process is enjoyable, a child’s parents and teacher work together to develop creative ideas that will be interesting and fun. Activities of increasing difficulty may be selected as a child matures.

**Cross-Context Communication and Older Children with ASD** The cross-context communication “plot thickens” as a child with ASD grows older. Verbal abilities have improved and vocabulary has expanded though other factors continue to interfere with the sharing of information between environments. What at face value appears to be a reluctance or disinterest in sharing information may be due to: 1) difficulty recognizing that others do not have the information already; 2) challenges related to the skills required to recall, prioritize, sequence, and express events



across environments; 3) negative experiences with cross-context communication via report cards and phone calls from those perplexed by a child's behavior; and 4) a growing privacy/defensiveness regarding social skills. Mixed into the confusion is an approaching adolescence; a time when all children become more private.

Like younger children, good communication habits are also prerequisite to encouraging an older child with ASD to communicate across contexts. What follows is a list of ideas to foster and strengthen communication with an older child with ASD:

- 1) P.R. (Patience and Routine). Provide a relaxed daily opportunity to stop everything and talk one- on-one. Make time to do so. Allow time for responses.
- 2) Follow the *Reason before Request* rule. Share "why" as a prerequisite to directives.
- 3) Abandon assumptions in favor of collecting and sharing information. Ask questions and/or provide fill-in-the-blank type statements for the child to answer. Clarify confusing points.
- 4) Enhance important verbal communication with casual visuals, as examples: *Keep-Me-Posted* notes, feeling thermometers and gauges, and/or *Comic Strip Conversations* (Gray, 1994).
- 5) Lengthen attention span for unusual topics; demonstrate an active interest in the child's agenda.
- 6) Listen *literally*. The child may mean *exactly what he said* instead of the typical implied meaning. If unsure of the child's intent, seek clarification. It may change the response he receives.
- 7) Focus on the information that is being shared, look past awkward pragmatics.
- 8) Except when teaching and role-playing how thoughts can differ from statements, *be sincere*. Ensure that words = feelings = pragmatics = context.
- 9) When possible, share abstract concepts using understandable metaphors.
- 10) Admit communication and social mistakes. (OOPS! Wasn't listening? Say so, apologize.)

In general, the cross-context communication basics that apply to young children hold merit for those who are older: 1) make it routine, 2) model, and 3) make it fun and *worthwhile*. As part of the routine, share mistakes and their resolution. For example, Dad shares a draft of an article he wrote that is full of his editor's red-mark revisions. To keep cross-context communication fun, Mom sends home a postcard of the rail station in London to her son who is interested in trains. A few cross-context communication habits and one or two activities - selected *with* the child and employed on a regular basis - demonstrate that sharing information about past (or future) contexts and situations has *current* importance and meaning.

## SOLUTION #6: SIMON SAYS... DO THIS

Modeling effective conflict resolution skills all the time - or even "more often than not" - is a challenge for even the most mature adult. Parents and professionals are on the front lines of a child's life. Patience can be quickly lost or, on a better day, just continually threaten to slip from grasp. Ken Rigby (1996) writes, "G.K. Chesterton once suggested that the main purpose served by a school, apart from getting children out of the home, was to provide examples of adult behavior under stress." (p. 83).



**Adults Who Unintentionally Bully Children** *Gray's Guide To Bullying, Part I*, discussed the concept of *educational bullying*, where there is no "...conscious desire to hurt, still less any exultation at another's misery. Indeed, to those who practice this kind of bullying the bullying may be seen as for the victim's own good" (Rigby, 1996, p. 18). An example of educational bullying submitted by a parent:

*My son Doug, age 12, has Asperger's Syndrome. He came home from school with a writing assignment completed in his special education class. They had to write a fictitious story. He wrote: "Dinosaurs were the largest reptiles of all time. In fact, scientists believe one species still exists today. The Alligator. The Shark is also sometimes considered a "dinosaur" as it has changed very little through evolution..." He wrote four pages of perfectly accurate detail, with paragraphs, punctuation, everything! His penmanship was better than I have ever seen!*

*He was reprimanded because it was not a fictitious story about dinosaurs. Under intense pressure, he re-did the assignment. This is what he wrote: "A dinosaur in muy swimin pul. There was a Dingasor in my pol. The dingasr screemd and flow away." His handwriting regressed to a child of five years. There were several mis-spelled words. With assistance, the assignment was re-written a third time, with slight improvements in content, handwriting, and punctuation.*

There are similarities between the interaction between Doug and his teacher and the defining criteria of a bullying interaction: 1) repeated negative actions - or a singular event - toward a targeted individual, 2) an imbalance of power, and 3) difference in the affect of the individuals involved. There is an obvious potential danger: as a parent or professional seeks to teach compliance, a child with ASD learns to be submissive in a bullying interaction. This example brings to mind two important questions from *The Anti-Bullying Game* (Searle and Streng, 1996), a game designed for children and adolescents: 1. *What can you do if the bully is the teacher?* 2. *Is it OK to stand up to a grown-up?*

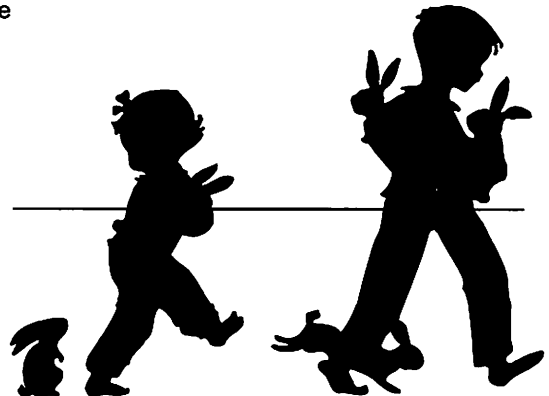
In addition to the similarities between the definition of bullying and the interaction between Doug and his teacher, there is the issue of self-esteem. Dr. Tony Attwood reminds workshop audiences that a child with ASD in a school setting has an exponentially increased social challenge in contrast to his peers. This makes protecting and maintaining a child's positive self-esteem as difficult as it is important. The worst insult for a child with ASD is to feel less intelligent (Attwood, 2000).

The example of Doug and the writing assignment is submitted to raise awareness, not to extend an accusation. There are few - if any - parents or professionals who can declare that all their interactions with children are mistake-free. In addition, like children, it's impossible for *adults* to learn if the focus is on accusation. A new presentation titled, *Correct, Confront, Concede, or Teach?* demonstrates the *teach* option is often available when adults choose to *correct, confront, or concede* (Gray, 2000). It is possible for parents and professionals to identify social mistakes to learn to respond to children with ASD effectively. In that light, Doug and the writing assignment will be re-visited at the close of this section.

**Social Goals for Parents and Professionals** Voors (2000) identifies a list of challenges for adults concerned with bullying behavior that may hold enhanced urgency for parents and professionals who work on behalf of children with ASD (list from pp 23-28):

- 1) Take personal responsibility for creating a world of nonviolence
- 2) Challenge stereotypes
- 3) Challenge the use of physical discipline
- 4) Challenge toxic media
- 5) Challenge gossip

To a child who focuses on - and imitates - adult behavior over that of peers, the statements, actions, and conflict resolution routines that parents and teachers follow take on increasing importance. Translating Voors' list (above) into corresponding anti-bullying goals for adults working with a child with ASD in his/her Real World results in this list:



- 1) *Ensure safe interactions* (socially, emotionally, and physically) between an adult and a child with ASD, at home and at school, that are free of the three defining criteria of bullying (repetitious and continual exposure to situations where there is an imbalance of power and a difference in the affect of the adult and child). Be socially creative (see the *New Art of Social Creativity*, below).
- 2) *Abandon assumptions* regarding the social information a child has and/or the motivation behind statements and behaviors. Avoid verbal labeling or thoughts that may be inaccurate (s/he's *lazy, stubborn, insensitive, oversensitive, timid, shy, irritating, inappropriate, manipulative*).
- 3) *Share accurate social information* that the child may be missing. Stay alert to misleading media and children's literature.
- 4) *Carefully model and teach effective conflict resolution*, consider the child's perspective and peaceful resolution between competing agendas, use literally reasonable consequences for misbehavior.
- 5) *Build strong lines of communication between professionals and parents*. This rule of thumb has always served me well: Everyone is telling the truth and making their best effort; abandon second guessing and work from there.



**The New Art of Social Creativity** Children with ASD require parents and professionals to learn the art of social creativity. Consider the previous example of Doug and the writing assignment. The goal is to teach the *meaning of fiction*, not *compliance to a request that is perceived as meaningless*. A little expansive thinking, pre-planning, and cooperation can bridge the social gap. Using the above list as a framework, social creativity is used on the professional side of the social equation to improve the odds of a positive outcome.

**1. Ensure a safe interaction.** The teacher knows Doug's strengths and how he learns. To help Doug write a fictional story, she "colors outside the lines" – thinking creatively to develop a plan based on Doug's talents and a few accommodations. Great authors of fiction often base their works on extensive research. *Facts are often the beginning* of great fiction. Since Doug has a command of factual information, he's half-way there. Doug may be able to help his peers find facts to use in their stories. Providing assistance to others is a valuable friendship skill. Can this be built into the activity?

**2. Abandon assumptions.** Doug's teacher leaves little to chance in teaching this difficult concept. She considers his challenges in relation to this assignment. Will Doug be able to independently follow directions that require a prerequisite ability to pretend? What about sequencing of ideas? Doug often interprets information literally. If he is encouraged to, "Make it up in his own mind..." ...*he will*, a written work straight from Doug's mind to the paper! How can *fiction* be meaningfully described or demonstrated to Doug? Doug's teacher uses all that she knows about his learning style to help her consider his perspective.

**3. Share accurate information.** The assistant and Doug prepare to complete the assignment. Doug is told that his knowledge of dinosaur facts will be wonderful for completing this assignment. Together, they visually identify (list, etc.) the steps, the materials needed (a writing box, pencil and paper, a computer, or a *Dictaphone*), and the people who can be of assistance. For this assignment, Doug needs his writing box and chooses to write with a paper and pencil. Doug created his writing box in September and it is full of photographs from home (vacation trips, family events, etc), objects, and pictures. It is kept in the classroom. Whenever there is a writing assignment, out comes the box.

Doug selects a photo for the context of the story. It is of his birthday party last year. Birthday party photo and dinosaur at hand, here we go (drawing all the way: mind maps, doodling):

- The dinosaur has a name. The dinosaur's name is \_\_\_\_\_. *Omnivore?* Great name!
- How will he get the invitation? Can he read? Oh, a friend will help him read? Nice friend!
- How long is Omnivore? He is \_\_ feet long. The dining room is \_\_ feet long. Will he fit?
- Let's look at that picture. The people at the birthday party are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. (Out come the photos of the beach, woods, and Disney World.) Oh - the party has to be moved outdoors? Which place?

The drawings from the brainstorming session are selected for the final story and sequenced. Due to Doug's difficulty with fine motor skills and specifically, handwriting, he dictates the story. This ensures he has only one difficult task to tackle at a time – developing a fictional story is challenge enough! When the assignment is completed, the word *fiction* is introduced. "Doug, your facts helped us include a dinosaur at your birthday party. Of course, it's a story that never *really* happened...*it's fiction*. Just like Tom Clancy, you used facts to write great fiction!"

**4. Carefully model and teach effective conflict resolution.** Here's a different scenario. The assignment is visually described, step by step, writing box ready, and *Doug isn't happy*. He would prefer not to combine *anything* in his writing box with facts about dinosaurs. He's emphatic, "*IT CAN'T BE DONE. I WON'T DO IT. YOU'RE WRECKING IT.*" Doug's objections sound like defiance; the genuine possibility exists they are sincere ideas with an awkward delivery. To *err in assessing Doug's motivation is socially costly*...as costly as "just giving in". There are some teaching options open, for example:

*It takes two points to make a line.* The first option is the most important: Lines of conflict, like all lines, are determined with two points. Doug has one point, and with his loud objections he has just put it down. *The teacher still has the other point*; there is no conflict as long as it stays with the teacher. Considering Doug has a social impairment, this conflict is not regarded as an *obstacle* to completion of the assignment. Instead, Doug's objections provide an *opportunity* to model and teach social skills *as part of* the assignment. It is here that it is determined if Doug will gain additional practice fighting - or - learning effective conflict resolution skills. It is the teacher's choice.

*Acknowledge the child's belief(s) and frustration.* Doug is angry. Some ideas: 1) Use a thermometer (Attwood, 2000) to help Doug identify what he is feeling. 2) Write, don't talk. The assistant and Doug exchange notes: he writes out his frustration, the assistant writes about how she wants to help Doug complete the assignment. They develop a compromise. 3) Doug is still struggling to control his emotions? Shelve the argument: *literally*. Place the written argument on the bookshelf. Take a break. Return and retrieve the written argument and start over, taking Doug's written arguments into consideration.

*Consider an alternate route.* Doug's teacher demonstrates positive conflict resolution. There is nothing lost and much to be gained if everyone makes it to the destination safely. Maybe it's facts first, fiction later (tomorrow?); a lengthened timeline for assignment completion; or a plan that compromises agendas. What about two papers? One paper with facts only, the other a joint effort with facts and the use the writing box? (Too much work and thus, unfair? Not if it's Doug's idea! Extend the due date.)

*When's the break?* This assignment is relatively easy for most children, yet *very challenging for Doug*. A break is scheduled in the work plan. If recess is the break, is it relaxing for Doug?

**5. Build strong lines of communication between professionals and parents.** The special education teacher contacts Doug's parents. "Doug tackled a difficult assignment today like a hero. Here's how he did it... Congratulate him when he gets home, he may be a little more tired than usual." Sometimes, the outcome may not be

as positive as parents and professionals would like, or they may disagree regarding one or more aspects of a child's educational placement or program. There *is* a solution - Solution Circles may help.

*Solution Circles* (Pearpoint & Forest, 1999) is an effective and efficient problem-solving approach. Six to twelve people form a group, with the following roles identified: problem presenter, process facilitator, note taker, and the remaining members of the team. There are four six-minute steps; the entire process takes less than thirty minutes:

- Step 1: The problem presenter has six uninterrupted minutes to describe the problem. If finished prior to six minutes, the group waits for six minutes to pass. This is critical, providing shy people with open time to talk freely. The six minutes also limits those who could talk much longer!
- Step 2: Brainstorm. Everyone offers ideas without any one person dominating. It is not a time to clarify the problem or ideas, or for the problem presenter to comment. The problem presenter listens; the recorder writes.
- Step 3: Dialogue led by the problem presenter – a chance to clarify the problem and explore the suggested ideas. The focus is on positive new steps only, not on what can't be done.
- Step 4: The problem presenter and the group decide on solutions that may be implemented within the next three days. A member of the group volunteers to call the problem presenter in three days to follow-up.

The approach is highly productive; the structure maximizes problem-solving while minimizing the pitfalls.

**The Curriculum of Adult Responses** Parents review their child's school schedule - math, reading, social studies, science, physical education - and mistakenly conclude that there is no social curriculum in place. There is: all day, every day. At home and at school. Parents and professionals underestimate the *Curriculum of Adult Responses*. Doug and the writing assignment is one example. Here are others:

- A child blurts out every answer during a class discussion, all classmates watch the teacher to learn how to respond to an irritating peer.
- A father arrives to pick up his daughter from school only to discover that again she has gone off to see the fish in the science room. Together, they sit down and write a plan to use the next day.
- A child with ASD is subtly pestered by a peer. The teacher corrects the peer. She shows the child with ASD how to respond to the peer should it happen again, and asks to be informed.

Learning to use *The Curriculum of Adult Responses* as an effective instructional strategy is not as easy as it may seem. Information is available. *How To Be A ParaPro* (Twachtman-Cullen, 2000) is a wonderful resource to help parents and professionals respond effectively to children with ASD. Designed for paraprofessionals, it has applicability for parents, teachers, consultants and administrators. *Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* (Attwood, 1998) is another resource full of practical information. Published just three years ago, many in the field consider it a classic. Finally, the book *Autism and Learning* (Powell & Jordan, 1997) is a new unsung hero in the field. Each chapter is a highly practical demonstration of how to minimize mistakes on the teaching side of the social equation. To quote:

*We may not be able to share autistic ways of understanding but that is our problem as teachers and our starting point for any move towards real learning on the part of our students. There is a natural tension (which professionals need to resolve) between, on the one hand, respecting the individual's autism and so working within its constraints, and on the other hand, trying to enable individuals with autism to work effectively and live productively within the non-autistic world by improving the effectiveness of their thinking and learning (p. 1)*

Parents and professionals are a powerful social curriculum. The Curriculum of Adult Responses in the hands of a team also learning the Art of Social Creativity, models social behavior and conflict resolution skills that are consistent with the social objectives they write for their child with ASD.

## SOLUTION #7: WE'RE NOT ALL FRIENDS HERE. THIS IS OKAY.



*Gray's Guide to Bullying Part I: The Basics* (Gray, 2000) described a type of relational/social bullying that - unlike bullying that is based in negative intent - arises instead from social curiosity (Gray, 2000, p. 12 in this edition). Here, children who are almost always caring and sensitive toward their peers conduct an impromptu "social experiment". Quite unintentionally they "stumble across" a classmate's unique response or characteristic. For example, Angie begins barking like a dog. As an unlikely sixth grade behavior, the barking draws the attention of Angie's peers. What starts with the exchange of a few nervous smiles and quizzical glances, quickly results in a group of children who gather around Angie, giggling. Someone calls out, "Angie, moo like a cow!" ...and she *does!* What's up with this? This form of bullying has ironically mixed potential – children with the greatest capacity to become part of the solution to bullying are suddenly engaging in one of its most dangerous forms, as Voors (2000) describes:

*In its most insidious form, bullying involves a cruel form of humor. When children associate humor with violence in a bullying situation, they are likely to become desensitized to another person's pain. Just as a person cannot feel anger and emotional warmth at the same time, one cannot experience cruel humor and empathy for another person at the same time. ...The laughter that causes bystanders to become less and less affected by peer abuse makes the abuse more likely to happen again. Their laughter reinforces the instigator's perception that nothing is wrong with the behavior (p. 11).*

Parents and professionals can help children avoid these mistakes with instructional strategies and age appropriate social/emotional information embedded in the general curriculum. Heading off their confusion with information and support gives compassion an opportunity to play a role in the classroom.

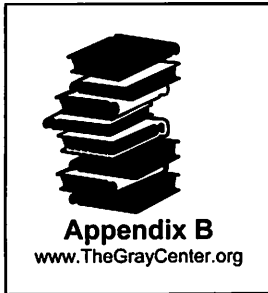
**A Case for Social Accuracy** There's frequently a difference between how a teacher refers to the social environment of a classroom and *how it is experienced by children*. It's the classic gap of fiction vs. fact. For example, a teacher comments, "...we are *all* friends here...". Oh, really? What grade is this? How children perceive and understand what a *friend* is changes rapidly as a child grows: in preschool a friend is the person who has a desired toy; at age six a child changes "best friends" more frequently than underwear; by age nine a friend has a good personality and matching interests. Looking around a classroom the first day of school, a child makes a rapid social assessment: thrilled to see some children and passionately disappointed to see others. The fact is we are *not* all friends here and don't want to be either. Ironically, the discrepancy between a child's actual social life and the fictional reports from adults are not usually problematic. The teacher says we're all friends here; we know we're not. No hands raised in confusion or harm done.

In the same classroom is Cedric, eight years old. He is a child with ASD who often makes literal interpretations and is not always privy to the "intrinsic" social understandings of his peers. It's the first day of school. The teacher includes in her opening comments that, "...everyone is a friend here. Friends cooperate with one another." Cedric believes her. At recess, two "friends" ask Cedric to pull down his pants and he cooperates. Or, the teacher comments in passing that "...a friend is always there for you". This is great news to Cedric. The first unsuspecting classmate who extends a friendly gesture on the playground inherits Cedric as a social shadow. Where typical children magically go about their social business *despite* the conflicting information from their teacher, Cedric does not. In contrast, his only source of social information is that imparted by adults. It is all very confusing. His social impairment is compounded by the information he is given.



A developmentally accurate perspective changes the vocabulary slightly, and directs parents and professionals to select socially accurate resources. It changes the tone, right from the start:

*You may look around the classroom today and see friends from last year. They may be your friends again this year. They may not. Some may discover new friends. You may see children here you have never met. All of this is okay. One thing we all have in common: We are Classroom Colleagues. A colleague is someone who works with you. A colleague may also be a friend. Like your mom or dad, you will work alongside people you like and people you don't like. If we don't agree, that's interesting. We will learn to work it out. We'll develop rules to keep everyone's body, feelings, and belongings safe. We are going to have a great year.*

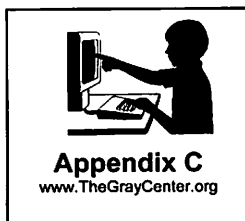


Children's literature is a great source of social information for children; it expands and applies concepts. Conversely, children's books may also be highly misleading. This applies to general social information as well as to bullying. Some children's literature accurately reflects a child's social experiences. For example, *Making Friends* (Rogers, 1987), describes the sudden social ups and downs of play among preschoolers in a positive, honest, and straight-forward manner. Other titles for older children include *Kids Write Through It: Essays from Kids Who Have Triumphed Over Trouble* (Fairview Press, 1998), and *We Can Work it Out: Conflict Resolution for Children* (Polland, 2000). The great resources are out there, unfortunately nestled on the shelves among the "bad boys" of children's literature. To shorten the search,

Appendix B reviews children's books that address friendship, self-esteem, and bullying with consideration of the unique learning style and social issues of children with ASD. Appendix B is available to download from the website: [www.TheGrayCenter.org](http://www.TheGrayCenter.org).

**Messing with the Social Hierarchy** Many schools use programs that build relationships and a strong sense of classroom community. Dr. Barry Prizant CCC-SLP, a clinical scholar, researcher and consultant for children with ASD, refers to this as "messing with the social hierarchy". These programs support "climate factors" that maximize positive interactions and minimize the potential for bullying. This section looks at strategies that mess with the social hierarchy in elementary school programs.

One of the most dramatic examples of a teacher messing with the social hierarchy is documented in the book by educator Vivian Gussin Paley, *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (1992). She announces a new rule in her kindergarten classroom at the beginning of the year, "You can't say, 'You can't play!'" The book is an account of the changes in the social hierarchy. in her classroom and "...illustrates how the teacher's art can attack the evil of exclusion at its childhood root" (Bell, 1992). Though I am still undecided regarding my opinion of the premise of her book and the social experiment it describes, Paley breaks new social ground with implications deserving of discussion.



Many elementary schools structure relationships and employ instructional techniques and programs to promote a positive school community. Many of these ideas are elements of best practices. Here are some examples:

- *Peer mediators.* Peer mediators are classmates trained to serve as a "third party". in the resolution of typical conflict situations. At Jenison Public Schools they are called *Conflict Managers* (Williams & Keehn, 1992). These upper elementary students agree to serve as role models and receive training in

active listening skills and step-by-step conflict resolution. The result? A reduction in office referrals for recess problems. (Note: In a bullying interaction, children who bully are not seeking resolution, making peer mediation inadvisable.)

- *Buddies*. Many schools are pairing younger students with older *buddies*. Buddies help with academic tasks and assume a “big brother” or “big sister” role. To younger children often frightened by older children, a buddy program can replace fears with positive experiences. In turn, older students learn to nurture and assist those with less academic and physical power.
- *Alternative Recess*. One setting with a high-risk for bullying on any Real World Map is the playground, specifically, recess. Many children find this unstructured time stressful. Some schools use recess alternatives to ensure all students have a chance to relax and recharge. Appendix C contains a list of recess alternatives and is available for download: [www.TheGrayCenter.org](http://www.TheGrayCenter.org).
- *Cooperative Learning* (Johnson & Johnson, 1991, Dishon & Wilson O’Leary, 1994) is a research- based method of instruction for teaching academic material, social skills, and democratic values. The emphasis is on the completion of tasks in learning groups instead of individual work. (Side note: When involving a child with ASD in cooperative learning activities, provide structure to their role within the group. For example, assign a task that the student may complete independently to ultimately merge with the efforts of the group, gradually increasing group involvement with subsequent activities).

**Social/Emotional Curricula and Activities** General education teachers base their efforts on selected curricula in math, reading, science and spelling, enhancing those lessons with creative activities that add meaning and applicability. Social understanding and social skills are taught via the same process. A curriculum provides the guidebook; the teacher brings it to life.

There are many packaged general education curricula that promote positive social and emotion-management skills. One example is the *Affective/Social Skills: Instructional Strategies and Techniques Program (ASSIST)*, developed by Pat Huggins (1990-1997). This program fosters positive self-esteem, self-management, interpersonal relationships and emotional understanding. The series of six volumes addresses topics from *Creating a Caring Classroom* to *Helping Kids Find Their Strengths*. The program may be incorporated as part of a school climate curriculum for children in elementary grades.

In addition to packaged curricula, some of the best activities promoting a positive classroom climate are creative classroom projects. Alice Walker, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Color Purple*, also wrote a children’s book, *The Green Stone* (1991). The story is about Johnny who loses his green stone and discovers that demonstrating kindness is the only way to find it. The book has been used to instigate a variety of classroom activities, for example: 1) a single green stone is passed around a classroom as children assist one another, 2) each child keeps a green stone in his/her desk as a reminder of lessons in the story, or 3) the teacher places a green stone in a large jar whenever acts of kindness are observed.

Specifically related to the acceptance and support of children with ASD, the lesson plan *The Sixth Sense* (Gray, 1996) helps typical children ages seven through eighteen understand their classmate. The activity opens with a discussion of the five senses. Children identify how they would assist a classmate who cannot see or hear by listing a variety of ideas. They are introduced to the Sixth Sense – the *social sense* - and how it works. This results in another list of ideas to help classmates who struggle with social skills. Extensive informal experience with the Sixth Sense suggests it has a positive long-lasting impact.

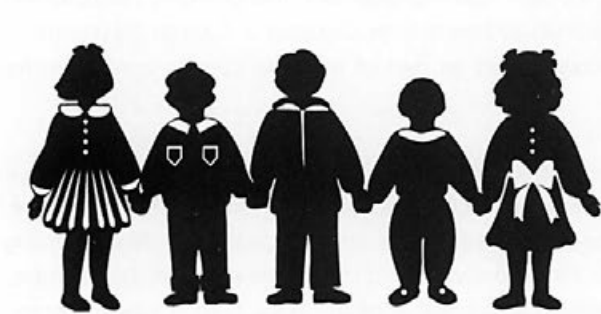
School programs that mess with the social hierarchy and social curricula can strengthen social understanding and peer relationships. In addition, information that explains unanswered social questions regarding a classmate with ASD can replace childhood curiosity with compassion. The basics of social understanding foster Social Readiness and provide a great back-drop for a bully-proofing assembly.

## SOLUTION #8: REVIEW BULLY-PROOFING CURRICULA

Many school districts currently adopt bully-proofing curricula as a part of their educational program. This section describes an assembly in Jenison, Michigan. Dr. Marcia McEvoy, a licensed psychologist and prevention specialist, works with fourth grade students (ages 9 – 10) using a bully-proofing program she developed (McEvoy, 2000). The program utilizes accurate information, discussion, a video, and role-plays to cover the topic. Through my notes, those reading this article are invited to come along to this morning assembly. Welcome to Pinewood Elementary School and Jenison Public Schools.

A few comments before the children arrive. Assemblies like the one we are about to observe are at the heart of a bully-proofing initiative. They represent core attitudes, concepts, vocabulary and skills that are reinforced with activities in the classroom. That's why we're here. It's important to watch and listen carefully for elements that may be confusing for a child with ASD. Specifically, our goal is to consider *context*, *content*, and *style*. Take plenty of notes.

The Jenison Public Schools' bully-proofing program for fourth graders tours among several local elementary schools, scheduled on dates spanning a few months. A similar arrangement is likely in other districts. This enables observation of a program *prior* to attendance by the child with ASD. Despite the advantages of previewing a program, an awareness of elements that will vary from school to school is essential. At Pinewood Elementary we are seated in a comfortable, carpeted media center. Will that be the same environment chosen for the assembly that the child with ASD will attend? For a child with ASD the difference between attending a program in a carpeted media center vs. a sound-bombarding gymnasium is significant! This introduces a general rule of thumb: *factors surrounding an assembly vary*. Anticipating the possible variations (setting, presenter, time of day) can result in logical accommodations for the child with ASD. In this case, the value of pre-planning translates an *ounce* of prevention into a hippopotamus-size benefit to the child.



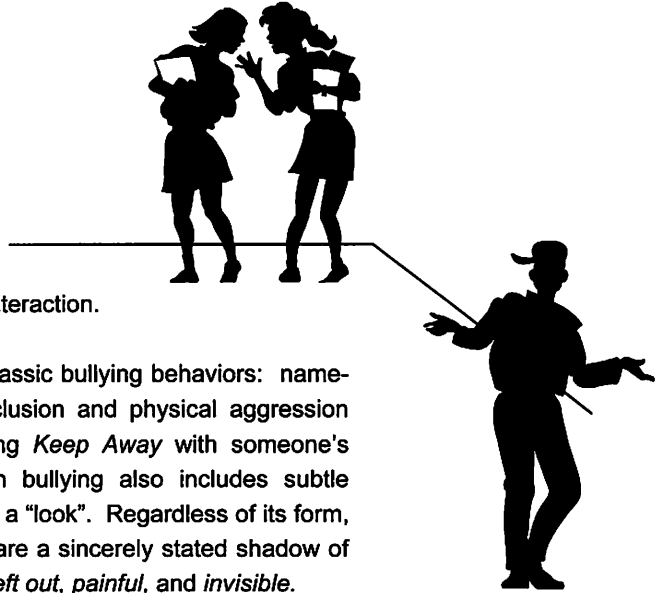
The assembly is about to start. We are surrounded by several classes of fourth graders. Fourth graders are an intriguing population. Physically, they are yesterday's six-year-olds stretched over the outlines of wish-we-were adults. They sit perched on the social development fence between "a friend is someone who has a toy you want", and "a friend is someone who shares not only toys, but interests, beliefs, and secrets." Public with their knowledge of current fads and trends, they are private regarding the

thread-bare stuffed lion that still accompanies them to bed. Here among the experts on playground politics and apprentices to adolescence, the topic of bullying meets its match. Audience to the first glimpses of ethics and morality, the vantage point of fourth graders is original and open-minded. This will be an interesting morning.

This bully-proofing assembly is a half-day program covering a wealth of information in a relatively short amount of time. Standards of collaboration, respect for the ideas of others, group problem-solving and student participation is established within minutes and will continue throughout the assembly. This fast-paced program holds the attention of participants by alternating instruction with role-play. Working with Dr. McEvoy and Pinewood's elementary school counselor, Ms. Judy Williams, the children discuss and practice the following concepts and skills:

- What bullying is and isn't.
- Power in social relationships.
- The feelings elicited by bullying, from all three sides (child who bullies, child targeted by bullying, and the social majority).

- Motivation behind bullying.
- Why some children are targeted by bullying.
- The impact of bullying, immediate and long term.
- Help for the social majority: what to do.
- The distinction between *ratting* and *reporting*.
- Three rules to follow to ensure a safe school.
- How to respond to a child who initiates a bullying interaction.



**The Bullying Basics** The students readily identify classic bullying behaviors: name-calling, threats, and put-downs (Loser, Stupid, Ugly); exclusion and physical aggression (hitting, kicking, tripping, blocking someone's path, playing *Keep Away* with someone's belongings). That definition is expanded as they learn bullying also includes subtle aggression that is equally damaging: a glance, a gesture, or a "look". Regardless of its form, the reports of participants regarding the impact of bullying are a sincerely stated shadow of the research: it makes you feel *bad, stupid, embarrassed, left out, painful, and invisible*.

According to Pinewood's fourth graders, social power belongs to classmates who have more strength, size, verbal skills, athletic skills, intelligence, good looks and/or money relative to their peers. Conversely, their list of children with less social power includes deficits in identical characteristics: children who are smaller, quieter, clumsy or awkward, less intelligent and/or who wear outdated, oversized, or worn clothing. They learn social power is okay and it carries an inherent responsibility to use it positively.

By a raise of hands, the majority of fourth graders admit to bullying someone at least once at some time in their school career. So, why do children bully? According to these students, children bully others to: feel better, scare others, have more power and control, be cool, get what they want, and/or deal with negative feelings they can't express, like jealousy, anger, and resentment.

The participants learn that children who bully are likely to have difficulty as adults (increased likelihood of drug abuse, abusive relationships, and being arrested for a crime). In other words, a fourth grader who reports bullying to an adult is ultimately helping the child who is targeted *and* the child who bullies.

**The Difference Between Reporting and Tattling** An issue for fourth graders is the fear of being accused of "tattling" or "ratting". Dr. McEvoy makes a clear distinction between "ratting" and "reporting". It's *ratting* if the reason for telling an adult is to: get help for a problem you can solve yourself, get your own way, make yourself "look good", or get someone you don't like in trouble. Conversely, it's *reporting* if someone's body, feelings, friendships, or property is getting hurt.

**Help for the Social Majority** Children *are* the social "front lines" in any school. They are most likely to be among the first to observe or become aware of bullying relationships. Eighty-four of every one hundred students are empathetic to children who are bullied and not likely to be direct participants in a bullying interaction. Empowering this group by defining their role is critical. This is a friendly army that has previously never been given the opportunity to train or to demonstrate their potential. That is, not until today. Pinewood's fourth graders learn how to recruit adult assistance to help both the targets of bullying *and* the children who bully. They are encouraged to choose a course of action from the following:

- Privately report the incident to an adult.
- Encourage a child who is being bullied to report the bullying, accompanying that child if necessary.
- Encourage a good friend who is bullying to stop it before they get into trouble.

Learning these skills in a large group demonstrates that everyone is involved in the same effort, and that reports to adults will fall on informed ears. A new set of tools has just been handed to children who previously felt powerless.

The children are also trained regarding *how to report* bullying incidents to achieve the best results:

- Make the report privately, away from other children.
- When making the report tell *who* is involved, *where* the bullying occurs, and *what* form the bullying takes.
- Tell a second adult if the first adult does not take any action.

Having permission to report bullying concerns and the skills to do so, these fourth graders are a step closer to playing an active role in the social climate of their school.

Three rules are identified in the course of the assembly to ensure a safer school environment (Garrity et.al., 1994): 1) We will not bully other students; 2) We will help others who are being bullied; and 3) We will use extra effort to include all children, and report deliberate exclusion.

**Role-Plays** New rules require practice. Here that practice takes the form of role-plays. Children are asked to volunteer to participate. Consistently, they are placed in the role of the social majority or the child who is targeted. The role of the child who bullies is consistently assigned to adults. Students practice strategies for responding to a child who bullies. These include:

- *Poker Face.* The analogy is made to playing the game of *Old Maid*, where the ability to maintain an expressionless face increases the chances of fooling an opponent. Students are cautioned that – presented with the “Old Maid response” – a child who bullies may at first *try harder* to achieve the desired reaction until ultimately bored by the lack of response.
- *Act Like You Don’t Care.* Students are coached to respond to the child who bullies with statements like, “Is this supposed to hurt my feelings?” or “...so?”
- *Stand Up to the Child Who Bullies.* Students practice using a straight posture, serious tone of voice, and direct eye contact while saying, “That’s not true,” “That’s not okay with me,” or “Stop or I’ll report you.” The tone of voice must be firm without being confrontational. The incident is reported if the bullying continues.
- *Use a Comeback.* Students are forewarned that comebacks are among the most difficult responses to use effectively in response to a child who bullies. There is a fine social line between defending and confronting that cannot be crossed; it is important not to hurt the feelings of the child who bullies. Comeback statements include: “Sorry you feel that way,” “Don’t go there,” “That’s getting really old,” “Talk to the hand” (hand up, walk away), “Have a great day” (big smile), “Thank you, what a kind thing to say.”
- *Compliment the Child who Bullies.* Students practice responses like, “I’m sorry you feel that way, but I think you’re really: pretty / good at math / great on a basketball court.”



Place a child in front of an audience of peers to role-play and his or her emerging personality ...*emerges*. In the *Land of Being Ten*, to be “first” is a position coveted by some and dreaded by others. Many children embrace the chance to be “on stage”. Other children pray their turn will pass unnoticed. A moment earlier a face among a cross-legged crowd, the child called to the front now responds with unique gestures and statements.

All of the students practice *similar situations* as they “respond to the bully”; the similarity ends there. The *variety* of their personalities becomes strikingly apparent. Most children deliver new comebacks with assuredness and flash a smile to Dr. McEvoy as if to say, “That worked,

what’s next?” It’s readily apparent that they catch on quickly with abilities that allow them to be socially successful. A few quiet children step back, and cast longing glances toward where they were sitting just seconds earlier. These children will require more practice to be effective in responding to a child who bullies.



Before closing this section on general education bully-proofing curricula, here are a few ideas to enhance this important information and assist children as they learn and apply new skills:

- Schedule a bully-proofing assembly as close to the start of the school year as possible. Most bully-target relationships are established by the end of the sixth week of school.
- Identify "at-risk" children. These children may be identified as those who hesitate and need additional coaching during the role-play segment of the assembly, or who meet several of the defining characteristics of targets of bullying.
- Develop a small follow-up practice group for at-risk children with a few *low-risk* children led by an adult they can report to with bullying concerns.
- Develop a simple form that all children *may* use to seek help as a target of bullying or to report a concern regarding a bullying relationship among other students (Williams, 2001). This form may include a written reminder of the differences between ratting and reporting and how to make an accurate report. Walk "at-risk" children through the process of reporting.
- Post throughout the school - and all year long - the basic lessons of the bully-proofing assembly.
- Sponsor a bully-proofing poster contest. Winning posters are framed in the hall each year.

The close of the assembly marks the placement of the last brick on the *foundation* of a bully-proofing program for a child with ASD. It is good we were paying attention! Actually, I am glad I invited you – you were very attentive! We collect our notes as the children leave. Some elements of the program will be easily understood by our child with ASD. Other elements - in particular many of the suggested responses – are likely to be ineffective. We can tailor this information - along with what we've learned from the bullying research - to ensure our child is included in the effort to provide all children with a safe learning environment. Packing solutions #1 - #8 into our tote bag for future reference, we leave the media center.

## SOLUTION #9 "I CAN DO THIS!" SELF-ESTEEM & CHILDREN WITH ASD



For children with ASD a positive self-esteem is critically important. There is a *social challenge* that extends from the moment the alarm rings in the morning until the doors of home close behind them at the end of the day. Like an amusement ride without any structure, *social* is a continual, fast-moving, unpredictable factor that snakes throughout the day. Feeling safe and secure requires internal stability; reserves of self-esteem make the ups and downs of social errors tolerable. This section discusses five considerations related to teaching self-esteem as part of a social understanding and anti-bullying program for a child with ASD.

**1. What does self-esteem mean?** *Self-esteem* is an internal assessment of self; positive self-esteem is pride in *who you are* and *what you can do*. The song, *Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head* by B.J. Thomas (Bacharach, B. & David, H., 1970) is a musical rendition of just one of the benefits of self-esteem: "...But there's one thing I know. The blues they send to greet me won't defeat me. It won't be long 'til happiness steps up to greet me!"

Children with positive self-esteem are more likely to: have a positive attitude, bounce back from disappointments, take positive risks, keep themselves physically and emotionally safe, set goals, feel free to use talents and unique traits and resist negative peer pressure. Self-esteem is "learned and earned" (Kaufman, G., Raphael, L. and Espeland, P. 1999).



## 2. Caught target coaching. Go back three spaces.

Discussed in the last issue of *The Morning News*, *Target Coaching* (Gray, 2000) refers to adult efforts to make a child less “teasable” with suggestions to the child to change behaviors, interests, or dress. It is advice to “not wear that” or “talk like that” because it may “invite” teasing. In contrast to negative behaviors that require correction, Target Coaching focuses on traits and behaviors that are *not bad*; they are just *different*. In many cases these may be characteristics that the child *values as personal strengths*. Adults who engage in Target Coaching are well-intentioned, though uninformed - confusing the *topic* of a bullying interaction with the *actual reason* the child is a target. The relationship between Target Coaching and self-esteem is discussed in this section.

Counterproductive to the positive efforts described in Solutions #1 - #8 of this article, Target Coaching may be damaging to the self-esteem of a child with ASD. It comes wrapped in three unstated messages for the child: 1) Who you are is not okay, 2) You need to match your interests and/or mannerisms to other children, and 3) We believe you are *inviting* the teasing (which also makes you responsible). In addition to the potential for diminished self-esteem, the research suggests that Target Coaching is ineffective:

*...a widely held view...is that external deviations cause victimizations. It is argued that students who are fat, red-haired, wear glasses, or speak with an unusual dialect...are particularly likely to become victims of bullying. This hypothesis received no support in empirical analyses ...and suggests that external deviations play a much smaller role in the origin of bully/victim problems than generally assumed.” (excerpted from Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999)*

At this point I have a personal confession to make. When my children were preschoolers they loved the classic game, *Candy Land* (Abbott, 1949). For those unfamiliar with Candy Land, it is a pre-school board game with a color-coded path, a coordinating deck of sixty-four cards, and a plastic set of gingerbread men to represent the players. Along the path are various locations, for example, the *Lollipop Woods* or the ultimate destination, the *Candy Castle*. As a busy mom, I became painfully aware that this simple game could go on *for hours*. As an intelligent Mom, I figured out why. Two cards, *Peppermint Forest* and *Gum Drop Mountains* could send a player from a position of *almost winning* (i.e. game over!) - back to the beginning (i.e. guess not). This candy-coated twist of fate could occur an *infinite* number of times, delaying dinner, chores, and bedtime *...unless* I could muster the courage to endure the disappointed cries as I *arbitrarily* announced that the game ended NOW. This was behavior unbecoming a visitor to Candy Land, and also very unpopular. So... during the still and sticky hours of an August night, with flashlight in hand, I removed the cards for the Peppermint Forest and Gum Drop Woods from the deck of cards. The Candy Land game was fixed - I could play the game *and* have a life, too.

A targeted child with ASD is not to blame for a bullying relationship. Like removing the Peppermint Forest from the deck of cards in Candy Land, taking Target Coaching out of the response repertoire of parents and professionals opens up time for new possibilities:

*One child psychiatrist found that parents were amazed at how quickly the problem could be solved when the victim/child became convinced that he or she was not at fault and it was the bully who was the source of the predicament. Giving up the self-blame that accompanies bullying may be all it takes for a victim to interrupt the pattern (Fried & Fried, 1996, p. 132).*

The “best bets” for addressing bullying are found in the *exact opposite direction* of Target Coaching – keeping blame where it belongs while supporting the child with ASD.

**3. Positive self-esteem can be taught!** Positive self-regard is the sum of many internal *and* external experiences. Praise is one among many factors that contribute to self-esteem. For children with ASD, praise often seems to “miss” its target – a teacher says “Great job!” ...to a child who seems unresponsive. Here, the art of social creativity, the communication habits for parents and professionals, and the Curriculum of Adult Responses are recruited to assist in teaching self-esteem. All of those skills are right at home working alongside these suggestions to foster self-esteem in a child with ASD (adapted from McNamara & McNamara, 1997, pp 49-50; Voors, 2000, pp 78-91):

- *Give specific and generous praise.* State, “Great score on the math test!” instead of “Good work!” Remember, social gestures that are simple for a typical child are worthy achievements for the child with ASD. At least half of all Social Stories (Gray, 1998) developed for a child should be a written record of positive events, talents, and skills.
- *Affirm a child by recognizing and acknowledging* talents and skills that he values in himself. Enhance praise with *photos*. For example, refer to a photograph of Angie’s piano recital while commenting on her musical skill. The same holds true for challenging activities the child *attempts*.
- *Encourage the development of talents* with enrollment in a small class or club.
- *Introduce the child to heroes with similar traits* (Edison, Gates, Grandin, Jefferson, Mozart).
- *Refer to a child’s expertise*, for example, asking a child to provide information about a topic.
- *Watch for and address pessimism.* Children with low self-esteem also tend to have negative attitudes. Respond to pessimism by listening attentively, then helping the child to restate the situation in more objective terms. Try focusing on “just the facts” to define a problem.
- *Respond positively to a child’s self-depreciating comments* (“I’m so stupid!”) by acknowledging/ clarifying/ *writing down* the feeling and countering with *facts*. (“Sounds like you are *frustrated*. Even intelligent people - like you - can feel frustrated at times. Let’s work this out.”)



These suggestions *expand* the number of opportunities for praise and affirmation while enhancing their meaning.

There are several curricula and resources available to help children interpret and organize their self-perception while exploring who they are and what they can do. Some books developed for typical children are wonderful for children with ASD. For example, *1,400 Things to Be Happy About* (Meisel, 1994) structures the development of several *lists* of favorite “things” in a variety of categories. Another book, *The Secret Record of Me* (Harvey, 1997) is an interactive book that is completed with a child’s personal thoughts and ideas! Another book packed with practical visually-based information is *Stick Up for Yourself!* (Kaufman, Raphael & Espeland, 1999). It began as a course at Michigan State University titled, *Affect and Self-Esteem*. The authors adapted the research-based materials for children ages eight through twelve (although in my opinion it is also applicable for students who are older). The authors use “social facts” throughout while clearly describing elements of self-regard and social interaction. Add a caring adult to guide the way and this book becomes a valuable resource for parents, teachers, and children. Matching the format of a book to a child’s learning style increases the likelihood of capturing a child’s interest.

Many children with ASD have focused interests. These interests often fall in line with genuine (though unrecognized) talents that may lead to rewarding careers or an interesting contribution to our understanding of the world. Again, children’s books are an exciting resource of true stories about people with unique ideas and perspectives. My favorite is a Caldecott Award winner, *Snowflake Bentley* (Martin, 1998). It is the story about Willie Bentley, a young boy who is fascinated by snowflakes. He is determined to find a way to photograph snow crystals, despite incredible odds (i.e. they melt!):



Even so his first pictures were failures – no better than shadows. Yet he would not quit. Mistake by mistake, snowflake by snowflake, Willie worked through every storm. Winter ended, the snow melted, and he had no good pictures. He waited for another season of snow. One day, in the second winter, he tried a new experiment. And it worked! Willie had figured out how to photograph snowflakes! Now everyone can see the great beauty in a tiny crystal!" he said. *Snow Crystals* (Bentley & Humphreys, 1962) is a book containing Bentley's collection of photographs: a reminder that nature is the sum of incredible details.

behavior she *first* attributes it to the child's age, personality or inherited traits. If these factors do not provide an explanation, then the child's diagnosis may be responsible. Often it is the *frequency* or *intensity* of a behavior that is attributable to autistic spectrum disorders. Second, the article, *The Discovery of Aspie: Criteria by Attwood & Gray* (Gray & Attwood, 1999) explores the implications of defining Asperger's Syndrome by its *strengths*. Positive attitudes support a child's positive self-regard.

**5. It's okay to have ASD.** An important part of a child's self image is his understanding of his own strengths, talents, and diagnosis. Sharing this information - especially regarding the child's diagnosis - is dependent upon several personal factors. A decade ago there were few resources available, now the process of sharing a diagnosis may be enhanced with resources that support a child's self-esteem in the process. Two examples are *Pictures of Me* (Gray, 1996), and *What Does it Mean to Me?*(Faherty, 2000).



*Pictures of Me* (Gray, 1996) is the title of an "interactive" Social Story that guides parents and professionals through the process of sharing the diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. The goal is to introduce a child, aged seven to twelve, to his/her personality, talents, and diagnosis. Everyone draws pictures to illustrate their ideas. I'll never forget the dad who refused to draw because he was "not good at it." I encouraged him to draw; to draw the best he could. He refused. It was a missed opportunity that could not be rescued. It's important for an adult to approach drawing positively. The adult may announce, "I do not draw well! I'm

going to give it my best effort!" Considering that children with ASD tackle dozens of tough challenges daily, seeing adults struggle is gratifying. Observing positive resolution is essential. *Pictures of Me* results in a notebook that the child can show to others and refer to at a later time.

Beginning where *Pictures of Me* leaves off, *What Does it Mean to Me* (Faherty, 2000) is a hard-cover, activity-based self-discovery workbook designed for children (ages 8-12) with ASD. Here are the opening words from the first chapter titled, *I Might Have Questions*: "This book can help me understand myself better. I have been told that I have high functioning autism or PDD or Asperger Syndrome or PDD-NOS or \_\_\_\_\_. I might have questions. I will circle the questions that I have..." (p. 2). The book proceeds with a one-step-at-a-time self-tour. *What Does it Mean to Me?* becomes a personal literary classic.

Teaching self-esteem begins with a deliberate re-thinking of attitudes and responses, a decision to leave little of a child's self-perception to chance. Unlike the luck that governs Candy Land, The Real World is open to the art of

social creativity and new resources. When it comes to teaching self-esteem, we can “pull” a few cards from the deck to make room for activities that remind our children with ASD of how valuable and incredible they really are.

## **SOLUTION #10: USE TEN CRAYONS TO COLOR THE REAL WORLD**

The bully-proofing team that formed on page 24 and organized on page 25, arrives on page 45... exhausted after a 20-page marathon game of Leapfrog. The principal falls back onto a sofa. Catching his breath, he asks, “Who’s got that map?” In response, the dad waves his arm in the air to show he’s still holding the *Map of The Real World*. The teacher wipes her brow on her sleeve, while retrieving the folded paper from her back pocket. “I’ve got the notes from the bully-proofing assembly!” The concerned neighbor clarifies a suspected celebrity ‘sighting’, “Hey, am I dreaming or did we pass the Lone Ranger back there?” The social worker nods while stretching sore muscles. Thoughtfully, the paraprofessional asks a critical question, “Do you think the Leapfrog idea was just an *analogy*, guys, and maybe not a *requirement*?” Her question is followed by a stunned silence and exchanged glances. This is not a *perfect* team, but they definitely “will do”. After all, they are here on page 45 equipped with all nine “crayons”:

- 1) Determination to use and never lose that now-very-wrinkled Real World Map.
- 2) A new love of Leapfrog and an appreciation of team effort.
- 3) A *somewhat* organized team.
- 4) New skills for Hide and Seek, specifically, new skills to discover a child targeted by bullying.
- 5) Renewed resolve to play Telephone the Right Way, to develop cross-context communication.
- 6) An understanding that adults are always “it” in the game of Simon Says, with a commitment to model positive conflict resolution skills.
- 7) An appreciation of Social Accuracy and a tendency to mess with the social hierarchy.
- 8) Multi-folded, copious notes from the bully-proofing assembly.
- 9) Strategies to teach positive self-esteem.

The principal looks toward the top of the page and springs to his feet, “Hey - this is Solution #10 we’re on!” This will require a complete set of crayons. Just in time - here is crayon # 10.

Solution #10 colors in the *details* on the Real World Map. These are the practical details that ensure a child with ASD benefits from a district’s bully-proofing initiative. Solution #10 discusses: 1) increasing informed supervision; 2) restructuring high-risk settings; and 3) modifying the bully-proofing curriculum.

**1. Increasing Informed Supervision** Increasing adult supervision decreases bullying (Olweus, 1993). Supervision plays a key role in both the prevention *and* identification of problem relationships. Discussed earlier, this is especially true for children with ASD who may be far more difficult to identify as targets of bullying. In this case, the goal is to increase informed adult supervision during high risk time slots.



Increasing Supervision means to put more adults in more places on the Real World Map; specifically, increasing supervision in high-risk settings and time slots (circled earlier). First, the team determines if the number of adults assigned to the playground, hallway, or cafeteria are sufficient to ensure a child’s safety. Some children have a full-time assistant. Others are supervised by general staff. This raises separate sets of issues.

- If a child has a full-time assistant, finding answers to these questions can lead to increased supervision:
- Is the assistant present during high-risk time slots?
- When does the assistant take breaks? Are they during high-risk time slots?
- What if the assistant is absent?



A child may require more supervision if general staff is all that is utilized. Answers to these questions may help:

- Can additional staff be hired and trained?
- Can volunteers (for example students from a local university) *supplement* general staff? Can a Playground Buddies program be implemented, pairing younger and older students? Can staff be trained regarding high-risk children and how to assist them?

**Informed Supervision** There's a danger that increasing supervision may increase the likelihood that a child with ASD will be misunderstood. Gray's Guide to Bullying Part I discusses how adults may *compound* the damage of a bullying interaction (Gray, 2000, this edition p. 17). An adult new to autistic spectrum disorders and unaware of the bullying research is at risk of misreading a situation and should not be placed in a supervisory capacity without information and training. Specifically, the team needs to ensure that each supervising adult:

- ...has accurate bully-proofing information and a basic understanding of the child's diagnosis.
- ...understands the unique issues related to bullying and children with ASD.
- ...knows what to do if the child with ASD is involved in a bullying interaction.
- ...develops a notebook with information about high-risk settings and the child with ASD, which is used when the supervising adult is absent.

Training and information places helpful people on a child's Real World Map. There are wonderful low-cost resources and information available. Draw supervising adults as stick figures on a child's Real World Map *only after they are trained* – with an emphasis on high-risk settings and time slots. Uninformed stick figures are best kept on scraps of drawing paper in the drawer.



**2. Restructure High-Risk Settings** Ultimately the goal is for a child's entire day to be free of bullying risks and situations. Creating alternative settings and activities during high-risk contexts and time slots can immediately decrease the opportunity for bullying. As mentioned earlier, recess alternatives ensure a child's safe experience while providing a more relaxing and pleasurable activity. Similar adjustments to other high-risk time slots, for example transitioning between

classes a few minutes early or eating lunch with a few friends away from the cafeteria, can be especially helpful when supervisory staff are limited. Restructuring high-risk settings is a start; ultimately a child can contribute to efforts to keep him/herself.

A bully-proofing team can teach a child with ASD basic skills to maintain a safe environment. A very young child has a delayed (and frequently distorted) perception of safe vs. unsafe people and experiences. To a child with ASD the social world may be viewed as a series of undistinguishable faces, where only a few take on personal meaning (Gerland, G. as cited in Gray, 2000, this edition p. 15). Direct intervention and practice teaches a child to identify key people who can help. A child can also learn the steps to recruit assistance to regain a safe situation when it is threatened. Here are a few suggestions:

- *Adults with Green Stones* are trained team members who can help when a child feels unsafe. First, *Finding the Green Stone* (Walker, 1991) is read and discussed. The child gives a green stone to three school staff, for example, a teacher, assistant, and custodian. The green stone is placed in a visible location, like on the corner of the teacher's desk. This helps the child remember where to go for help. A Social Story may be used to identify adults who have the green stones, and how they can help.
- *The Green Chair* is a variation of the strategy described above. A child is taught to go to a specific chair or place when feeling unsafe, an adult comes to assist with communication.

- A *Green List of “Green Word” Colleagues* includes the names of children who formally agree to “keep an eye out” for the included colleague with ASD. “Green word” children are friendly children who are good to be *near* on a playground or in the hallways, especially when playing or working alone. Playing *with* them is not required, playing *near* them is important to staying safe. A Social Story can be developed listing the green word colleagues.
- On a *Real World Map*, *safe places* and time slots are identified to help a child discover that most of the day is problem-free. A child also may have a safe place to go and rest periodically.

Safe places and people identified, the next challenge is more difficult. How can adults teach a child with ASD to understand the complex “ins and outs” of a bullying interaction? Where do they start?

**3. No “Hand Me Downs”:** **Tailoring the Bully-Proofing Curriculum** As the youngest of three girls in my family, I knew early the difference between “hand me downs” and the clothes purchased just for me. The clothes that were handed down fit okay, but those that came to me directly from the store “fit” in terms of size *and* style. There were also the unique items never before seen on my sisters, like the fake-fur leopard vest I wore in second grade. The same concept applies to modifying a curriculum. In addition to tailoring the general education bully-proofing curriculum to size (selecting important concepts and individualized instruction), it’s important to consider style (motivation and interests). There’s also the occasional “leopard vest” to consider: *unique concepts not covered in the general curriculum* (for example, *intent*), that may need to be taught to the child with ASD. What seems like a tall order is found in the answers to: *where, when, what, and how* does a child with ASD learn bully-proofing information?

**Where?** The team identifies the setting and format where the child with ASD is most likely to be successful learning new bully-proofing concepts and skills. Here are some guidelines:

- *Identify a comfortable setting* for the child with ASD, where it will be easy to establish a relaxed approach to the curriculum and activities.
- *Decide on a format* that will maximize the child’s learning: Individual instruction? Small group? A combination of both?
- *Develop a schedule* that allows ample time for planning and instruction.
- *Carefully schedule instruction time* so that it does not interfere with a favorite activity.
- *Share the schedule* with the parents and the child/children in the group. Establish communication regarding bully-proofing goals and cross-context communication after each session.
- *No bully-proofing homework.* Instead, parents and other professionals are provided with ideas to reinforce goals in naturally occurring home, school, and community situations.
- *No expiration date.* If this program is a special-topic group that will eventually disband, set up monthly follow-up meetings to reinforce skills throughout the year.
- *See you next year!* Re-teach the bully-proofing skills each year to keep step with the changes in the developmental profile of bullying and the school curriculum.

**How?** A child with ASD cannot be expected to apply information that s/he does not understand. The challenge is to translate bully-proofing concepts into information that holds *accurate meaning*. Some general guidelines for instruction are listed here. (A few are mentioned again and described in more detail in the following section titled, *What?*). Suggested strategies include:

- Match instruction to the child’s individual learning style.
- Teach one concept/skill/idea at a time. Think of each concept as a brick; use them to build a wall.
- Use visual strategies to illustrate concepts, for example: drawings, pictures, photographs.
- Use videos to illustrate ideas, for example, video-tape the lunch room or recess if it is allowed.
- Use Social Stories (Gray, 1998) to clarify information or to share pre-requisite information that is not a part of the general bully-proofing curriculum.

- Use Comic Strip Conversations (Gray, 1994), specifically to illustrate abstract concepts like *intent* or how *context can change the meaning* of a statement.
- Demonstrate, using several examples to illustrate a single concept.
- Use high-interest metaphors and analogies to explain concepts, for example, *Pokemon* (Nintendo, 1997-2001) can help to demonstrate the importance of working with others.
- Use role-plays to teach *carefully selected fact-based responses* to a bullying attempt. (More on coaching a child to respond to a child who bullies will be in the next issue of *The Morning News*).
- Use carefully selected books to enhance the curriculum. Books can help to illustrate *and* demonstrate, and provide wonderful ideas for activities.

The team has established a location for bully-proofing group meetings. The teacher for the group knows all about children with ASD and individualized instruction. When the children come on Monday, what will they do? What is this program all about?

**What?** The basic curriculum lies in the notes from the bully-proofing assembly. The team selects the most important concepts and discards those that are not essential and/or potentially misleading. This creates the *basic* curriculum. These concepts will be clarified using visual strategies, analogies, and demonstration. The team considers adding two elements to the curriculum: *bully-proofing readiness* and *special attention to vocabulary*.

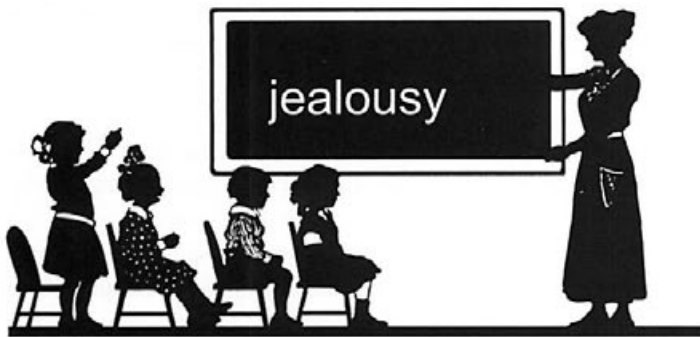
**Bully-proofing Readiness** Even the most sensitive Real World is not going to delay the school's bully-proofing program until the child with ASD has all the prerequisite social understandings to attend. Nor should they. The challenge for the team is to ensure that the child is ready to learn bully-proofing skills.

Some concepts and skills in a bully-proofing assembly will require instruction in *prerequisite* information. These are the social and emotional concepts typical children have already mastered. In addition, this also includes focused instruction in concepts that may hold *increased relevance* for children with ASD over typical children. For example, children with ASD are frequent targets of two types of bullying, *Backhanded Bullying* and *Absurd Information or Requests* (Gray, 2000, pp 13-14). Both of these forms of bullying arrive decorated with smiling faces and friendly statements, and will need to receive special attention in the tailored bully-proofing curriculum. Ideally, prerequisite information is identified by the team and covered *in advance* of a bully-proofing assembly. Other concepts will inevitably be "stumbled upon" as the program proceeds.

The prerequisite information identified by the team will be specific to the child and *may include* concepts like:

1. Most children are kind and can be helpful.
2. Each child has thoughts and feelings of his/her own.
3. Sometimes what a child is saying and thinking is the same (both are green words). Sometimes what a child says is different from what the person is thinking.
4. Sometimes a person may say kind words and be thinking unkind words.
5. Sometimes a person may have a kind expression (smile) while thinking unkind thoughts.
6. Children make mistakes. Someone who is *usually nice* and *comfortable to be around* may make a mistake and say something that hurts another person's feelings, or that makes another person feel confused. Mistakes children make at age (six, seven, eight, nine...) are \_\_\_\_\_. Have you ever seen any of these mistakes?
7. The mistakes children make as they play are *different* from bullying. It *may* be bullying if:
  - a) A child asks you to do something that makes many *other* children laugh.
  - b) A child keeps asking you to do the same thing at about the same time every day.
  - c) A child asks you to do something that you have never seen done by another child, or that none of the other children around you are doing at the present time.
  - d) A child asks you to do something that you know your mom, dad, or teacher does not allow you to do.

- e) A child asks you for money.
  - f) A child asks you to do something that you know is wrong.
  - g) A child calls you by a name other than your actual name.
8. Children often feel confused about what to do or say next with other children. There are adults that can help *anytime you feel confused* or uncomfortable. Their names are...
  9. Zebras have a lot to teach people about staying socially safe in a world with lions. Zebras graze in groups to stay safe. (It's not because they get more grass that way!) It's okay to play by yourself but try to play *near* others. Clarify the meaning of *near*.
  10. Last (in an incomplete list) and definitely not least. Friends are valuable in preventing and responding to bully-proofing attempts. Friendship skills can be learned by children with ASD.



*Attention to Vocabulary* A bully-proofing curriculum is full of words that require prerequisite social understanding. A child with ASD may be unfamiliar with many of these words. He may be confused by the literal meaning of a word, or may assign meaning without considering the context in which it is used. From the bully-proofing assembly at Pinewood Elementary, I selected several words/phrases with a high-risk of misinterpretation, among them: *stand*

*up for yourself, friend, jealous, firm tone of voice, poker face, etc.* From their notes, a team identifies terms and phrases most-likely-to-derail meaning for the child with ASD. *Enhancing* or *expanding* on these words will clarify their accurate meaning.

Bully-proofing vocabulary may be *enhanced* by a (picture) dictionary, analogies (often found in children's literature), visual strategies, demonstration and role-playing. Much of bully-proofing vocabulary refers to feelings. Here, some ideas to teach the meaning of words like *jealousy*:

- *Dictionary*: Look up the word. Read the definition aloud. Discuss.
- *Analogies*: Think about how Johnny felt on page 5 in *Finding the Green Stone* (Walker, 1991). Have you ever wanted something another child has?
- *Visual strategies*: 1) A map of the definition of *jealous*: word in the center, meanings drawn out from the center with examples from the child's experience drawn off of the meanings; 2) a *Comic Strip Conversation* (Gray, 1994) to illustrate examples of jealous statements and the thoughts behind them; or 3) a Social Story to summarize what has been discovered about jealousy.
- *Demonstration/Role Play*: Work from basic to more abstract - starting with jealousy of immediate possessions (candy), to jealousy of desired non-immediate possessions (new computer), to jealousy of abilities, friendships, and talents.

Jealousy is representative of many words in a bully-proofing curriculum that may be confusing for a child with ASD. Taking time to clarify their meaning avoids misapplication of bully-proofing concepts.

Some vocabulary in a bully-proofing assembly may need to be *expanded* to be clarified. The book introduced earlier, *Stick Up for Yourself* (Kaufman, Raphael, & Espeland, 1999) refers to this as "...growing a feelings vocabulary" (p. 25). In this book, the authors describe how Dr. Silvan Tomkins sorts feelings into nine basic categories. They are: *interest, enjoyment, surprise, fear, distress, anger, shame, disgust, and 'dis smell'* ("...a specific feeling that doesn't have a word". p. 37). The first seven can occur in either *high-* or *low-intensity*. For example, *interest* is a low-intensity feeling that is opposite its high intensity counterpart, *excitement*. Strategies like this that *expand and organize* vocabulary can help students with ASD begin to assign accurate meanings to confusing terms.

To provide an example of expanding vocabulary, consider the word, *friend*. To a child with ASD, it may be overwhelming to appreciate *all* of the intended meanings that others so readily understand. In contrast to the word *friend*, other terms referring to social concepts are far more specific:

*Our language offers few possibilities for distinguishing among friendships, the word "friend" being used to refer to a wide range of relationships with varying degrees of closeness and distance. Compare this with kinship and the rich set of descriptive terms the language makes available. The words "mother," "father," "aunt," "uncle," "cousin," all tell us something specific about a person's place in the kin circle (Rubin, 1959, p. 5).*

Teaching the names and meanings of *many* words to clarify the meaning of one may feel like taking the "long way around the block". When words like *friend* and *friendship* are on the table it may be the shortest route to home. This is especially true considering the speed with which the intended meaning has to be clarified and matched to a response. In this case it may be advisable to simplify the lesson by first teaching the meanings of *other* related words, like *stranger, acquaintance, colleague, team member, friend, and close friend*.



The team arrived with nine solutions, and now is coloring in the details with the tenth. They develop a "custom curriculum" for the child that shares many elements with the general program. The team sorts through the concepts, saving most and discarding those that are unnecessary and confusing. They consider the prerequisite concepts that will need to be covered, and add meaning and practicality to the vocabulary. With all ten solutions in place, and with the *continuing* support of a wonderful team, the child with ASD will be included - and rightfully so - in the school district's efforts to provide children with safe learning experiences.

## SUMMARY

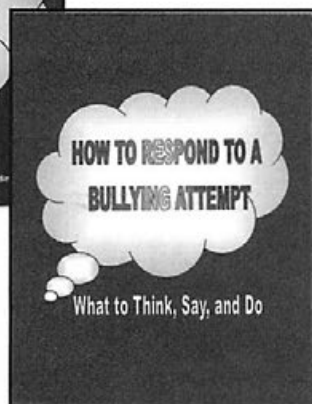
Together, the The Morning News Winter 2000 and Spring 2001 issues have discussed concerns related to the inclusion of children with ASD in the international efforts address bullying. Myths and misconceptions have been dissolved and terms like *bullying backdraft* and *social accuracy* have been introduced. We've drawn a map with stick figures; formed a team; played Leapfrog, Hide and Seek, Simon Says, and Telephone; discovered it is okay that we are not all friends; messed with the social hierarchy; attended a bully-proofing assembly; fostered self-esteem; and tailored a curriculum - all in 59 pages of The Morning News! Now our attention becomes more detailed, as we focus on the dynamics of a bullying interaction and relationship.

Gray's Guide to Bullying Part I: The Basics, discussed the sharp contrasts and similarities between children with ASD and children who bully others:

*In an interaction where a socially vulnerable child encounters a child seeking negative control, marked differences – and shocking similarities emerge. Whereas the child with ASD is most frequently passive and overwhelmed, the child who bullies others is aggressive and confident. However, both have difficulty empathizing – for very different reasons. Both have difficulty taking the other's perspective – for very different reasons. Both seek predictability and control – for very different reasons. Their similarities meet amidst a collision of striking developmental, cognitive, social and emotional differences.(Gray, 2000, p. 4)*

The next issue of The Morning News focuses in detail on this "social collision". Two guest authors will explore the issues surrounding children who bully. Gray's Guide to Bullying will conclude with a detailed parent/professional guide and a corresponding student workbook that teaches children with ASD to respond to a bullying attempt via their cognitive strengths. Extra copies of the student workbook are available from The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding, [www.thegraycenter.org](http://www.thegraycenter.org) .





# Gray's Guide to Bullying

## Part III: How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt



### How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt: A Guide for Parents and Professionals

**Editor's Note:** Information in this article is based on Gray's Guide to Bullying Part I: The Basics (Gray, 2000) and Gray's Guide to Bullying Part II: The Real World (Gray, 2001). Additional copies of the workbook are available from The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding, [www.TheGrayCenter.org](http://www.TheGrayCenter.org), Phone 616-954-9747 or FAX 616-954-9749, and other distributors.

*In his book, The Human Mind, Dr. Karl Menninger tells the tale of a lonely fish in a well-populated fish pond. "When a trout, rising to a fly gets hooked on a line and finds himself unable to swim about freely, he begins a fight which results in struggles and splashes and sometimes an escape. Often, of course, the situation is too tough for him. In the same way the human being struggles with his environment and with the hooks that catch him. Sometimes he masters his difficulties; sometimes they are too much for him. His struggles are all that the world sees and it usually misunderstands them. It is hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one." (Fried & Fried, 1996, p. 135)*

## INTRODUCTION

*Gray's Guide to Bullying Part I: The Basics* (Gray, 2000) discussed the sharp contrasts and similarities between a student with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and a student who bullies others:

*In an interaction where a socially vulnerable child encounters a child seeking negative control, marked differences - and shocking similarities - emerge. Whereas the child with ASD is most frequently passive and overwhelmed, the child who bullies others is aggressive and confident. However, both have difficulty empathizing - for very different reasons. Both have difficulty taking the other's perspective - for very different reasons. Both seek predictability and control - for very different reasons. Their similarities meet amidst a collision of striking developmental, cognitive, social and emotional differences.*

This article and accompanying workbook discuss this “social collision” in detail, with a focus on teaching a student with ASD to respond effectively to a bullying attempt.

A supportive environment with a caring bully-proofing team and comprehensive program is prerequisite to teaching effective bullying responses to a child with ASD. Specifically, the team is trained and prepared with the following:

- A definition of bullying that represents the needs of all children.
- An understanding of the variety of roles in a bullying interaction, and the characteristics of each.
- An understanding of the different types of bullying, and the unique profile that bullying often assumes when directed at children with ASD.
- An understanding of the warning signs that a typical child may be a target of bullying, as well as the unique behaviors that may indicate a child with ASD is a target.
- An understanding of the myths surrounding bullying vs. accurate information.

In addition, the team works within a context that has:

- A clear understanding of a student’s “real world”, the contexts that are usually safe and those that are often problematic.
- A comprehensive pro-active bully-proofing curriculum that from an early age teaches important skills, including cross-context communication and positive self-esteem.
- An awareness of instructional strategies that may meet the defining criteria of bullying, and use of positive instructional strategies that model social creativity and positive conflict resolution.
- A developmentally appropriate social curriculum that is based on an accurate understanding of a student’s current interactions and experiences.
- A comprehensive bully-proofing curriculum for all students, parents, and the community.
- A commitment to keep a bully-proofing program comprehensive, to avoid short cuts or omissions of program components.

The above lists are taken from *Gray’s Guide to Bullying Part 1: The Basics* (Gray, 2000) and *Gray’s Guide to Bullying Part II: The Real World* (Gray, 2001), where they are described in greater detail.

This guide and student workbook, *How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt* addresses one type of bullying characterized by a verbal interaction between two students. For our purposes here, the assumption is that a student with ASD is the target of the bullying, and other students and adults are not immediately aware of the bullying attempt. It is shared as *an example* of how one bully-proofing concept and skill may be taught to a student with ASD. (Important note: a student should *not* be taught to “fight back” or “even the score”. *Only adults* employ consequences and/or teach the student who bullies more effective ways to interact.)

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE BULLY-PROOFING TEAM**

Bullying can seem overwhelming to parents and professionals on a child’s bully-proofing team. Coupled with the “ins” and “outs” that complicate efforts to share information with students with ASD, the task can initially feel like bullying itself: *intimidating* and *huge*. *Gray’s Guide to Bullying Part II: The Real World* (Gray, 2001) outlines strategies to adapt and tailor the general bully-proofing curriculum. This includes: consideration of the learning environment, identification of goals and objectives (including prerequisite concepts and skills), individualized goals and objectives, and attention to vocabulary (pp. 33-37). Here, a few of these strategies are described in greater detail; applied to teaching students with ASD to respond to a bullying attempt. They include: 1) Relax, 2) Build a Brick Wall, 3) Select a Positive, Clear, and Consistent Vocabulary, and 4) Creatively Enhance Activities.

**Relax** At face value, advice to relax seems out of context alongside the topic of bullying. At face value, *it is*. Regardless of how it *seems*, relaxing enables parents and professionals to think clearly, and supports the

development of a thoughtfully designed program. In addition, *presenting* bully-proofing information in a relaxed manner *helps students learn*. A quiet and controlled delivery enables monitoring of a student's comprehension/emotional reaction to the information. In addition, in this way the parent/professional *models the calm self-control* that supports an effective response to a bullying attempt.

**Build a Brick Wall** Using the general bully-proofing curriculum as a guide, the bully-proofing team identifies the most critical concepts and skills. Each concept and skill is a brick: once mastered, it is cemented to the wall. Learning to respond to a verbal bullying attempt is one "brick". It was selected as an example for this article and workbook because of the frequency of verbal bullying and the importance of delivering an effective response. There are many other prerequisite concepts and skills that come before it on the bully-proofing wall; learning to respond to a bullying attempt is a brick near the top. It is a skill that may take several weeks to learn and apply effectively.

**Select a Positive, Clear, and Consistent Vocabulary** It is important wisdom that, "it's not just what you say, but how you say it". That point is made in the workbook, and also applies to parents and professionals as they teach workbook concepts and skills.

Writing many Social Stories is excellent training for stating information positively. Stating information positively includes using those terms and phrases that reflect the most politically correct attitudes possible. Current vocabulary models attitudes consistent with the bullying research and state-of-the-art educational programs. Figure 1 (page 4) contrasts traditional vs. current vocabulary frequently used when teaching students to respond to a bullying attempt.

In the process of selecting the vocabulary for *How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt*, I made an interesting discovery. The term *bullying* is similar to other verbs like *running* and *talking*. Not only do they describe an action, they imply a *completion* of an action. I did not want to suggest to my students that if someone initiates *bullying* their actions are inherently completed in any way. This would render a futile role for the student who is targeted. My students "lit up" the afternoon I used the term *bullying attempt* instead of *bullying*. This slight change in vocabulary increased their resolve to keep the mistakes with the student who bullies; to prevent the success of the attempt. For this reason, the student workbook uses the more accurate term *bullying attempt* in place of *bullying*.

There is vocabulary in the workbook that will likely need clarification prior to teaching the concepts and skills. For this reason, once the meaning of a term is established, it is important to take care to use that term consistently to minimize confusion. Keeping with the general rule-of-thumb to teach one thing at a time, it's important that the focus is kept on teaching a student how to respond to a bullying attempt over expansion of vocabulary. We're looking for a "few good words" to consistently represent concepts.

<b>Figure 1: Traditional vs. Current Bully-proofing Vocabulary/Phrasing</b>	
<u>Traditional</u>	<u>Current</u>
Bully	Child who attempts to bully
Victim	Someone who is the target of a bullying attempt
Don't get upset	Try to stay calm, try to stay in good self-control
Bullying	Bullying attempt

**Creatively Enhance Instruction** It is my hope that there is not a workbook of any kind that is intended to be used in isolation. \*The workbook accompanying this guide is no exception. Learning in childhood is a creative process - not found solely between the first and last page of *anything*. My students worked on the concepts and skills in the workbook over several weekly sessions. For example, covering the information on page 5 in the student workbook (*What to Think in Response to a Bullying Attempt*) took three sessions, or a total instruction time of two and one quarter hours. We discussed one of the facts each week, using a variety of activities to apply the information. Drawing from that experience, I have included a few suggestions of additional materials and activities to use along with the workbook.

Because every student is unique, enhancing instruction with *individualized* considerations will ultimately increase the likelihood that a student will learn to respond to a bullying attempt. Parents and professionals may use the discussion and ideas in this guide as a starting point to creatively tailor the information to match the learning style and abilities of an individual student.

## THE SEARCH FOR HONEST RESPONSES TO BULLYING ATTEMPTS

Most bully-proofing programs assume an audience of typical students. This is especially apparent when students are taught how to respond to bullying attempts.

In the fall 2000 bully-proofing assembly at Pinewood Elementary School, Jenison Public Schools, the fourth graders used role-playing to practice a variety of responses (Gray, 2001). Many of the responses suggested to typical students require a command of more advanced social concepts and the ability to make distinctions along very abstract social lines. The responses they rehearsed are likely to be difficult - if not impossible - for a student with ASD to learn. For example, one suggested response requires the ability to be insincere, such as *pretending you don't care* in a situation that is obviously uncomfortable. Similarly, *paying a compliment* to a threatening peer is outside the lines of "social logic". Overall, the fourth graders are reminded to be *firm* (assertive) without *sounding confrontational* (aggressive). These quick distinctions are among the greatest social challenges for students with ASD, and are thus unlikely to be of use in the fast-paced "heat" of a bullying attempt.

If a student with ASD is going to effectively respond to a bullying attempt, he or she needs a systematic approach that capitalizes on his/her strengths and learning style. The basic premise of the student workbook and parent/professional guide, *How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt*, includes:

- Many students with ASD have a visual learning style, and an ability to memorize and recall factual information and lists. Thus, a response that utilizes these strengths may increase a student's relaxation and confidence. The more relaxed a student is, the greater his/her likelihood of staying in control and recalling relevant information when it is most critically needed.
- That being said, even a relaxed student is not likely to be able to apply information that doesn't *make sense* to him/her. Responses to bullying that are based on the ability to be insincere, or to deceive, elude, or distract will need to be omitted in favor of their more "straight-forward" counterparts. The responses most easily understood and applied by a student with ASD will likely be those that are accurate, honest, and logical.
- Finally, the research is clear that a comprehensive team approach is essential to effectively addressing bullying in schools. It would be a mistake to teach a student to respond to a bullying attempt without significant supports already in place. For that reason, the concepts and skills presented in *How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt* are presented within the context of a team approach.

\*For additional copies of the workbook contact The Gray Center, [www.TheGrayCenter.org](http://www.TheGrayCenter.org), 616-954-9747 or FAX 616-954-9749.

Identifying the learning outcome for this workbook and guide was interesting. In this case, I am uncomfortable with mastery as “demonstration of skills 80% of the time”. The disturbing analogy that comes to mind is teaching a student to “safely cross the street” with the same criteria. The goal is a completion of all the supporting objectives: *The student will learn what to think, say, and do in response to a verbal bullying attempt and consistently demonstrate those skills in natural contexts.*

## **THE WORKBOOK: HOW TO RESPOND TO A BULLYING ATTEMPT**

Many students with ASD *know* what to do in a bullying interaction, though the artful placement of those responses in the correct social spaces eludes them. Anxiety can interfere. Strategies that help a student relax during a bullying attempt are likely to increase the effectiveness of his/her responses. Most curricula focus solely on teaching students *what to do* during a bullying attempt. Students with ASD may benefit from learning the *attitudes and thoughts* that set the stage for an effective response, before learning what to say and do.

**Introduction** (Workbook, page 1-3): The workbook opens with mention of the following concepts: 1) What the workbook is about, 2) the distinction between kind children and children who attempt to bully others, 3) the members of a student’s bully-proofing team, and 4) understanding a bullying attempt involves one student who is out of control. The first three concepts represent a quick review of important prerequisite information. The fourth concept sets the stage for the student with ASD, providing information that may be welcome in a situation that often *feels like* the child who bullies is in control.

The first few pages of the workbook represent a huge amount of material, and will most likely require several activities to cover them adequately. For example, to clarify the distinction between a child who makes a social mistake and a child who bullies, I read *Finding the Green Stone* (Walker, 1991) to my students. The story is about Johnny who loses his green stone. He discovers that showing kindness is the only way to find it. The entire community joins the search in support. Within that context, Johnny finds his green stone. The book provides a wonderful backdrop for identifying mistakes that children make, and how children learn to resolve those errors.

The following week, we read *Bully on the Bus* (Bosch, 1988). The story line is in sharp contrast to *Finding the Green Stone*, and depicts both the imbalance in power and repetitiveness that characterize bullying. *Bully on the Bus* also introduces the difficulty of finding an effective response to this type of behavior; the reader selects different response choices to follow through the text. This creates a different ending each time the book is read, and provides for a comparison of outcomes. *Bully on the Bus* helped me introduce the students to our goal for the remainder of the unit: to learn how to respond to a bullying attempt.

**What to Think** (Workbook, page 4): The first step to responding to a bullying attempt is: “Think calmly about my bullying fact(s) and a peaceful picture”. The dependability and certainty of facts can be reassuring to students with ASD. Learning to keep specific facts in mind during a bullying attempt may help a student with ASD relax, and thus respond more effectively. Similarly, encouraging a student to think about a peaceful image or picture utilizes a common cognitive strength of students with ASD (Grandin, 1995). Notice a student’s choice is emphasized throughout the workbook whenever possible, an attempt to bring further control to the student with ASD.

**Is that a fact?** The distinction between facts and theories/beliefs/opinions is important to learning to respond to a bullying attempt. First, in addition to using facts for reassurance, they are also the basis of a student’s verbal response. Second, it is helpful if the student with ASD understands that the selected topics/statements that initiate a bullying attempt are usually inaccurate, and always of little merit. They do not represent factual information. Understanding this, a student can appreciate the goal to “stick with the facts” *regardless* of the fictional information presented in a bullying attempt.



A simple sorting task may be used to ensure a student can distinguish between facts and theories/beliefs/opinions. Show the student a series of photographs with accompanying statements. There are two pieces of paper on the table, labeled *Facts* and *Opinions/Beliefs* respectively, that represent each category. The student looks at a photo and corresponding statement, for example, *This is a tree*, or the same photo with, *This is an ugly tree*. Each statement is assigned to one of the two piles.

**Teaching a student to think calm thoughts** The adult and student select one, two, or three *facts* to recall in a bullying interaction. These facts may be 1) tailor-made by the team, 2) written with the student, 3) selected from the facts listed in this section or 4) a combination of all three. These facts are tools to help the student with ASD stay calm in a bullying attempt.

To introduce facts, an adult uses an individualized format that is meaningful for the student. Here's the general message:

*You have a talent for remembering things (a mind for facts/command of lists, etc.). I'm going to help you memorize some important facts. Keep these facts in a safe place in your mind/thought symbol/mind's filing cabinet, like in the Documents section of a computer. When you retrieve them, think of them in a very calm color/superimposed on calm pictures. (facts from Kaufman, Raphael, & Espeland, 1999, pp 82-83, adapted for students with ASD in outline form):*

- I. *It is not my fault that I am the target of this bullying attempt.*
  - A. Supporting facts:
    1. I am a good and valuable person.
    2. A student should not be bullied by others.
- II. *The student who is attempting to bully me is making a social mistake / is out of control.*
  - A. Supporting facts:
    1. The goal is to keep only one student out of control / making a mistake.
    2. Trying to stay calm is an intelligent decision.
    3. Staying calm is the best way for a targeted student to stay mistake-free when a peer is making a mistake.
    4. Staying calm and mistake-free keeps the mistakes with the peer who is making the bullying attempt.
- III. *I am not the only student who is bullied.*
  - A. Supporting facts:
    1. Approximately 2.7 million elementary and junior high students are bullied in the United States each day.
    2. Millions of other students are bullied around the world each day.
    3. It is not their fault, either.

**Additional activities to enhance instruction:** A few activities may be used to help students learn "what to think" during a bullying attempt. A few examples are described in this section.

Learning to recall selected facts takes practice. It may be helpful to visualize these facts as actual *tools*, as Dr. Tony Attwood does in his modified cognitive behavior therapy approach (Attwood, 2000). For example, the facts may be visualized as a life-saving ring used by lifeguards, or a lifejacket. They should *never* be visualized as a weapon or villain of any kind.

I used children's literature and drawing to teach my students to pair peaceful pictures with bullying attempts. I read the book *Simon's Hook* (Burnett, 2000), to my students. The story is about a freckled boy, Simon, who has an exceptionally "bad hair day" after his sister cuts gum out of his red hair. He proceeds to the playground under the security of a hat, which is quickly lost. Suddenly, he is the target of friendly teasing. Simon's feelings are hurt. He is

rescued by the wisdom of his Grandma Rose (enter a member of the bully-proofing team!) who tells a story about fish and “taking the bait”. The book is brightly illustrated with several fish scenes that accompany Grandma Rose’s story. Every fish has a *thought symbol*, which is another reason I selected it for this activity. My students were intrigued by the story, and insisted that I read aloud the content of every thought symbol!

Before sharing the story, I told the students they were welcome to draw *peaceful pictures* while I read. I told them if they absolutely needed to draw something else, to wait until later...now was the time for only gentle images. My goal? To temper the feelings elicited by bullying with personal, peaceful pictures. When I finished reading, I asked my students to tell me about their drawings. One student, Tyler, showed his flower to the group, and indicated that bullying attempts, like insults and unkind words, are merely “raindrops that make my flower grow.” A second student, Cody, followed suit, sharing that birds and other details would be added to the tree he drew every time someone tries to bully him. Their idea is a great one: calming pictures can be a “work in progress” that translates a peer’s repeated negative social behavior into an increasingly detailed artistic accomplishment. (Cody and Tyler’s drawings decorate the journal cover, pictured in this edition at the top of page 51.)

**Important note:** In addition to the facts, a student with ASD will have *other* thoughts and feelings related to a bullying attempt. Ensure s/he understands that *all* thoughts and feelings related to a bullying incident are important, and that key adults are interested and concerned.

**What to Say and How to Say It** (Workbook, page 5) The second step to responding to a bullying attempt is: *Say one sentence well*. Notice the emphasis is on the student’s response, and away from the infinite topics that a peer may select to initiate a bullying attempt. It’s important to ignore the topic of a bullying interaction, to respond matter-of-factly. Remaining calm, the student makes one statement.

Role-playing is an important tool to teach a student what to say - and how to say it - in response to a bullying attempt. McNamara & McNamara (1997) provide an instructional outline for teaching students what to do in a bullying interaction: *Instruct, model, rehearse, feedback and practice*:

- To *instruct*, be as explicit as possible; identify *exactly* what to do.
- *Modeling* demonstrates the desired behavior; showing several versions of the same response provides an opportunity to point out the similarities among them.
- Structure *rehearsal*. First guide a student through what to say and do; gradually let the student assume more independence.
- Provide non-critical and supportive *feedback* to improve the student’s performance. For example, “You have your head up ...that’s an *intelligent thing to do!* Let’s try straightening your shoulders even more. That’s it!”
- *Practice* by noticing naturally occurring opportunities to use new skills, praising all attempts (paraphrased and adapted from pp. 55-59).

Using the procedure just described, a team member practices the three steps to responding to a bullying attempt (adapted from combined response strategies recommended by Fried & Fried, 1996; McNamara & McNamara, 1997; Rigby, 1996; and Voors, 2000):

**STEP 1:** *Try to think calmly about my bullying facts and a peaceful picture.*

**STEP 2:** *Try to say one sentence well:*

- **Make one (1) and only one honest statement.** An intelligent bullying response is **one** statement. The first word of this statement is “I”. Memorizing the first word can help with retrieval of the rest.
  - *I hear you.*
  - *I need you to stop.*
  - *I don’t like that, stop it.*
- **Keep all body parts to self.**

- *Stand straight with my head up.* (If a student in his *current* social skill repertoire has the ability to establish confident eye-gaze, teach him to do it. If not, encourage the student to keep his head up, perhaps looking *past* or *over the shoulder* of the student who is bullying.)
- *Use a steady in-control voice.* Practice “*steady and in-control*” with a tape recorder. Play it back. Say the selected phrase the same way each time.
- *Maintain a safe distance and try to increase it.*
  - Walk away after one sentence and start STEP 3 (Try to report to a member of My Team.)

The student who initiated the bullying attempt may keep talking; regardless, the targeted student is done after making one statement. (Make sure to *routinely include* STEP 3, reporting the incident, in role-plays. This is described in the section titled, *Reporting*, page 11.)

**Mistakes lead to discoveries** I initially made some mistakes implementing bullying role-plays with my students, leading to a new discovery. When role-playing bullying attempts with students, the adult always assumes the role of the student who bullies. This created an awkward dilemma for me. The last thing I wanted to do with my students is “put them down” or call them names. The students in my social understanding group became genuinely confused as I grappled with this problem. First, I tried saying harmless, neutral statements coupled with bullying inflection and pragmatics. I instructed the students to *pretend* my statements were bullying attempts, and to “think the facts” and practice making a single statement response. The outcome was predictable. I said, “Kittens are soft and furry,” with a mean expression and degrading tone of voice, and the first student responded with a smile, “Yes they are!”

Absolutely determined to not make bullying statements to my students, I discovered a solution. I assumed a variety of both positive and negative pragmatics (bullying can have either a friendly - or unfriendly - delivery) while making statements like these:

- “Thinking unkind words, saying friendly words.”
- “Making a social mistake here. I’m sort of out of control.”
- “Really unkind statement, same time, everyday.”
- “A question you’ve never seen me ask anyone else.”
- “An unkind look followed by not-your-name.”

I was afraid this might add to the confusion; instead it had a surprising impact: The students loved it! They were intrigued as I assigned these “labels” to bullying attempts. Actually, they thought it was a little funny – and interestingly accurate - which helped them relax and practice their responses. In addition, I was demonstrating the variety of forms a bullying attempt may take. I confirmed their suspicions *and* affirmed their frustrations. The role-playing was a success.

**One parent’s adaptation of role-playing** Kathryn Lowry developed a strategy to help her adolescent son, Reed, handle bullying attempts. Her approach incorporates many of the elements suggested in this guide:

*A couple of years ago, Reed was very depressed/angry/anxious about the things kids said to him, how some of his friends turned away after years of friendship, and difficulty of school. Every day seemed like a living nightmare, for him and also for me as I tried to boost him up and help him make sense of his world. We were both exhausted. I knew we needed some extra help!*

*I made a shield out of cardboard, covered it with yellow poster board, and then covered that with clear contact paper. I had a rope on the back so he could hold onto it. This was his “Shield of Faith.” Then, I took a bunch of packing sponges, about 6” x 8”. I fastened them to 4” x 6” cards on which I had written all the negative, bullying comments kids said to him, and also the self-defeating things he said to himself. These were the “bully bricks” that students threw at him, or that he threw at himself.*

Next, I took colored 3" x 5" cards and wrote responses to each of the negative comments. These were the Truth Cards that he could literally pick up and tape onto his shield to deflect the Bully Bricks. We practiced throwing Bully Bricks at him and had him choose a response from the Truth Cards. By doing this game over and over, it gave him some new places for his thoughts to go, instead of the usual downward spiral of depression and futility.

Reed is doing quite well now, compared to where he was two to three years ago. I know this game was one piece of the puzzle of how to help him. I hope our bullying experiences will help someone else who is struggling.

Kathryn's approach incorporates visual strategies and metaphors to demonstrate an abstract set of concepts and skills, to enable Reed to comprehend and apply the information.

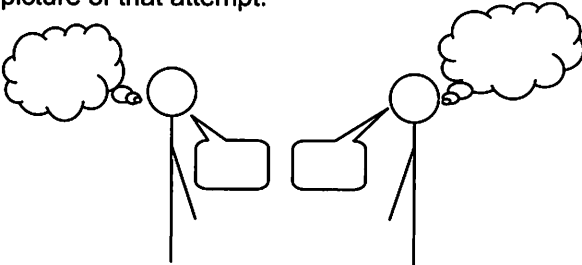
**IMPORTANT NOTE: In a situation where a stranger approaches a student, SKIP STEP 2. The student should not speak; immediately going to a safe location to begin STEP 3.**

**Reporting** (Workbook, pages 6-7) The third step to responding to a bullying attempt is: *Report the bullying attempt to a member of My Team.* Students with ASD are likely to need support to report bullying attempts to adults. That support may range from the practice provided by role-plays, to a variety of visual strategies.

**Report of a Bullying Attempt**

My name \_\_\_\_\_

Someone made a bullying attempt. Here's a picture of that attempt:



Where? \_\_\_\_\_

When? \_\_\_\_\_

Who? \_\_\_\_\_

What happened? \_\_\_\_\_

What was said? \_\_\_\_\_

This report now goes to \_\_\_\_\_.

**Report Forms** A report form can be used to help a student structure and sequence a report. For a student who can answer "wh" questions easily, the form at left may be suitable. Other students may need additional support, using a form where relevant information is circled or picture cues serve as guides. A student may be directed to bring a blank form to a member of the team if a bullying attempt occurs, to complete the form together.

More important than completion of the form is teaching the child to make contact with a team member immediately following a bullying attempt. Routinely including Step 3 in role-plays (including completing a report form) and using a variety of contexts, can help to ensure a student will report regardless of where the bullying attempt occurs.

The importance of distinguishing facts from theories/opinions/beliefs, discussed earlier, is also critical when teaching a student to report bullying attempts. Review of this concept teaches the inherent responsibility in reporting the negative actions and statements of another person.

**In conclusion**, it is my sincere hope that this parent/professional guide and workbook will prove useful to parents, professionals, and the incredible young people that they represent. Ultimately, our collective goal is to create an environment that is physically, emotionally, and socially safe for all people. I believe that what we have learned, and continue to learn, from people with autistic spectrum disorders will be a critical factor in our success.

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**HOW TO RESPOND TO A  
BULLYING ATTEMPT**

**What to Think, Say, and Do**



*How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt:*

*What to Think, Say, and Do,*

is a workbook that was started by Carol Gray

and finished by \_\_\_\_\_.

This workbook belongs to: \_\_\_\_\_.

Additional copies of this workbook are available from The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding, Suite 302, 2020 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546  
Website: [www.TheGrayCenter.org](http://www.TheGrayCenter.org) Email: [info@thegraycenter.org](mailto:info@thegraycenter.org) Phone: 616-954-9747  
FAX: 616-954-9749. The workbook may also be available from other distributors.

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This workbook describes how to **respond** to a bully. It describes what to **think, say,** and **do** if someone tries to bully me.



Most students (about 92 - 95% of them) are **kind**. They **want** all students to feel **safe** and **comfortable** at school. *Almost* all of the time, kind students use friendly words. *Almost* all of the time, kind students *try* to follow the rules and help others. *Sometimes*, these students make **social mistakes** with one another. They may forget to share. Sometimes, kind students do not follow the rules. Soon, they want to make things right again. Adults help them learn from their social mistakes.

Some students **bully** others by making them feel uncomfortable, frightened, or sad. They bully students who are **smaller or who have less power**. How can I know if someone is trying to bully me? It *may* be bullying if someone:

- says something to me that is not kind, not true, or frightening.
- calls me by a name that is not mine, or that is unkind.
- writes messages that are not kind or that frighten me.
- hurts my body, for example, hits, trips, kicks, shoves, or pushes me.
- tells other students not to talk or play with me.
- makes the same or similar mistake many times, **over** and **over**.



Bullying can be very confusing. Getting more information can help. A student who bullies may be a boy or a girl. A student who bullies may be older or younger than me. A student who bullies may be alone or with others. A student who bullies may:

- do something that makes other students laugh.
- do something that causes an adult to feel upset or angry.
- do something that I know is wrong, or that I guess may be wrong.
- give away my money (without an adult saying it is okay).

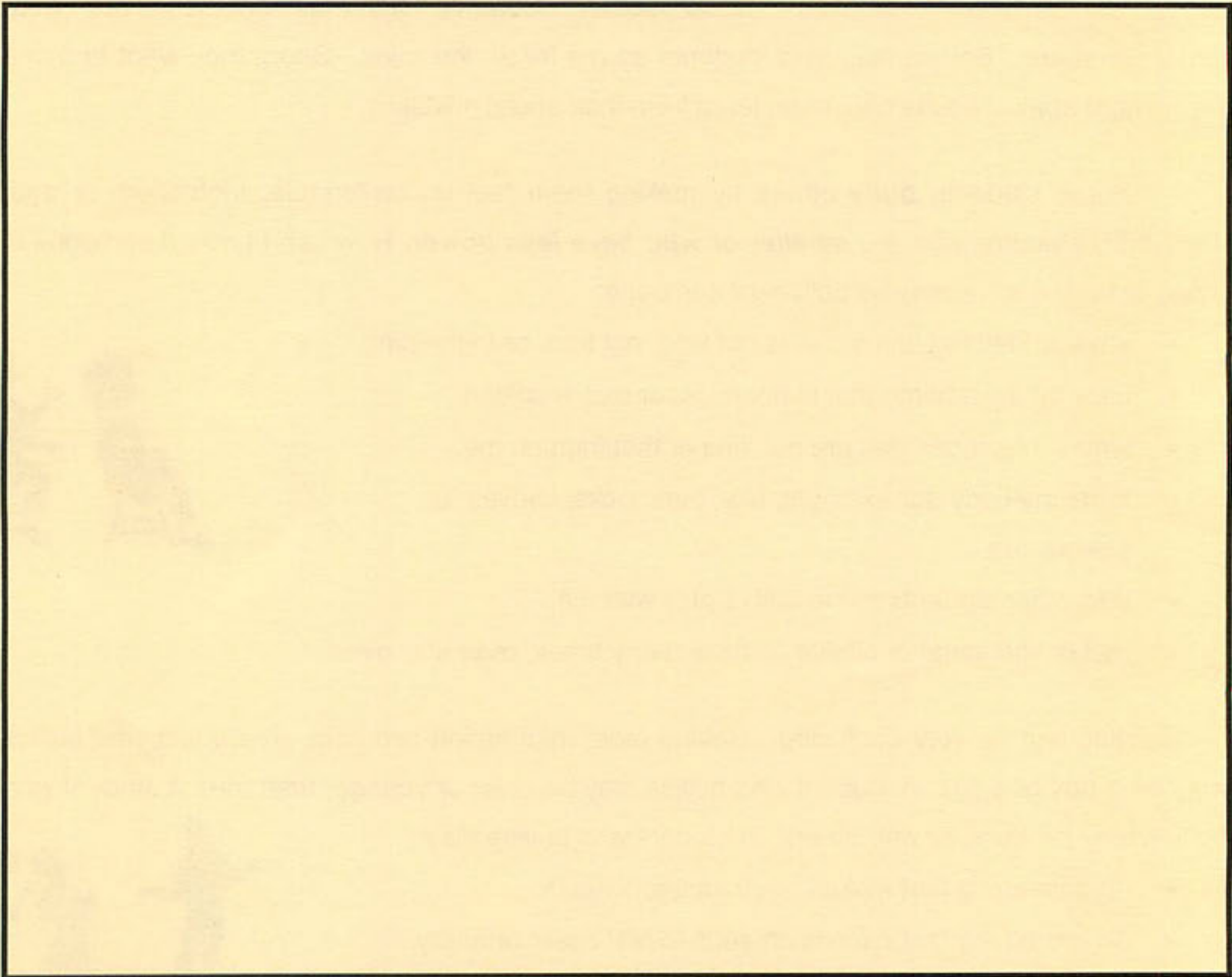


If I feel confused or have questions about bullying, it's an intelligent decision to get more information from adults. Adults were children many years ago. They remember students who bullied them. An adult can help me decide if someone is trying to bully me.



## My Team

I know some adults that are concerned about bullying. They are on *My Team*. My Team will work with me to make sure my school and neighborhood are safe and comfortable. I am an important member of the team. We will work together. My Team will help me finish this workbook. Below is a picture of me with My Team. The members of My Team may print their names below our picture. They may *sign* their names, too.

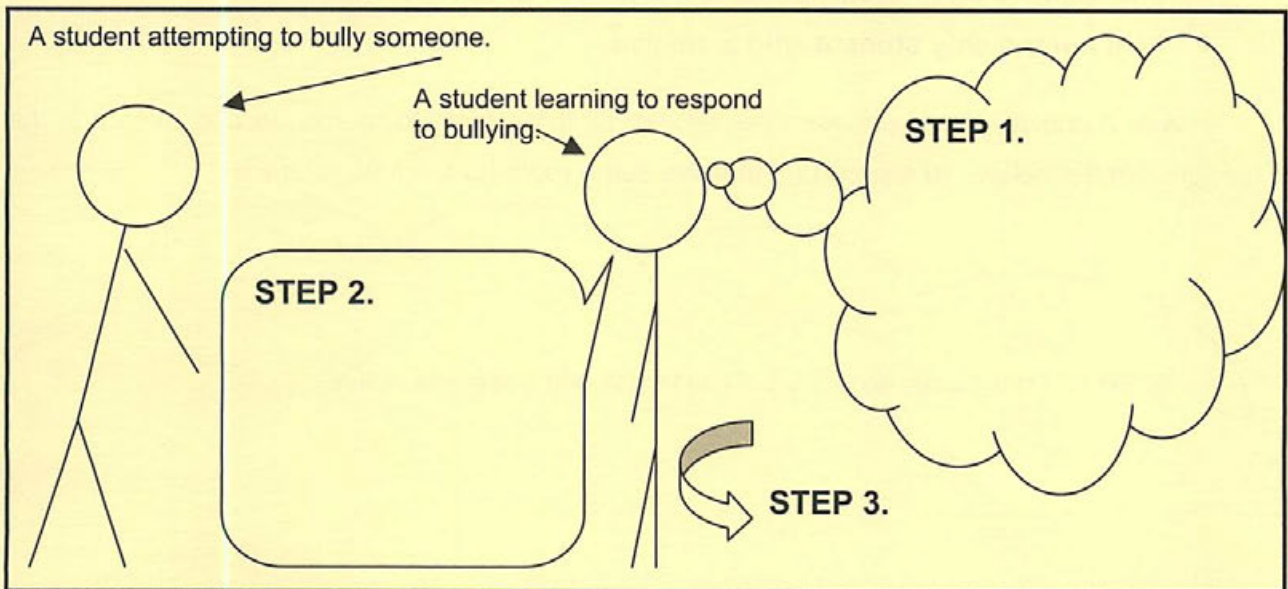


My Team is doing many things to make school a very comfortable and safe place for all students. They have been busy studying and learning new ways to respond to bullying. Even adults have to learn new skills. On page 8, the adults on My Team will write a list of what they have learned. They will also write a list of what they are doing to keep our school and neighborhood safe and comfortable for all students (page 8).

## Learning to Respond to Bullying

Sometimes, a student may try to bully me when My Team is not around. Sometimes, a student may try to bully me when a member of My Team *is* near, but does not see the bullying. I can learn how to **respond** to a student who bullies. I can learn what to **think, say, and do**.

When a student tries to bully someone, it is called a **bullying attempt**. Together with a member of my team, we can complete the picture of a bullying attempt in the rectangle below. We will complete it step by step, following the directions and answering the questions together.



### Directions and questions:

1. On the left is a student attempting to bully someone. Is this student using good self-control? \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes if a student is not using good self-control, adults describe the student as being **out of control**. When a student makes a bullying attempt, he or she is *out of control*.

2. On the right is another student. This child is the target of a bullying attempt. The goal is for this student to use good control, to know what to *think, say, and do*. Is it better to have one student out of control, or two students out of control? \_\_\_\_\_.

The student on the right is one of millions who are learning to use good self-control to respond to bullying. Learning to use good self-control in a bullying situation means:

1. Learning what to think.
2. Learning what to say.
3. Learning what to do.

With a member of my team, I will try to complete the following pages in this workbook. We will return to complete this picture, writing in what to think, say, and do in response to a bullying attempt.



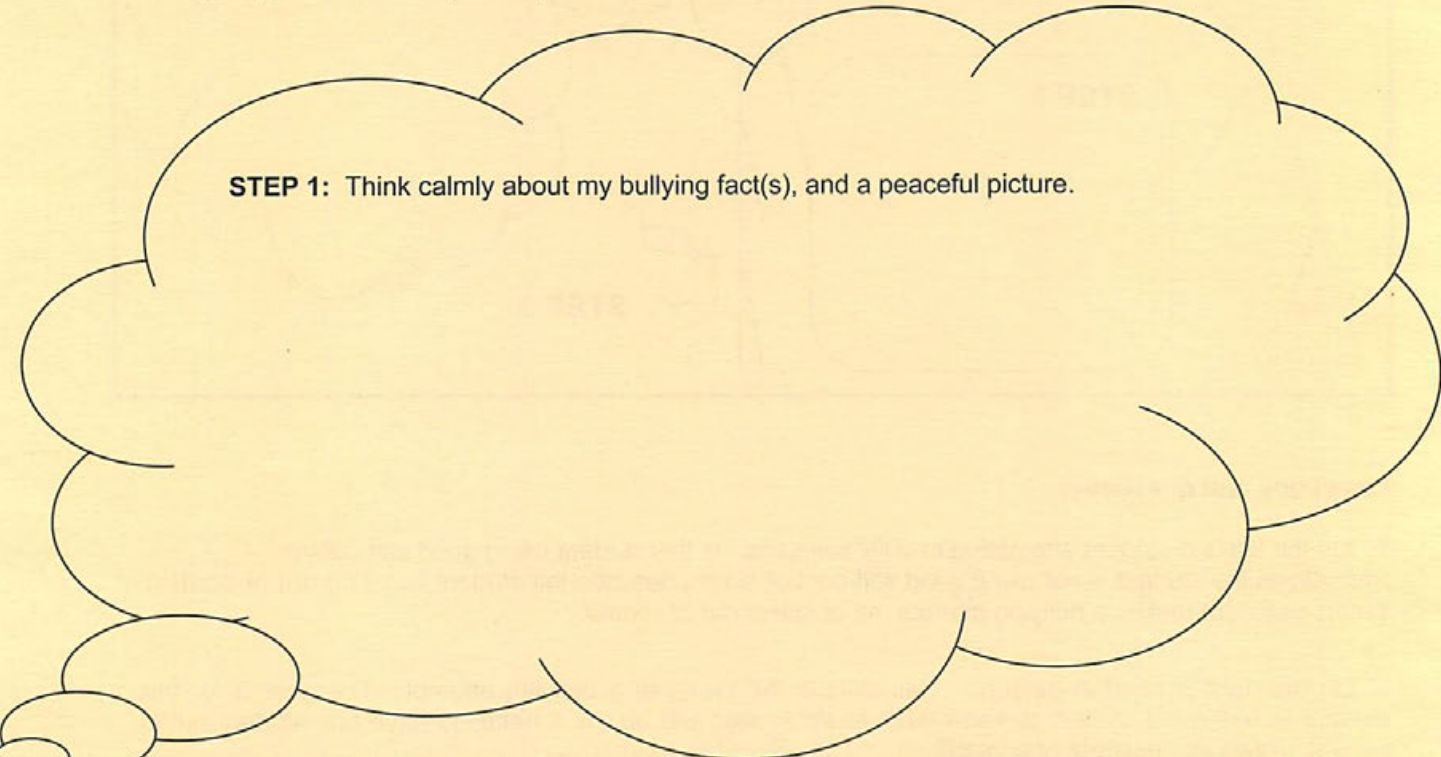
## What to Think in Response to a Bullying Attempt

There are three steps to responding to a bullying attempt. STEP 1 is: *Think calmly about my bullying facts and a peaceful picture.*

**Bullying Facts:** Facts are true. Thinking about the bullying facts helps a student stay calm. If I am bullied, thinking about the bullying facts may help me use good self-control. There are many bullying facts. Here are three of them:

- **It is not my fault that I am the target of this bullying attempt.**
- **The student who is attempting to bully me is out of control.**
- **I am not the only student who is bullied.**

I have a choice. I may choose one, two, or all three facts to memorize and write it in the thought symbol below. (It's important to leave some room for a small picture.)



**STEP 1:** Think calmly about my bullying fact(s), and a peaceful picture.

**A Peaceful Picture:** If I am bullied, thinking of a peaceful picture may help me stay calm and in good self-control. I may choose a peaceful picture to put in my thought symbol.

A member of My Team will help me practice STEP 1 to responding to a bullying attempt. STEP 1 is: Think calmly about my bullying facts and a peaceful picture.



## What to Say in Response to a Bullying Attempt and How to Say It

There are three steps to responding to a bullying attempt. STEP 1 is: \_\_\_\_\_

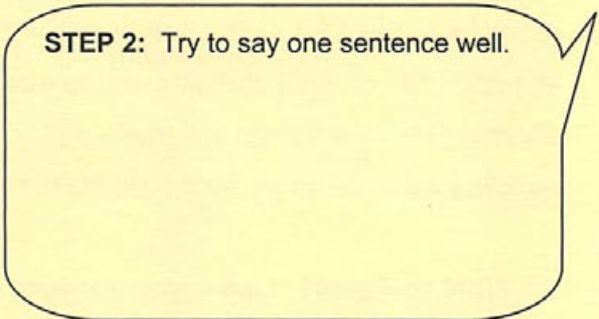
STEP 2 is: *Say one sentence well.* Knowing **what** to say and **how** to say it helps a student use good self-control.

**What to Say:** There are three sentences in the list below. I may choose **one** of these sentences. I will try to choose the **one** sentence that is the most true for me. This is written in the talk symbol. This **one** sentence is what I will try to say in response to a bullying attempt.

- "I hear you."
- "I need you to stop."
- "I don't like that; stop it."

When I say my one sentence, the student who bullies may keep talking. Sometimes this can happen when a student is out of control. I have said my one sentence and I am finished talking.

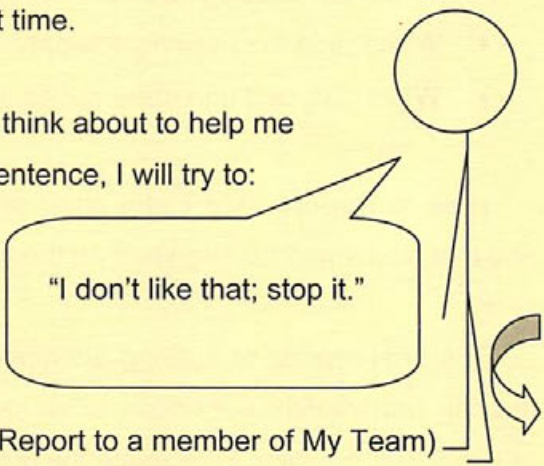
It's time for me to go. It is right to leave a bullying attempt, even if the student who bullies is still talking. **This is very important.** This keeps me mistake-free and in good self-control. Later, adults will teach this student to stop talking at the right time.



STEP 2: Try to say one sentence well.

**How to Say It:** I have facts and a picture to think about to help me stay calm. I have one sentence to say. As I say the sentence, I will try to:

- Keep all parts of my body to myself.
- Stand straight with my head up.
- Use a steady in-control voice.
- Keep a safe distance.
- Walk away after one sentence. (Start STEP 3: Report to a member of My Team)



"I don't like that; stop it."

Knowing what to say and how to say it takes practice. A member of My Team can help me practice. STEP 2 is: Say one sentence well.





## What to Do in Response to a Bullying Attempt

There are three steps to responding to a bullying attempt. STEP 1 is: \_\_\_\_\_

STEP 2 is: \_\_\_\_\_ . STEP 3 is: *Report the bullying attempt to a member of My Team.* Knowing **why** a report is important, **what** to report, **how** to report it, and **who** to give my report to helps me stay in good self-control.

**Why is it Important to Report Bullying Attempts?** *Reporting* is how people learn about important events that occur in other places. Often, an adult is not present when someone makes a bullying attempt. Sometimes, an adult may be present, but does not see the bullying attempt. Reporting is the only way to make sure a member of My Team knows about a bullying attempt. My Team and I will make a plan for reporting bullying attempts. That plan will include deciding **what** to report, **how** I will make my report, and **who** will receive my report.

**What to Report** Like news reporters, it is important for all students to learn how to carefully report bullying information to adults. A good report will include:

- **Where** the bullying attempt occurred.
- **When** the bullying attempt occurred.
- **Who** made the bullying attempt.
- **What** was said and done during the bullying attempt.

**How to Report** My Team and I will make a plan for reporting that is immediate, factual, and that works well for everyone on the team.

The best reports of bullying attempts are **immediate**. It is important for students to report bullying *immediately*, very close to the same time as the bullying attempt. That way, it is easiest to remember the facts to describe the bullying attempt. This is very important.

The best reports of bullying attempts are **factual**. A factual report uses true sentences to describe *where* the bullying attempt occurred, *when* the bullying attempt occurred, *who* made the bullying attempt, and *what* was said and/or done. A student leaves a bullying attempt and tries to immediately make a factual report to a team member.



The first part of the plan is deciding how a student will report bullying attempts to the team. Some students **talk** with a team member to report the facts of a bullying attempt. Some students **write** to a team member to report the facts of a bullying attempt. Some students report bullying attempts by using a **reporting form** or **drawing circles around pictures**. Every team has their own best plan for reporting bullying. My Team and I will fill in #3 in the plan (below). This completes the first part of our plan.

The second part of our plan is deciding who receives my report of a bullying attempt. Each adult member of My Team knows how to help when I have a report. Sometimes, one member of My Team may not be *available*. That person may be sick or in another place. This is okay. There are other members of the team. In the plan (below) My Team has listed the names of the members of my team. They are listed *in order*. I will try to give my report to the team member at the top of the list. If that person is not available, then I will try to report to the team member on the next line, and so on. It is important to report to a member of My Team.

My Team's Plan for Reporting Bullying Attempts.	
I will try to...	Adult team members will try to...
1. report bullying attempts immediately.	1. listen to or read my report immediately.
2. use facts to report bullying attempts.	2. clarify the facts if necessary.
3. report bullying attempts by:	3. take helpful action.
_____	
_____	
My report will be received by:	
_____	. If not available, my report will be received by
_____	. If not available, my report will be received by
_____	. If not available, my report will be received by
_____	. It's important to report to a team member.

STEP 3 is: Report the bullying to a member of My Team.

## How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt

A factual report by the members of My Team:

---

---

*Team members sign on these lines.*

(This section completed by adult team members.)

My Team has learned a lot about how to respond to a bullying attempt. For example, the adult members of My Team have learned:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

My Team is working to keep our school and neighborhood safe and comfortable for all students. They are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

(This section completed by \_\_\_\_\_)

My Team has learned a lot about how to respond to a bullying attempt. I have learned three steps to responding to a bullying attempt. STEP 1 is: \_\_\_\_\_

STEP 2 is: \_\_\_\_\_

STEP 3 is: \_\_\_\_\_

People are learning about bullying all over the world. Some people learn by completing workbooks and practicing. All people learn by working together. Now, My Team can complete the picture on page 3. It's a picture of how to respond to a bullying attempt. I may also decorate the back cover of my workbook with my fact(s), a peaceful picture, and one statement to use when I respond to a bullying attempt. Look at what we have learned! Together, we will keep practicing.

We'd like to know your opinion of:

*How to Respond to a Bullying Attempt:  
What to Think, Say, and Do*

You have our permission to copy the inside back cover of this workbook.  
That way, your workbook will continue to have a cover!

**Please copy this form, complete it, and send it to us. Here is our address:**

Carol Gray and Karen Lind  
Jenison High School  
2140 Bauer Road  
Jenison, Michigan 49428  
United States of America

1. In terms of learning what to do when someone attempts to bully me, I think this workbook is (check one):

- very helpful
- helpful
- not very helpful

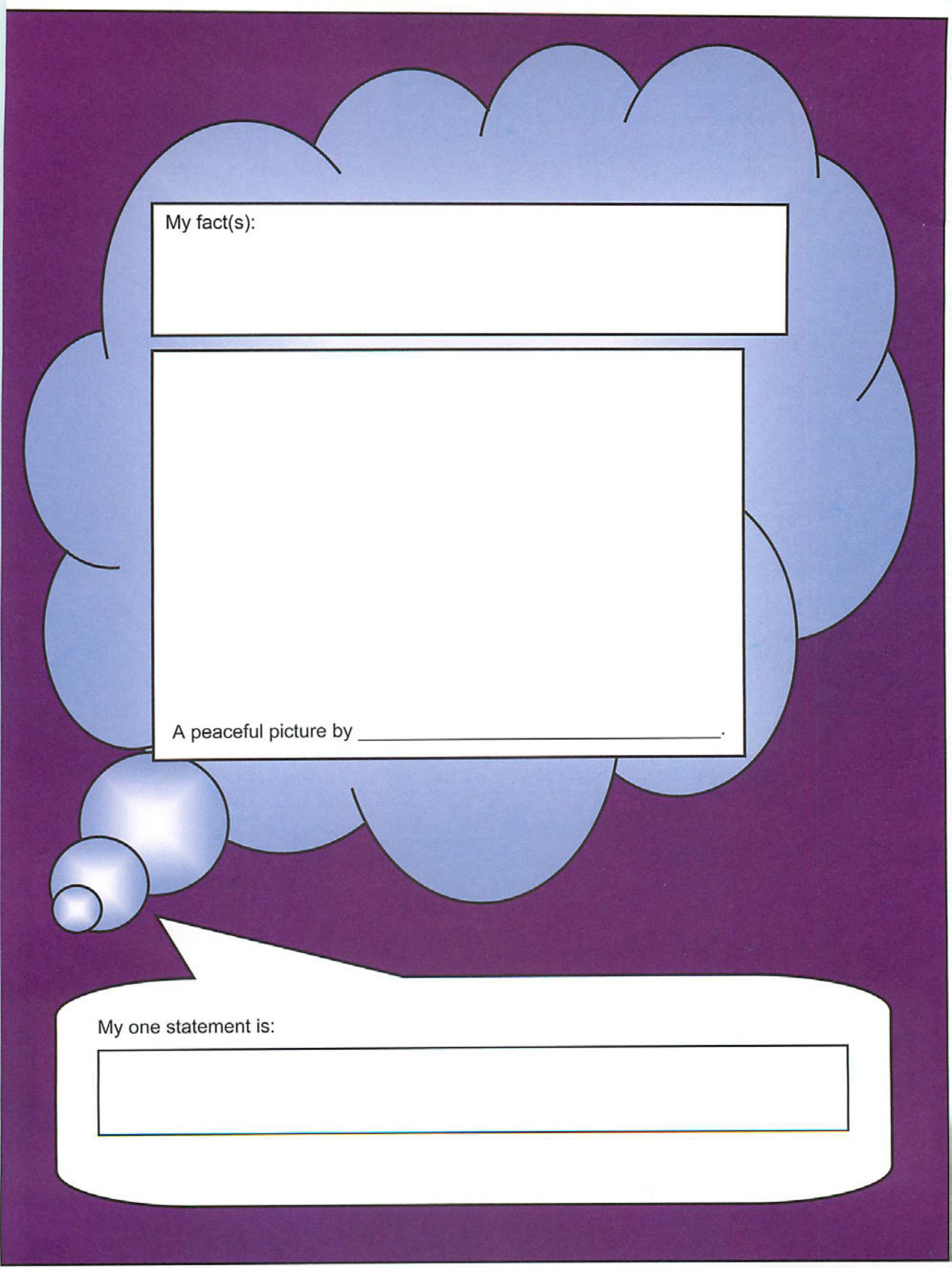
2. What I liked the best about this workbook is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What I did not like about this workbook is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. The thing(s) I would change about this workbook is/are: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. I would also like you to know that: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





My fact(s):

A peaceful picture by \_\_\_\_\_.

My one statement is: