Bullying can occur in many forms, and unfortunately, students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are more vulnerable due to their deficits in communication skills and social cognition. Research shows that students with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be bullied than their typical peers. A student with ASD inability to understand someone else’s perspective can make them easy targets for bullying, particularly in their adolescent years. Students with autism find it difficult to read body language and facial expressions, making it hard to understand if someone is being friendly or attempting to hurt them. Peer intentions may be misunderstood. In addition, because they prefer to play or be on their own, a student with autism can become an easy target.

The impact which bullying has on a student can be profound and devastating.

What is Bullying?

- Bullying does not only refer to physical aggression towards a student but can take on many forms. Bullying includes:
  - Verbal aggression (i.e., name calling, derogatory comments)
  - Social exclusion and/or isolation
  - Physical aggression (e.g., hitting, kicking, spitting)
  - Spreading rumors and false statements about the student
  - Having money/or other material belongings taken away or damaged by the bully
  - Threatened or forced to do things by the bully
  - Cyberbullying (i.e., cell phone, internet, social media)

What are some signs of bullying?

- Hesitancy to attend school
- Emotional behavior (e.g., stressed, anxiety, depression, angry)
- Change in routines, diet, sleeping patterns
- Damaged books and belongings
- Bruises, scratches, cuts, marks on body
- Decrease in academic performance
- Imitating behaviors observed in school
What can be done if someone is being bullied?

- Social skills and communication training can help the student learn to identify when peers are being friendly or not friendly (e.g., identifying facial expressions, body language, tones of voice, gestures).
- Teaching internet safety (i.e., never disclosing personal information, nothing that is online is private).
- Social stories to help understand what to do if they are in a situation that is upsetting.
- List of rules to follow if they are upset or are in an unsafe situation (e.g., tell a teacher).
- Keeping a journal of how they feel can help the student with autism manage their emotions.

What can be done to prevent bullying?

- Raise awareness about autism, disabilities, and acceptance through lesson plans at school. Perhaps asking the school to include a lesson about autism and different disabilities in order to teach acceptance.
- Some schools have a friendship bench where students can sit if they need someone to talk to or play with.
- A bullying box allows students to report incidents of bullying anonymously. In addition, some students with autism have an easier time writing out what they feel than expressing it vocally.

Bully Prevention Websites

- Kennedy Krieger Institute
  Study on emotional and physical consequences of bullying for children with autism.

- Stopbullying.gov
  http://www.stopbullying.gov/
  Information from various government agencies on bullying, cyberbullying, prevention, and who is at risk.

- Stomp Our Bullying
  Hot line, become teen ambassadors, parent and educator advice, October National Bullying Prevention Month activities.

- Stop Bullying Now
  http://stopbullyingnow.com/
  Advise for school professionals in addressing peer mistreatment.

- Cartoon Network
  http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/stop-bullying/
  #WESPEAKUP pledge, videos, parents and educators info.

- The Bully Project
  http://www.thebullyproject.com/
  Film, share your personal story, tools, resources and roadmap to creating change in schools.

References:

Books

A is for Autism F is for Friend
A kid’s book for making friends with a child who has autism.

The Juice Box Bully
Empowering kids to stand up for others.

Nobody!
A story about overcoming bullying in schools.

Ethan Blecher Braves a Bully
Early reader series. Ethan finds himself the focus of a bully in his new school.

The Bully Blockers
Standing up for classmates with autism.

Confessions of a Former Bully
Confessions of a Former Bully provides kids with real life tools they can use to identify and stop relational aggression.

Apps

Mighty League, Vol. 1: The Terrible Taunting
JMan and Jaycee and their sidekick, Mr. Redge are the unstoppable, secret superhero team who save a classmate from the poking pranks of Dr. Evil Touch! Discover the super-secret notebook for information on Aspergers Syndrome.

This app comes with curriculum:
http://geekclubbooks.com/autism-edu/

Bullying Reporting Apps
School administrator’s info on mobile apps to report bullying.

Episode 04 of Bluebee TeeVee also has great resources for bullying topics.
Download the guide:
Deeper Thinking Activity

What is a Bully?

First discuss the difference between bullying and unkind words. Unkind words can be ignored, but constant teasing should be addressed. Have the kids write about different times when they felt teased or bullied. Make a meter of ways to respond to bullying or teasing. For example, the “1” on their meter might be to ignore it. A “10” might be to get as much help as possible. Use “What is a Bully?” worksheet at the end of this guide.

When Should I Tell an Adult?

Have the students do the “When Should I Tell an Adult?” worksheet at the end of this guide.

Role Playing

Have the students act out different situations where someone is teasing or bullying. What is the difference between friendly teasing and bullying? How would they react if it was happening to them? How would they react if it was happening to someone else?

Find Bluebee TeeVee, Autism Information Station on YouTube.com/BluebeeTeeVee
### What is a Bully and What Should I Do About It?

Fill in the left column with different types of people you meet. Fill in the right column with ideas on what to do when you meet that person. Start at the bottom with an example of a nice or neutral person. The next level up should be the next level of people you may meet until you get to the top.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help! This person is the meanest bully I have ever met!</th>
<th>Get an adult! Get help fast!</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>This person seems calm and friendly.</td>
<td>Wave hello, smile at them or say, “Hi!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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When Should I Tell an Adult?

Match the situation with whether you should tell an adult, ignore the situation, talk it out or walk away. Draw a line from the situation to the correct response.

The other students are wiggling and being noisy while standing in line.

Another student keeps making annoying noises on the playground.

You see another student taking someone’s lunch.

Another student pushes you off the play structure on purpose.

Your friend says something mean to you.

Your friend runs away at recess and hurts your feelings.

Someone accidentally bumps into you. They say sorry and dash away.

You see another student is not paying attention to the teacher.

Ignore what the other student is doing and focus on what you should

Just walk away.

Talk about the problem and work out a solution.

Find an adult and get help!