



Bullying : What's a Parent to Do?

This packet includes the following items:

- The Truth About Bullying and LD
- Bullying Hurts Everyone, Not Just the Victim
- Bullying: What's a Parent to Do?
- The Social/Emotional Side of Learning Disabilities
- Tips for Helping Your Child Build Social Skills

The National Center for Learning Disabilities has partnered with The Bully Project to draw attention to this nationwide problem and to commit time and resources to prevent and stop bullying of this at-risk population. The attached collection of articles and resources will help you protect your child from bullying and give you (and them) the information and tools needed to both ensure their safety and to help them be recognized and appreciated as a valued member of their school and general communities.

Also be sure to view a specially designed anti-bullying toolkit with resources for parents, educators, and students at specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/toolkit.

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The National Center for Learning Disabilities' LD.org website offers busy parents a "one-stop shop" – answering questions about learning disabilities (LD) and providing free, helpful resources for the entire family as you move along the "LD journey."

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 - [Online newsletters](#)
 - [LD Insights Blog](#)
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Our Mission

The National Center for Learning Disabilities' (NCLD) mission is to ensure success for all individuals with learning disabilities in school, at work and in life. We:

- Connect parents and others with resources, guidance and support so they can advocate effectively for their children.
- Deliver evidence-based tools, resources and professional development to educators to improve student outcomes.
- Develop policies and engage advocates to strengthen educational rights and opportunities.

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The Truth about Bullying and LD

By Sheldon H. Horowitz, Ed.D.

It's hard to assign a number to describe the incidence of bullying — data from different sources report different findings — but one thing is certain; the deeper you dig, the clearer it becomes that the prevalence of bullying is staggering. *

Statistics

- 10% of children report having been the victims of severe bullying at least once during the school year
- 75% report being bullied at least once during the past 10 months
- 25-50% report being bullied at some point during their school years
- Every day, more than 160,000 students skip school because they are fearful of being bullied
- 40-75% of bullying incidents in school take place during class breaks, in the lunchroom, bathroom, or hallways

And how about these findings?

- 30% of children who suffer from food allergies report being bullied at school (sometimes by verbal taunting but more often, by having the allergen thrown or waved at them!)
- 30% of children who report having been bullied said they sometimes brought weapons to school
- 60% of boys who engaged in bullying behavior during grades 1-9 were convicted of at least one crime by age 24
- The average bullying episode lasts only 37 seconds, and school personnel are reported to notice or intervene in only one in 25 incidents (in contrast to another report where teachers said they intervened 71% of the time and students reported teachers taking action only 25% of the time)

Whether the number is 10% or 75%, the message is clear: bullying is widespread, often goes unnoticed, and can have immediate and long-lasting consequences.

And What About Students with Learning Disabilities?

Are children with LD at special risk for being harassed, bullied, or intimidated? Consider the following:

- A second grader with dyslexia whose difficulties with decoding unfamiliar words results in giggling and name calling whenever he is called upon to read aloud or write on the board in class (with this taunting more often than not carrying over into other settings, such as the cafeteria and school yard, and leaving an indelible impression about this child that will mark him as different for years to come)



- A fifth grader with LD and AD/HD who, despite her enthusiasm, creativity, and deep knowledge of the subject matter, is always the last to be chosen by peers for group projects because of her disorganized approach to work and her need for initial modeling and structure when working on assignments
- A ninth grader with LD and AD/HD who is told not to climb on the new gym equipment but is egged on by his peers until he succumbs and breaks the rules, resulting in punishment and further victimization by his peers
- An eleventh grader with LD who struggles with rapid reading and short-term memory and comprehension deficits whose guidance counselor is discouraging him from setting his sights on enrollment in a competitive college physics and robotics program when math and science are areas in which he excels academically

Some might agree that these are examples of bullying behavior, and others might say that they describe how individuals with LD often suffer from the “soft bigotry of low expectations.” The reality is that all students are vulnerable to the negative impact of bullying, and students with dyslexia and specific learning disabilities, AD/HD and other disorders that impact learning and behavior are indeed at special risk. They are often vulnerable by virtue of their having low self-esteem triggered by low achievement. They might see themselves as outsiders in their peer groups and often have trouble making and keeping friends because their need for special types of intervention, accommodations and support are misunderstood.

What can parents and other concerned adults do to diffuse the powerful negative impact of bullying?

Don’t wait for bullying to present as a problem. Assume it is happening, assume that students are at risk, that teachers and other school personnel are either unaware or incapable of dealing with this problem alone, and that it’s just a matter of time before someone close to you is effected by bullying. Parents need to know that their comments and complaints about bullying (to children, other parents, and school personnel) are taken seriously and they should not hold back sharing information in fear of retribution or ostracism.

Punishing the bully is not the answer. Pointing a finger at the perpetrator doing the bullying may seem like a feel-good answer to the problem, but it is only the tip of the iceberg and will likely not change the person’s behavior. The underlying problem has much more to do with how each person, in school, at home, and in the community appreciates diversity. Whether a person has big ears or long legs, whether they have light skin or dark features, whether they are athletic or klutzy, outgoing or reserved, or whether they are accelerated learners or have special learning needs, the ways that we talk about these differences and the underlying value we place upon these individuals need to be clear: everyone is deserving of respect. Period. No exceptions.

Provide support for everyone involved. No single approach to preventing or stopping bullying is recommended for all situations, but a number of options have been found to be effective. They include:

- Implementing school-wide anti-bullying awareness programs that include all members of the school community, setting clear expectations and acknowledging and rewarding positive behaviors and acceptance of diversity in ways that are visible and recognized
- Offering social skills training and other such interventions for students who are likely to be perpetrators or victims of bullying
- Creating safe and confidential ways for students to report bullying



- Conducting parent awareness and training programs that link to school policies and practices regarding reporting bullying and resolving conflicts in ways that minimize stigma to the children involved
- Improving vigilance by school faculty and student leaders (especially in often unsupervised areas) so that bullying behavior is recognized and stopped

What can parents do? The best advice is to follow your heart... and stop bullying from claiming your child as its next victim.

*The statistics cited come from a variety of sources:

[55 Facts about Bullying](#); [References and Resources from StopBullying.gov](#); [Walk a Mile in their Shoes: Bullying and the Child with Special Needs](#); and [Bullying Statistics](#).

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Bullying Hurts Everyone, Not Just the Victim

By Sheldon H. Horowitz, Ed.D.

BULLYING

- Repeated aggressive behaviors that intentionally causes harm to its victims
- An imbalance of power that is meant to result in verbal, physical, or social harm

At first, the word “bullying” conjures up images of a tough, wise-cracking kid verbally taunting and embarrassing another, pushing, punching, poking, tripping, threatening, taking his possessions, ripping his clothes, defacing his property... all behaviors that are clearly inappropriate and that demand immediate adult intervention. But what about the child who because of her small stature and difficulties with expressive language, is rejected by peers when she tries to sit next to them on the school bus and taunted when she tries to join in a conversation? Or the student who is fearful of walking through the hallways in school because of the dozens of times (by any number of peers) he has been shoved, face first, into a locker or had his backpack yanked off his body causing him to fall backwards (sometimes on the staircase!) resulting in his being late for class, not to mention the physical and emotional pain he’s had to endure.



How about the child whose teachers, perhaps unknowingly, have communicated to the entire class that there are certain children whose work is, and will likely remain, below expectations, resulting in their being perceived as “dummies” or “stupid” (these are their words, not mine!). Or the child who is socially manipulated or baited, causing them to be the repeated brunt of jokes and relentless teasing.

Would you knowingly allow your child to be in this situation? For 6-8 hours each day in school? On the ball field during what should be a time of fun and release of tension? And would you have them go back to these situations day after day, week after week, mistakenly assuming that supervising adults were making sure that all was well? Of course not!

And it’s not just about the act of bullying... It’s about the culture, environment, and community within which bullying takes place. How confident are you that your child will feel accepted and be safe in places and situations where, for whatever reason, people (children and adults) don’t seem to value them as individuals and see no need to speak up when they are being targeted? Addressing the problem of bullying is much more than having a parent-child conversation. It’s something that needs to be addressed in partnership with parents, school personnel and members of the community at large.

Don’t Assume There’s Not a Problem — Ask Questions!

- Ask your child if he or she has ever been bullied. How did it made them feel? What do they wish could have been done to prevent it from happening?
- Ask friends or family members whether they recall having been bullied or witnessed someone else being bullied. (Don’t be surprised when they recall, years later, in vivid detail, the impact it had on them.)
- Ask yourself how sure you are that your child has not been involved in bullying, as a victim, perpetrator, or observer. Does your child understand his or her rights and responsibilities as individuals and as members of the community, to guarantee that bullying is not in any way tolerated?



And then what should you do? Adapting the 2010 slogan adopted by the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security... **“Be on the lookout for bullying, and if you see something, say something, do something.”**

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Bullying : What's a Parent to Do?

By Sheldon H. Horowitz, Ed.D.

How familiar are these phrases?

- Kids will be kids and teasing is normal; they really don't mean any harm.
- Just ignore it and it will go away.
- All you have to do is stand up for yourself.

Is this the kind of advice that you would give to your child if they reported being picked on at school? Sure, maybe the first time they were called a name, or the second time they were intentionally pushed to the back of the line in the cafeteria. But is this the approach you would take if your child was singled out in a mean and hurtful way day after day? Of course not!

And what about these phrases:

- You need to remember to use your words instead of your hands.
- Detention again? Why can't you stay out of the principal's office?
- Did you know the boy who tried to hurt himself because he was picked on?
- I wonder why she is missing so many days of school... she seems like such a sweet girl.

The thoughts and feelings underlying these comments and questions could be unrecognized signs that bullying is taking place. **Bullying involves not only the victim, but also the one doing the bullying, and those who stand by and don't take action.** Even when it is not possible to protect the victim from a particular incident, there is no excuse for not taking a stand and taking action that will discourage or prevent bullying behavior from happening again.

What should parents do?

- **Stop bullying before it starts.** Let everyone know (your child and his friends, school personnel, the bus driver, sports coach... everyone!) that you are on the prowl for signs of bullying and that you expect everyone else to do the same. Preventing and stopping bullying is a shared responsibility, and one that is not voluntary. Ask to see the school-wide no-bullying policy (if they don't have one, insist that they create one!) and ask that the details regarding recognizing and reporting, consequences, and prevention activities be shared frequently with parents and faculty.
- **Use the word "bullying" with your child; make sure they know what it means.** They may not know that the hurtful behavior they are being forced to endure is wrong, mistaking it for "attention" or "acceptance" from peers. If your child is the one doing the bullying, help them to understand the negative impact it has on their status (which is often why they engage in bullying behavior in the first place). And if they are bystanders when bullying is taking place, help them to know what options they have -- doing nothing not being one of them -- without fear of being targeted themselves.
- **Help your child know what to do, and assure them that they will not get in trouble.** The perceived consequences of "tattling" could be keeping your child from sharing their bullying experiences. Help your child know the difference between "tattling" and "reporting an incident of bullying." This is equally important for children who are being victimized, who are themselves the aggressor, or who are bystanders and not speaking up on behalf of those directly involved.



- **Know your rights and don't be afraid to exercise them.** The U.S. government, under both education and civil rights law, recognizes that bullying and harassment are forms of discrimination. Include a goal about bullying in your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP); ask about bullying at every parent teacher conference; and if bullying issues are not properly addressed, be prepared to file a formal complaint with the Office of Civil Rights. None of these actions are excessive or inappropriate to ensure the safety and well-being of your child.

There are lots of topics about which children, parents, and school personnel might disagree, but there should be no question that every individual deserves respect and that it is everyone's responsibility to protect the physical and emotional wellbeing of every child, treating them as valued and respected members of the community.

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The Social/Emotional Side of Learning Disabilities

By Sheldon H. Horowitz, Ed.D.

Thinking back on this past calendar year and the scores of studies and texts that I've read (OK, maybe skimmed) covering dozens of important topics, I am reminded of how frequently I found myself nodding my head in agreement with Dr. Samuel Kirk's observation of more than 30 years ago that children with LD, in addition to struggles with academic learning, have trouble with "skills needed for social interaction." What are some of the social and emotional variables that pose as barriers to success for students with LD? Read on.

What are the "Social and Emotional" Aspects of Learning Disabilities?

Let's take an imaginary walk down the hall with Joseph, a sixth grader, as he makes his way from his first period math class to his second period English class. He's already a few minutes late because he needed extra time to copy the homework assignment from the board. Rushing to his locker (on the far end of the hall) where he will hopefully find the text books he needs for the remainder of his morning classes, he is aware of the chatter and bustling of other students moving about but has not noticed the pervasive agitated mood of the students in the hallway. Apparently Joseph missed the announcement that the cafeteria was closed for repairs and that students would have to eat in their classrooms. Not picking up on any of the all-too-obvious facial expressions and body language, Joseph turns to a group of classmates and asks, "Want to play cards in the cafeteria during lunch?"

- How do you think these students reacted to Joseph's question?
- What was Joseph feeling as this incident unfolded?
- What are the immediate and long-term consequences of Joseph's having a very different and sometimes ineffective social and emotional barometer?

While it is true that some social skills are more easily taught than others, and that over time, established patterns and routines can compensate for difficulties in social and emotional learning and behavior, these types of problems don't just go away. They can have a profound impact upon students (e.g. stress, feeling of self-worth) and are linked to all sorts of everyday activities. Social and emotional skills are critical to activities such as personal interactions ("meeting and greeting") and talking on the phone or via the Internet, and are directly associated with problem-solving, decision-making, self-management and initiating and maintaining positive social relationships with peers and others.

Some Definitions

It might be helpful to clarify what we mean by the words "social" and "emotional."

Social—this word might be best understood in two different ways:

- Social skills are the specific reactions, responses, techniques and strategies that a student uses in social situations.
- Social competence is the term used to describe how well (or poorly) a student performs in social situations.

It is the combination of these two things that helps to describe a student's social well-being.



Emotional: While this word is most readily associated with “feelings,” it is really much more than that. Emotional well-being is associated with what has been called “emotional intelligence,” which includes:

- Knowing one’s emotions (how do I feel about this?)
- Managing one’s emotions (given how I feel, how should I react?)
- Motivating one’s self (regardless of how I feel, I need to...)
- Recognizing others’ emotions (I know how you are feeling)
- Making effective use of social skills (the best thing for me to do now is...)

While the building blocks of emotional intelligence are important for all students, they are particularly important for students with LD who may also struggle because of something I will refer to as “goodness of fit.” Explained wonderfully in a book by Barbara Keogh, titled *Temperament in the Classroom: Understanding Individual Differences*, this perspective suggests that social-emotional and learning problems are linked to “temperament” (or style of behavior) and that temperament, rather than a disability of any sort, might account for how a student behaves in a particular situation. Let’s think for a moment about how students do things rather than what they do or why they do them, and pay attention to such things as:

- Adaptability
- Reactivity
- Task orientation persistence
- Flexibility

What is the connection to LD? What happens when a child’s temperament doesn’t conform to the expectations of teachers or parents? Could a child’s temperament be a “risk factor” for school achievement in the same way that LD poses barriers to learning? You bet it can!

Some Important Points About the Social-Emotional Side of Learning Disabilities

- There are many students with LD for whom social skills are an area of strength and who are able to negotiate emotional challenges without needing support. Don’t assume that every student with LD experiences struggle in this area.
- When compared with non-learning disabled peers, studies have shown that students with LD may be prone to being more poorly accepted by their peers, at greater risk for social alienation from teachers and classmates, less frequently selected to play or join in group activities, and more willing to conform to peer pressure (in adolescence, this is especially troublesome because of the general predisposition to engage in antisocial behaviors). All of these factors clearly have a direct impact on social-emotional well-being.
- Information processing and executive functioning difficulties can make it seem like students with LD are not “fitting in” and can contribute to strain and frustration in the classroom and even at home and other settings.
- Students with LD often (and appropriately) demand additional time and attention from teachers and others. When these students then ask inappropriate questions, ask the same question that was just answered, respond impulsively rather than waiting their turn, or misread a social cue that results in a disruption (all of which they are prone to do), the outcome can be upsetting for everyone involved.



What Can You Do?

The following is a short list of ways to promote the social and emotional well-being of students with LD:

1. Recognize the child's specific areas of strength (competence) and need, and look for (or create) teachable moments to model and reinforce positive skills.
2. Teach social skills the same way you would academic skills: proceed in small steps, demonstrate and give multiple examples, offer practice and feedback (reinforcement and praise), and systematically find opportunities to generalize (apply) newly learned skills and behaviors to different settings. Some critical skills to address include:
 - Awareness of non-verbal cues (e.g., gestures, body language)
 - Social conversation (e.g., initiating greetings, turn-taking, asking for clarification)
 - Being funny vs. acting funny (e.g., knowing when to tell a joke and when doing so can be intrusive or offensive, knowing when to clown around and when to stop)
 - Confidentiality and getting personal (e.g., what types of things to share, how to get someone's attention)
 - Giving and accepting positive feedback (e.g., accepting praise without going overboard, offering criticism without being hurtful)
 - Identifying feelings (yours and others')
 - Anticipating problems and problem solving (e.g., before, during and after moments of stress)
3. Find ways to build the student's self-concept, and help them to achieve and sustain a level of appreciation and positive status among their peers. For many students, this is often most easily accomplished by focusing on non-academic activities (e.g., art, music, athletics), but may not hold true for students who have very particular areas of weakness (I am reminded of a phrase used by NCLD's former Professional Advisory Board member Dr. Sally Shaywitz, who refers to LD as "an island of weakness in a sea of strengths").
4. Try to minimize competition and focus instead on cooperative learning. Whether in the home, at a job, or in the classroom, students are quick to compare their work with the performances of others. Rather than asking students to work independently, try to create opportunities for shared learning and joint activities. This is not only a wonderful way to build social and emotional connections, but an approach that has considerable merit in professional literature as a way to enhance student learning.

Some Helpful Resources and Readings:

- [Teaching Social Skills to Kids Who Don't Yet Have Them](#)
This article from the LDOnline Web site by Dr. Thomas McIntyre is about social skill difficulties experienced by students with learning and attention problems.
- [Nurturing Social Competence in a Child with Learning Disabilities](#)
Research has indicated that children with learning disabilities (LD) have more difficulty making and keeping friends than young people without these problems. Adolescents with LD have been shown to be less involved in recreational activities and to derive less satisfaction from their social interactions than their peers without LD. Read this article by Dr. Betty Osman, Honorary Chairman of NCLD's Professional Advisory Board, in which she discusses the nature of these social disabilities among children with LD, and what, if anything, parents can do to help their children and adolescents "fit in."



- [Learning and Teaching Social Skills: A Relationship-Based Approach](#)
While this article by Dr. Adam Cox focuses primarily on non-verbal learning disabilities, it provides a helpful overview of the types of social and emotional challenges that are common to all students with LD.
- [It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend](#)
Visit the Learning Store at LDOnline to learn more about this informative and effective video/DVD by Rick Lavoie.
- "The Social-Emotional Side of Learning Disabilities: A Science-Based Presentation of the State of the Art." *Learning Disability Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 1
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Tips for Helping Your Child to Build Social Skills

By NCLD Editorial Staff

As young children, we develop what are known as “scripts,” or abstract descriptions of a series of actions or events that are necessary to achieve an objective. Typical scripts a child may have include:

- The format for a birthday party (i.e., you arrive, play games with others, eat cake and/or ice cream)
- Going shopping (i.e., you arrive at store, pick out items to buy, pay at the cash register)
- Eating at a restaurant (i.e., you order from menu, eat, pay)

Depending on the nature and severity of your child’s learning disability, he or she may need additional support from you to develop strong social skills — skills that are critical for building and maintaining friendships. Guiding your child through various social scripts will enable him or her to navigate such situations with greater ease and less apprehension, especially when he or she is interacting with other children.

Activities to Help Your Child Create Scripts

- Read storybooks on topics that address friendships and social interaction and discuss the social components of successful interactions with others.
- Identify areas of social difficulty exhibited by your child and role-play how to handle situations requiring such skills.
- Discuss situations that occur in everyday life, such as a conversation with a supermarket cashier, or the dialogue, facial expressions, and body language between two actors on a television program.
- Present your child with an opening vignette involving a social situation, and ask him or her to provide an ending. Afterward, discuss his or her input and other possible endings.
- When watching a movie or television show, point out subtle social cues, such as non-verbal behaviors and various social situations, that may be unfamiliar or complex, and discuss them with your child.

Putting Scripts Into Practice

- When push comes to shove, nothing is better than real life experience! Allow your son or daughter to spend time with friends and peers. Trial and error is sometimes the only way a person can truly learn.
- Enroll your child in activities outside his or her known social circle if your child feels unpopular in his or her regular setting. Allowing a child to start anew will give him or her opportunities to confidently practice new social skills.
- Engage your child in conversation whenever possible. Eat family dinners together at the kitchen or dining room table instead of in front of the television. As the parent, make the promise to not answer the phone during family meal times so you can better focus on conversation with your child.



General Tips to Share With Your Child

- Be aware of the personal space of others and learn not to invade it.
- Practice making and maintaining eye contact during conversations.
- Pay attention during conversations. Don't let your mind wander or daydream.
- Learn how (and when) to begin and end a conversation politely.
- Try not to monopolize the discussion. Remember, a dialogue is at least two-sided, so allow the other person (or people) to speak their mind (or minds).
- Engage in self-monitoring — that is, adapt your behavior to reflect the social situation at hand. When you are with friends, feel free to let loose and act more relaxed and playful. At school, be attentive and responsive.
- Think twice before speaking to avoid inappropriate comments.
- Patience is a virtue. Allow others to finish speaking before you begin to talk. You wouldn't want someone to interrupt your train of thought, would you?
- Always be courteous — say please and thank you.

Remind your child that practice makes perfect. The more he or she socializes the more confident he or she will become in social situations. And, make an effort to praise your child when he or she is being socially proper and is clearly striving to make a change in behavior.



Related Resources

Related Content on [LD.org](https://www.ld.org):

- [NCLD Talks – Bullying: What Parents Can Do to Protect and Support Their Child](#)
- [Teaching Others About Words that Hurt](#)
- [Behavior Problems and Learning Disabilities](#)
- [Does Your Child or Teen with LD Need Therapy?](#)
- [Interactive LD Checklist](#)
- [Learning Disabilities: What They Are, and What They Are Not](#)
- [Learning Styles vs. Learning Disabilities](#)

Additional Information Linked with Bullying and Learning Disabilities

- [Special Needs Anti-Bullying Toolkit](#)
- [The Bully Project’s Official Website](#)
- [HHS and Education Department’s “Stop Bullying” Website](#)
- [Walk a Mile in Their Shoes: Bullying and the Child with Special Needs](#)
- [Bullies and Victims: Information for Parents \(National Association of School Psychologists\)](#)
- [Bullying Prevention: Tips for Teachers, Principals and Parents \(Edutopia\)](#)
- [How Parents, Teachers and Kids Can Take Action to Prevent Bullying \(American Psychological Association\)](#)

