

Autism Advocacy: Responding to Bullying in the Community

Purpose:

Bullying of autistic individuals can happen in schools, workplaces, public spaces, and online — and it's often misunderstood or ignored. This handout empowers autistic people, families, and allies to recognize bullying, respond safely, and advocate for inclusive, respectful communities.

Remember:

Bullying is never acceptable. Advocacy means standing up for respect, safety, and inclusion — for yourself and others.

Recognizing Bullying Behaviors

- **Verbal abuse:** Name-calling, mocking speech patterns, using autism as an insult
- **Social exclusion:** Ignoring, isolating, or refusing to include someone in activities
- **Physical intimidation:** Threats, unwanted touching, blocking movement
- **Manipulation or gaslighting:** Denying accommodations, blaming autistic traits for conflict
- **Online harassment:** Cyberbullying, impersonation, spreading rumors

Understanding the Impact

- Autistic individuals may struggle to interpret social cues or respond quickly under stress
- Bullying can lead to anxiety, shutdowns, meltdowns, or withdrawal
- Adults may face workplace discrimination, retaliation, or denial of support

Responding Safely

- **Stay calm and safe:** Remove yourself from the situation if possible
- **Use clear phrases:** “Please stop,” “That’s not okay,” “I need help”
- **Document incidents:** Write down what happened, save messages or photos

- **Report bullying:** Tell a trusted adult, supervisor, or community leader
- **Seek support:** Connect with advocacy groups, disability services, or legal aid

Advocacy Actions

- Educate others about autism and neurodiversity
- Promote inclusive policies in schools, workplaces, and public programs
- Encourage bystanders to speak up and support targets of bullying
- Host community events that celebrate autistic voices and talents
- Push for enforcement of anti-bullying laws that include disability protections

What to Do If Bullying Happens

- Remove yourself from danger
- Tell someone you trust
- Write down what happened
- Save any evidence
- Ask for accommodations or support
- Follow up to ensure action is taken