

## **www.autismhelp.info**

### **Teasing and bullying**

#### **Points to note**

- The student may tolerate teasing from his peers just to have company. He may have difficulty understanding whether the comments or actions of other children have malicious intent; he might be very naïve and doesn't know when he is being manipulated. Some children are so eager for acceptance they are tricked into breaking school rules, stealing, etc.
- A child with autism can be a soft target for bullies. He may be a 'loner', have unusual behaviour, poor social interaction skills and lack assertiveness; this really makes him stand out from the crowd.
- Children with autism are frequently subjected to bullying when others learn that they can tell the child to do or say almost anything and they will then go off and do it. This type of bullying is particularly hard to spot.
- The student may have no desire to conform to his peers; this will be especially noticeable as he reaches adolescence. He may not be interested in wearing the latest clothes, preferring comfort and practicality over fashion; girls with autism may choose not to wear make-up or perfume because the smell is aversive. These differences single the student out from the 'in crowd'.
- Teasing and bullying can trigger an angry or emotional outburst without warning, some time after the event. When challenging behaviour occurs in the classroom, always consider whether it is the result of bullying. Many children with autism have great difficulty communicating their distress.

#### **What you can do**

- Appoint a mature child to watch over the student with autism, a kind of 'guardian angel'. This can be done without the student's knowledge to save embarrassment.
- All students in the school should be aware that bullying is unacceptable through a school policy of positive behaviour management.
- Ensure that all staff have an understanding of the social difficulties experienced by students with autism.
- Set up a home base or resource room for the student to retreat to when he feels threatened or anxious. See [Creating a home base](#).
- Talk to the student's peers, explaining the characteristics of autism and the difficulties the student experiences. Seek parental permission first.
- Help the student to develop appropriate responses to unwanted or hostile approaches. 'Business cards' with suggested responses can be carried in the student's pocket. This is important as a student that is being regularly tormented may have outbursts of rage and aggression.

- Make sure the student has someone to talk to when he is upset, either a school counsellor, a compassionate peer or another adult who is readily available. It may help to give the student a map with directions, so he can easily find help when he needs it. A student that is distressed may have added difficulty finding his way around the school grounds. Walk the route a few times to familiarise him or write a list of directions if the student has difficulty reading maps.