

STOP BULLYING OF THE DISABLED!

Bullying Prevention Consulting

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There are certain statements that we should be aware of, as educators, parents, and students, about bullying and disabilities (Pacer National Bullying Prevention Center, 2020) and moreover children with disabilities are less able to deal with bullying and more likely to suffer permanent harm (Special Needs Alliance, 2019):

1. Statistics

Students with disabilities are more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers. Studies show that children with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers.



Students with disabilities may be viewed as different and not part of the 'in crowd' and we must change this perception. Also a bully tends to pick on someone who is powerless, and perceived to be unable, to fight back. Sometimes there are disabilities with speaking, with lowered self-esteem, or cognitive and/or physical challenges which will make speaking up to and resisting more difficult.

2. Impact of Bullying

Students with disabilities are already dealing with the various challenges that affect them. Bullying negatively impacts a person's access to education and work environments. It can lead to:

- *absenteeism from school or from the job*
- *decrease in grades or work output*
- *inability to concentrate*
- *loss of interest in challenges in school and on the job*



3. Defining Bullying

Bullying occurs on a consistent basis when there is verbal abuse, name calling, threats, physical assaults, threatening behavior.

4. Bystanders and Peer Advocacy.

Most people don't like to see bullying when it happens and many don't know what to do as it occurs. It is important to teach others peer advocacy so that people speak out on behalf of others. A person who is observing bullying incidents will have more impact on others, if the bystander tells the bully to stop. We must learn to become Upstanders.

5. How Are People With Disabilities Targeted

Not picking up social cues people perceive the disabled as 'stupid' or 'slow' making them more vulnerable to bullying people who are disabled will think they are being picked on because of their disability which could be untrue other people may pick on them because they don't understand that the difference may be part of the disability.

In the workplaces and in the school environment (HRSA Stop Bullying Now!, 2020) people with learning disabilities are more at risk of being teased and physically bullied. People with medical conditions that affect their appearance can be bullied by referring to their disability by name. People with paralysis can be victimized by their peers and have fewer friends. People with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) can be viewed as impulsive with weaker social skills. The bully (who can possibly grow to be a narcissist) can make fun of, threaten, degrade and scapegoat a weaker person.

That being said bullying is a frightening experience and can cause lasting harm, long

after the incidents have occurred. In the long run bullying can impact on substance abuse disorders, addictions suicidal thoughts, and many physical symptoms.

We need bullying prevention programs at our schools and in our workplaces. Studies have found that when schools have such programs in place, bullying can be decreased (Diaz, 2018). Such programs need to define bullying, and give accountability, as well as redress to those who bully. Intervention programs like peer intervention, or a buddy program which promotes positive, healthy friendships are possible solutions.

AbilityPath.org is an online community for professionals and parents of children with special needs that gives access to services for the disabled-- and offers ways to address bullying.

Dreamscape Foundation empowers the disabled to meet their academic needs by making others aware of, and bridging the gap between perceptions and realities of the disabled, by providing resources for the disabled, and helping with assistive technology.

It is important for educators and parents to teach our students and children to understand and tolerate differences Talking about social skills and civility is important. We need to educate our staff at our workplaces what to do when we see bullying, and how to

respond to this. There must be zero tolerance policies at our workplaces It is important show understanding regarding the the manifestation of symptoms, people with special needs have in our workplaces.

"Such programs need to define bullying, and give accountability..."

It is the responsibility of our schools and our workplaces to create a safe environment for people with disabilities. Accommodations are needed, and educating our teachers and supervisors about health needs of those who are disabled is paramount. Even with the



existing laws--this is still not enough to change perceptions about the disabled. We need to change existing perceptions in our cultures so the disabled are no longer bullied.

Let's work on this together!

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