



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY College of Education

# Students with ASD in Secondary Education: Navigating Friendships and Bullying

Marisa H. Fisher, PhD, BCBA-D

Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education  
Michigan State University  
fishermh@msu.edu

# Agenda

- ⬆ Introductions
- ⬆ Overview of friendships and social vulnerability of individuals with ASD
- ⬆ Overview of my research on bullying of individuals with ASD
- ⬆ Discussion of ways to support students who experience bullying and ways to decrease bullying

# Who Am I?

- Associate Professor of Special Education at Michigan State University
- Board Certified Behavior Analyst
- Research on social vulnerability and victimization of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

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# Friendship Experiences for Individuals with ASD

# Friendships

- ⬆ Critical in the development of a healthy quality of life
  - ⬆ promote well-being & strong self-worth
  - ⬆ increase community engagement
  - ⬆ act as a protective factor against poor health

(Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al., 2018)

# Friendships and ASD

- ⬆ Developing and maintaining friendships can be challenging for students with disabilities
  - ⬆ ~ 30% of students with disabilities have significantly fewer friends and are less accepted by their classmates
  - ⬆ ~ 50% of adolescents with ASD have never been invited by other students to social activities
  - ⬆ Almost one-third report never interacting with friends outside of class

(Pijl, Frostad, & Flem, 2008; Wagner, Cadwallader, & Marder, 2003)

# Friendships and ASD

- Friendship development does not appear to improve as students age
- Young adults with ASD are at greater risk for experiencing loneliness, difficulty forming & maintaining friendships, and have only a few close friendships
- Individuals with disabilities have an average of only 3.1 people in their social network compared to nearly 125 in those without disabilities

(Fulford & Cobrigo, 2016; Hill & Dunbar, 2003; Vendonshcot et al., 2009)

# Why?

- ⬆ Difficulties developing and maintaining friendships are associated with
  - ⬆ interpersonal barriers
    - ⬆ social skills deficits, behavioral challenges
  - ⬆ societal barriers
    - ⬆ poor attitudes toward IDD, limited opportunities
    - ⬆ physical integration alone does not necessarily encourage social inclusion, acceptance, or the development of friendships

(Hughes, Carter, Hughes, Bradford, & Copeland, 2002; Rossetti, Lehr, Lederer, Pelerin, & Huang, 2015)

# Impact

- ⬆ high levels of loneliness
- ⬆ reduced emotional support
- ⬆ feelings of rejection
- ⬆ social isolation
- ⬆ Increased risk for bullying and other forms of peer victimization

(Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Bhaumik et al., 2008; Fulford & Cobigo, 2018; Petrina et al., 2014; Meyer & Ostrosky, 2014; Petrina, Carter, Stephenson, & Sweller, 2016)

# Bullying and Peer Victimization of Individuals with ASD

# Did you hear about this?

## **Attack Of Man With Disabilities Streamed Live On Facebook**

by **Chicago Tribune/TNS** | January 5, 2017

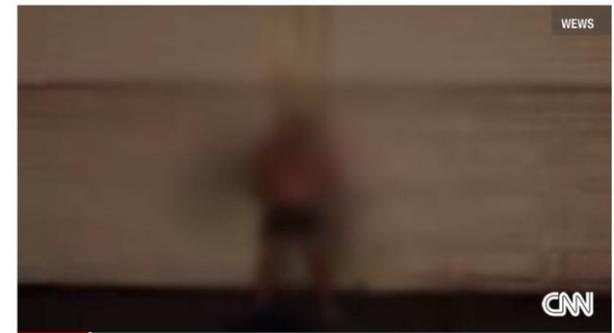
# Did you hear about this?

[Home](#) > [News](#) > 5 Juveniles Charged in Ice Bucket Challenge Prank on Teen with Autism

## 5 Juveniles Charged in Ice Bucket Challenge Prank on Teen with Autism

**October 14, 2014** -- Charges were filed against five teens accused of dumping a bucket of bodily fluids on a teen with autism who thought he was participating in the ice bucket challenge for charity.

The incident took place in the Cleveland suburb of Bay Village. The teens have been charged in juvenile court with disorderly conduct.



# Did you hear about this?

## Principal resigns after emailing fellow teacher's video mocking autistic boy, 11, with his head stuck in a chair to other staff

An elementary school teacher has come under fire for filming and taunting an autistic boy who became stuck in a chair rather than helping him.

Nicole McVey reached for her cell phone when the 11-year-old boy, who has Asperger's syndrome, became caught through a chair at Oaktree Elementary School in Goodrich, Michigan last November.

The footage shows that, as he struggled to free himself, McVey asked him how he became caught in the chair and whether he wanted to get Tasered.

The school's principal, Michael Ellis, was also in the room at the time and can be heard chipping in.



**Father says his autistic son, 12, was left with autism suicidal after bullies attacked him, tied**

Compared to the estimated national prevalence rate of 10.6% of students in the general population, parents report that nearly half (46.3%) to almost all (94%) adolescents with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are victims of bullying

**Attack Of Man With Disabilities Streamed Live On Facebook**

# What is Bullying?

- ⬆️ Unwanted aggressive behavior by one individual or group of individuals toward another
- ⬆️ Observed or perceived power imbalance
- ⬆️ May be repeated multiple times
  - ⬆️ Physical
  - ⬆️ Verbal
  - ⬆️ Relational
  - ⬆️ Damage to property

# What Age

- ⬆ Middle school is the hardest
- ⬆ All ages are at risk

# Where Does It Happen?

- ⬆ At school
  - ⬆ In the hallways, cafeteria, playground
  - ⬆ Places teachers are less likely to see
- ⬆ On the bus
- ⬆ In the neighborhood
- ⬆ At work
- ⬆ Online

# ASD and Bullying

## Increased risk factors

### fewer or lower quality peer relationships

-  protective factor in TD literature

### limited social skills

-  trouble with conversational skills and awareness of social cues

### communication difficulties

-  assertiveness and effective communication identified as protective factors in TD literature

(Kloosterman, et al., 2013; Nabuzoka, 2003; Rowley, et al., 2012; Schroeder et al., 2014; Wainscot et al., 2008)

# ASD and Bullying

- ⬆ Increased risk factors
  - ⬆ rigid and repetitive behavior
    - ⬆ may lead peers to view them as odd
  - ⬆ social naiveté
    - ⬆ can lead to manipulation
  - ⬆ difficulty regulating emotions
    - ⬆ strong emotional or behavioral reactions may encourage perpetrator

(Schroeder et al., 2014)

# Impact of Bullying

- ⬆ Higher levels of
  - ⬆ Anxiety
  - ⬆ Hyperactivity
  - ⬆ Self-injurious behaviors
  - ⬆ Stereotypic behaviors
  - ⬆ Elevated emotional sensitivity

# What Type of Bullying Does Individuals with ASD Experience?

- ⬆ Individuals with ASD are most likely to experience relational or verbal bullying
- ⬆ Peer pressure

# Bullying of students with ASD

- ⬆ Does not necessarily look the same as bullying for students without disabilities
- ⬆ The perception of bullying
  - ⬆ Student might perceive he was victimized, even if that event does not fit into a specific bullying category
    - ⬆ Goes unreported on current questionnaires
    - ⬆ Student still negatively affected by the experience

# Bullying of students with ASD

- My research asked individuals with ASD to tell me about their own bullying experiences and why they thought they were bullied
- To better understand the bullying experience of middle school students with ASD to inform the development of more successful bullying prevention and intervention programs



*Original Article*

# **Let's talk about it: Peer victimization experiences as reported by adolescents with autism spectrum disorder**

Autism  
2016, Vol. 20(4) 402–411  
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DOI: 10.1177/1362361315585948  
[aut.sagepub.com](http://aut.sagepub.com)  


**Marisa H Fisher<sup>1</sup> and Julie Lounds Taylor<sup>2</sup>**

# Physical Victimization

- ⬆ Minor to severe instances of physical bullying
- ⬆ Peers “poked me over and over.”
- ⬆ “tied my shoes together”

## more serious physical altercation :

- ⬆ “I got bit by some jerks. (*Yeah? What happened with those jerks?*) Well, I had some guys, decided to hiss like in my very previous years and still like in sophomore year. (*Oh, no, they hissed at you?*) Like [adolescent hisses]. And it was unexpected, like it was like [adolescent gasps] (*Oh, so it scared you a little bit?*) And it was like ‘why those annoying jerks’.”

# Verbal Victimization

- ⦿ picked on or teased by peers
- ⦿ “Well some kids would just pick on me like try to steal my books or call me names. Which I didn’t like.”
- ⦿ “Oh yes I used to have long long hair. I used to have long long hair and there was a girl when I was in school, she didn’t like that. In fact there were two girls and they did not like that. They teased me all the time. Yep. Didn’t like that. I ended up cutting it. *[Did you cut it because of that?]* Yes, it was long, well it was because of that”

# Relational Victimization

- peers ignoring them or not being nice
- peers would “stare at me in a weird manner”
- “he annoys me on purpose”
- “mostly talk behind my back”

## **Some had trouble determining whether they were a specific target:**

- “he irritates everyone”
- “I would get teased around in public in front of my friends and I know they’re just kidding...kind of hurts in a way”

# Reasons for Bullying

- ⬆ Some offered reasons as to why they thought others might target them
  - ⬆ personal attributes
  - ⬆ other's opinions of them

# Personal Attributes

## Blame on themselves

- ⬆ “maybe that was kind of my fault”
- ⬆ “I’m not exactly approachable”
- ⬆ “I haven’t exactly made an attempt”
- ⬆ “[it was an] awkward phase of early teens”

## Easy targets

- ⬆ “I’m easy to aggravate, pretty much. At times, at least. Um, yeah. I was way too easy to target, I was easy pickings is the word”
- ⬆ Others felt bullies noticed their disability (e.g., “I was obviously different”)

# Personal Attributes

## Because of their disability

- “I was obviously different”
- “To get a reaction out of me, that’s what they were after...thought it was funny seeing my re-seeing me react....Cause I was different like my disability. They took advantage of it”
- “I guess I just don’t do what they do. It’s so hard to tell you how it works. I don’t know. Maybe I talk different than them maybe. I’m not interested in the same stuff all the time, or, I don’t know, I just don’t do well with kids in high school. It’s just hard to explain”

# Other's Opinions of Them

## **Felt that other students in the school did not like them or want to be around them**

- ⬆ “because um the other kids just seem not to want to be around me”
- ⬆ “they all hate me, too”
- ⬆ “it’s hard to keep friends”

# How Can We Recognize It?

- ⦿ Students with ASD might not tell you they are being bullied, or they might not realize that the way they are treated is wrong
- ⦿ Look for changes in behavior, fear to go to school or a previously preferred activity, withdrawal

# What Can We Do To Decrease Bullying and Peer Victimization

# First: Recognize It

## Ask questions

- “How was your bus ride today?”

- “Have you ever seen anyone being mean to someone else on the bus?”

## Then move on to questions that directly affect the child such as,

- “Are you ever scared to get on the bus?”

- “Has anyone ever been mean to you on the bus?”

# Second: Help Students Learn to Respond

## Promote Self-Advocacy

### Behavior Skills Training

-  Teach why it is important to stand up to a bully
-  Model ways to stand up to a bully
-  Role play ways to stand up to a bully
-  Practice ways for the student to report bullying to a trusted adult

# Second: Help Students Learn to Respond

## Autism Speaks' Steps to Take A Stand Against Bullying

### 1. Start the Conversation

- Explain what it is and how to recognize it
  - If it hurts or harms, either emotionally or physically, it is bullying
- Explain why it is not okay
- Help them feel comfortable telling you

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/7-steps-take-stand-against-bullying>

# Second: Help Students Learn to Respond

## Autism Speaks' Steps to Take A Stand Against Bullying

1. Start the Conversation
2. Encourage Self-Advocacy
  - Explain why it is important to stand up to a bully
  - Role play ways to advocate

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/7-steps-take-stand-against-bullying>

# Second: Help Students Learn to Respond

## Autism Speaks' Steps to Take A Stand Against Bullying

1. Start the Conversation
2. Encourage Self-Advocacy
3. Speak Up
  - If you are worried, say something

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/7-steps-take-stand-against-bullying>

# Third: If they do report bullying...

- ⬆ **Listen**
- ⬆ **Believe**
- ⬆ **Be supportive**
- ⬆ **Be patient**
- ⬆ **Provide information**
- ⬆ **Explore options for intervention strategies**

# Third: If they do report bullying...

## Behavior management

-  Identify and address behaviors that are specifically targeted by bullies
  -  Reduce opportunities to target the student
  -  Individualized, capitalizing on the methods they have already developed

# Fourth: Help Others Decrease It

- Bullying Prevention Programs
- Despite the high rate of victimization of students with ASD, no bullying prevention programs have been developed to directly address victimization of students receiving special education services
  - Have to move beyond school-wide bullying prevention programs
  - Must be disability-specific

# Fourth: Help Others Decrease It

## Consider contextual Factors

-  School climate is a strong predictor of victimization

## Individual Factors

-  Disability status
-  Peer rejection

# Fourth: Help Others Decrease It

- Rejection of students with ASD related to
  - different appearance (both physical and behavioral)
  - presence of a one on one aide in the classroom
  - typically developing students do not understand students with ASD or the reasons for their differences

# Peer Mentoring Programs

- Students without disabilities are social supports in the classroom for students with ASD
- Peer mentors report
  - Feeling more comfortable advocating for students with disabilities
  - Intervening to stop other students from teasing students with disabilities
  - Modeling acceptance of students with disabilities for other peers to see

# What Peers Think We Should Do to Decrease Bullying of Students with ASD



# Awareness

- “People are too naïve to realize that they are humans too and that they’re not completely different. You know, they are different maybe socially, but, you know, but some of them are very, very smart, some of them might even be smarter than, you know, the people who have blind views on them, so I think that it’s just, um, a matter of everybody being educated, like an assembly. I think an assembly would work in just um educate people on some of the facts uh that come with autism so that, you know people can, uh, change their views and I feel like having a school-wide assembly would, um like I feel like that would motivate people to you know, say ‘hi’ to someone in the hallway who has autism or you know something like that...I think a large portion of the problem is just that people don’t know, you know, people don’t understand uh you know, how how far just a ‘hi’ a simple “hi” can go you know to a student like that. You know, that could make their day, you never know. They could be thinking about it three hours later that day, you know, that ‘this person said hi to me’. So, I think it’s just about people being educated about autism”

# Awareness

- “I mean, you do better when you know better. And I feel like they’ll know better if they know about this stuff and they’re gonna do better”
- “Just even like a day, you know, we go to like assemblies all of the time and I think that could really help with the people and to hear, just being aware”
- “I also think it would be cool if they made like an autism class, or even made LINKs like a core class so that everybody got a look at what it's like to actually be with people with autism”
- “Educate them on like....educate them about people with autism”

# Start Younger

- ⦿ “I’m just sad that we didn’t take it [the peer mentoring class] earlier, only as a Junior or Senior, because you can really see the progression over the years”
- ⦿ “It might be more necessary in the younger grades because those kids can be like really insensitive”
- ⦿ “Just cause that’s what they’re used to and like I remember when we were in 4th grade we could make little retarded jokes and that’s what they still do, it’s like stuck in everyone’s vocabulary and it’s messed up, but you gotta start younger, I guess”



## **FRIENDSHIP AND BULLYING STUDY For Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or Cognitive Impairments**

**We are conducting a research study regarding the friendships and bullying experiences of middle school students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or Cognitive Impairments. If you would like to hear more about the study or to sign up, please go to the following link**

**<https://is.gd/MSUfriendshipstudy>**

**Or email Marisa Fisher at [fishermh@msu.edu](mailto:fishermh@msu.edu)**

### **Who are we looking for?**

Individuals willing to meet with the research team and to complete some interviews and questionnaires

- **Adolescents in middle school (grades 5, 6, 7, or 8)** with Autism Spectrum Disorder and /or Cognitive Impairment and a **parent**
- The adolescent/parent will be asked to identify and invite a **teacher** of the individual with ASD/CI and a **same-aged peer** of the individual with ASD/CI to answer some questionnaires.

### **What will we do?**

- Individual with ASD/CI and parent will be interviewed about friendships and bullying experiences separately, and will complete questionnaires during a 1-2 hour visit either at your home or at MSU (\$50)
- Observe your child a few times throughout the school year during lunch at school (if school gives permission)
- A peer will be asked to complete an online questionnaire about the individual with ASD/CI's friendships (\$10)
- A teacher will be asked to complete an online question about the individual with ASD/CI's social behaviors and friendships (\$20)

**<https://is.gd/MSUfriendshipstudy>**

# THANK YOU!

## Friendship and Bullying Lab

Cynde Josol, Rachel Welling, Jessica Douglas,  
& Katie Cwiakala

## Institute of Education Sciences

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Marisa H. Fisher, PhD, BCBA-D  
[fishermh@msu.edu](mailto:fishermh@msu.edu)  
[marisahfisher.com](http://marisahfisher.com)