

The background features a dark blue gradient with a large, semi-transparent circular scale on the left side. The scale has numerical markings from 140 to 260 in increments of 10. Several smaller, faint circular patterns and arrows are scattered across the background, creating a technical or scientific aesthetic.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH ASD IN HANDLING BULLYING AND AGGRESSION

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AGENDA

- Review definitions and patterns in aggression and bullying
- Identify challenges in helping Autistic kids respond to bullying
- Discuss how to support kids' friendship skills and problem-solving skills
- Explore ways that parents can respond and support

FRIENDSHIP PROBLEM VS. BULLYING: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

- Sometimes peers are aggressive, either socially, verbally or physically
- When aggression happens occasionally between friends who are equals, it's **not bullying**.
- A helpful term when discussing conflict or aggression between peers is *Friendship Problem*
- When aggression is done repeatedly to someone with less power than the aggressor, it is **bullying**.

DEFINING BULLYING

Bullying is...

- *Intentional* mean behavior
- carried out *repeatedly*
- by someone with more *power* than the person they are targeting

WHY DO WE BULLY?

- To feel powerful/have a sense of control
- To draw people to us/build up our social status
- It's been modeled for us by parents, older siblings, or influential friends
- As an outlet for negative feelings—e.g., irritability or anger causing us to feel like being mean to someone
- And in combination with all of the above factors, having limited empathy for others' feelings or situations can lead to bullying

TYPES OF AGGRESSION

Physical: Hitting, pushing, tripping, kicking

Verbal: Name calling, insults, curses said directly to someone

Social/Relational: Mean words said behind someone's back, rumor-spreading, social exclusion, pressuring

Cyber: Aggression carried out via social media, videogames, or texting

UNDERSTANDING RELATIONAL AGGRESSION



Manipulation of social relationships and/or social standing to harm another's feelings or reputation



Withdrawal of friendship (or threats of doing so)



Can hurt more because it is ongoing. It lacks a distinct beginning and end--rumors spread and social exclusion continues for an indistinct time period

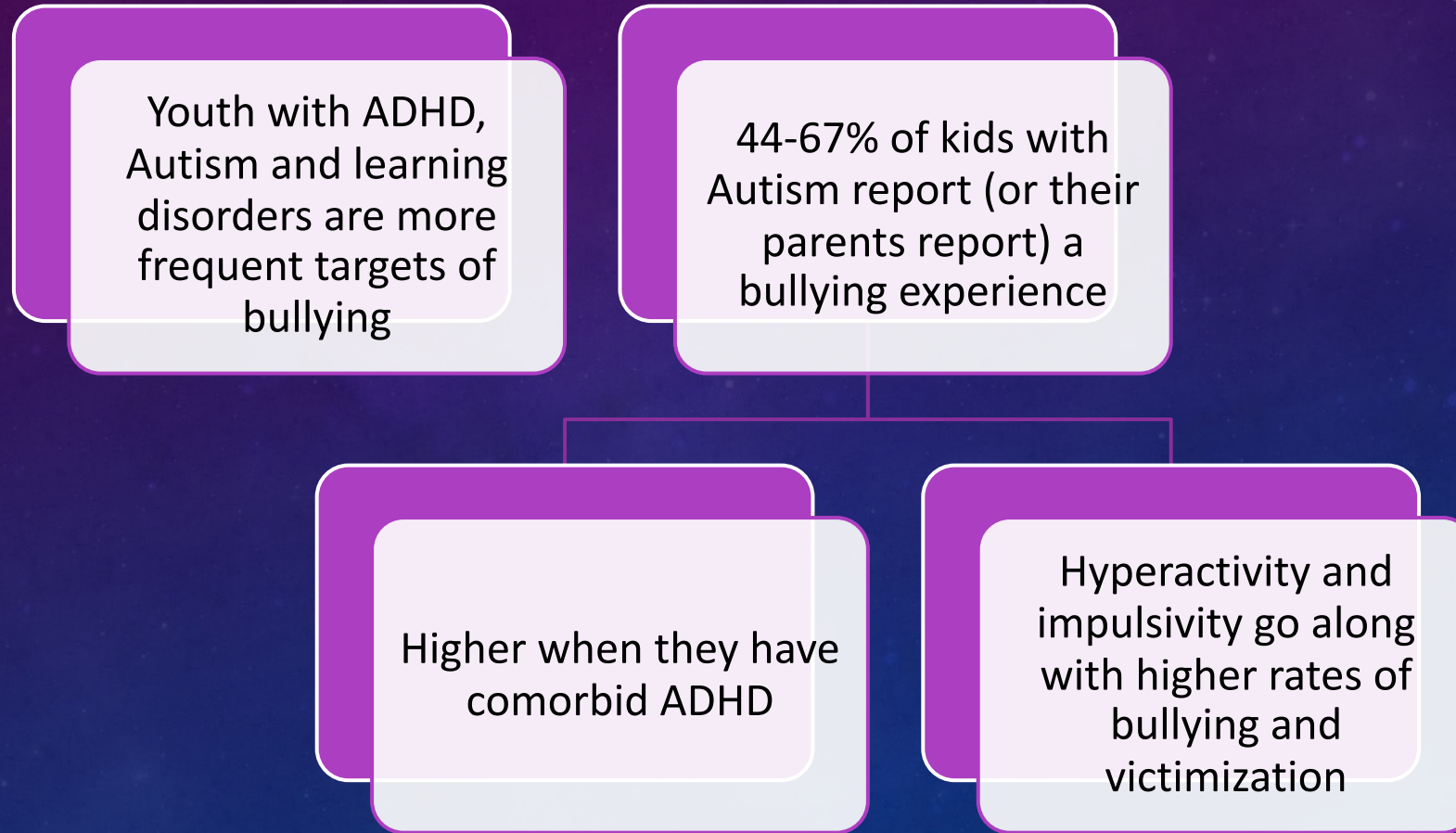
ANYTHING THAT SETS A CHILD APART CAN MAKE THEM A TARGET FOR BULLYING:

- Race
- Religion
- Talents
- Physical Appearance
- Popularity or lack of friends
- Illness or Disability
- Sexual orientation

SOME POPULATIONS ARE AT GREATER RISK FOR BULLYING

- Youth with ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder or other developmental disorders
- Youth who identify as LGBTQ
- Kids who have recently immigrated to the US
- Kids from religious or racial minorities
- Kids who are heavy

RISK FOR FOR BULLYING AMONG KIDS WITH ASD



WHAT MAKES KIDS WITH AUTISM VULNERABLE?

- More limited social awareness and social skill may set ASD kids apart from neurotypical kids
- Difficulty with social communication can mean they don't respond effectively to derail or stop the aggressor
- A less robust network of friends leaves them more isolated and easier to target
- Emotional dysregulation makes kids more appealing to target, because there's a more "satisfying" or obvious reaction

RECOGNIZE
SIGNS THAT
YOUR CHILD IS
BEING BULLIED

Headaches and stomachaches

Trouble sleeping

School avoidance or Lunch/Recess avoidance

Declining grades

Complaints about peers

Social/Emotional Withdrawal

Unexplained bruises or injuries

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESPONDING AS PARENTS

1. Ask open-ended questions to find out what happened. If not successful, move into more structured response choices. (e.g., Did someone do something to be mean to you? → Did someone leave you out or make fun of you?) Has this happened before? Did anyone help?
2. Let them know that the other child was wrong to engage in aggression or bullying. Tell them they deserve to feel safe at school.
3. Assess the impact on your child. What emotions are they having? Are they annoyed, frustrated embarrassed? What's the duration of any sadness or depression?
4. Ask what would help them feel better—both in the moment and in the days and weeks ahead.

CONSIDER POSSIBLE RESPONSES WITH YOUR CHILD

- Consider the situation: How serious is it? How many people are usually around when it's happening? Are there helpful adults nearby?
- As you brainstorm, help your child consider their own skills and personality...
 - If you're shy, you may do better with a non-verbal response, like rolling your eyes and walking away
 - If you're confident and bold, you may be comfortable telling a bully to stop what they're doing: "Hey—cut it out. That's not cool."
 - If you're funny, think about using humor to take back some of the power in the situation.
 - Is there a friend who could walk with you/stick with you/go for help?



APPLY A PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUE



- Explain that in hard situations, it's good to consider a whole range of responses. We do that through brainstorming!
- To form a good list of choices, you need to “turn off” that mental critic that says right away, “That won't work.”
- They're not committing to trying the options in the list, but rather, to considering them.
- Scaffold! Ask them to generate some options, and then you add some too. Insert some humor and some extreme choices. These can foster creativity in problem-solving.

HELP THEM THINK OF A RANGE OF OPTIONS...

- Create a commotion to draw attention and be less alone (e.g., stand up and start singing/dancing an anti-bullying song)
- Simply walk away
- Get an adult's support or help, even if you do it later.
- Confront the kid who's being mean or aggressive ("What's your problem? You're being so mean!")
- Share with your friends what happened, so they can support you.

WHAT IF THEY WANT TO...DO NOTHING?

- Especially as kids get older, it's important to honor their opinions and preferences
- Talk with them about the pro's and con's of doing nothing.
 - Pro: avoid drawing more attention to yourself
 - Con: the bully gets away with it and may continue or start to bully others
- Consider whether the school could take any actions that would not be embarrassing for your child
- Consider the potential for retaliation
- Consider whether your child's social judgement is likely to be accurate
 - If you think their perception of the situation is limited, weigh that as you determine your response

HOW CAN WE SOFTEN OR COUNTER THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA FROM BULLYING?

Resilience experts recommend...

- Continuous contact with and support from important people in child's life
- Disclosing the trauma to loved ones
- Identifying as a survivor as opposed to a victim
- Use of positive emotion and laughter
- Finding positive meaning in the trauma
- Helping others in their healing process

ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION WITH YOU

Make your child's school social life a regular topic of conversation!

- Try to be non-judgmental and convey a relaxed tone
- Rather than lots of questions, use declarative language: "Being with other kids can be fun, but also tiring." "I bet there are some kids at school who aren't that nice."
- Don't be too reactive: if you see an issue, remember you can take time to think it through before addressing it.
- When we're more reactive or harsh, we shut down communication and kids get more private and sneakier
- Validate them, point out their good choices/instincts, and name when something is hard/challenging for everyone

HOW DO WE PREVENT BULLYING?

- ❑ Invest in *multiyear, multi-component* programs
- ❑ *Coordinate* classroom, school- & community-wide efforts
- ❑ Teach *social-emotional skills* directly in real context
- ❑ Foster *respectful, supportive relations* among students, school staff, & parents
- ❑ Support & reinforce *positive* academic & social behavior through *comprehensive systems*

HOW CAN PARENTS HELP PREVENT BULLYING OF THEIR AUTISTIC KIDS?

Invest in helping your child integrate at school:

- Foster friendships and social interactions
- Obtain peer mentors/buddies
- Role play hard situations at home and practice helpful phrases/coping strategies

Explore with leaders/teachers how they work toward meaningful inclusion:

- Enlist help from teachers to build acceptance of neurodiversity and foster meaningful relationships
- Request goals and SDI's in the IEP related to meaningful inclusion and prevention of social isolation or bullying
- Request goals and SDI's that build child's social coping skills



FOSTER FRIENDSHIP SKILLS AND AWARENESS

Good, healthy friendships have some common ingredients:

- Trust
- Respect
- Liking and Caring
- Reliability
- Acceptance
- Safety



WHAT DO 'RESPECT AND TRUST' LOOK LIKE?

- Listening and paying attention to your friend
- Not talking about your friend behind their back
- Believing that your friend's intentions are good
- Believing your friend when they say they're sorry
- Being honest

WHAT DO 'LIKING AND CARING' LOOK LIKE?

- Being interested in what the other person is talking about...most of the time!
- Inviting/Including the other person in social activities
- Caring about the other person's feelings (i.e., wanting them to feel good)
- Saying nice, complementary things to each other
- Having interests and hobbies in common
- Appreciating the other person's personality

TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF UPSTANDERS!

- No one should have to handle bullying alone—in fact it’s almost impossible
- When you speak up or take action about mean or aggressive behavior, you’re being a positive bystander or upstander.
- This takes courage, good communication, and practice!
- It may be easier to “stand up” with other friends or classmates.
- Research has shown that when more kids stand up for their classmates who are experiencing mean or aggressive behavior, there’s less and less aggression in those schools.

[Click here for a Video on the Importance of Being an Upstander](#)

THANK YOU!

FOR FAMILY RESOURCES OR INFORMATION ABOUT
THE CENTER FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION AT CHOP PLEASE
VISIT [HTTPS://VIOLENCE.CHOP.EDU/RESOURCES-FAMILIES](https://violence.chop.edu/resources-families)