

Bullying: How does it Impact Students with Disabilities?

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Bullying is not a harmless rite of childhood that everyone experiences. Research shows that bullying can negatively impact a child's access to education and lead to school avoidance and absenteeism, a decrease in grades, an inability to concentrate, loss of interest in academic achievement, and increased dropout rates.

Children with disabilities such as developmental, physical, intellectual, emotional, and sensory disabilities are at an increased risk of being bullied. Any number of factors - physical vulnerability, social skill challenges, or intolerant environments—may increase the risk.

Statistically, the majority of people with Intellectual and Developmental disabilities experience high rates of crime and often have difficulty identifying when to be compliant and when to assert themselves. As a result, they may be victimized both when they comply too easily AND when their refusal to comply provokes retaliation.

When bullying is directed at a child because of his or her established disability and it creates a hostile environment at school, bullying behavior may cross the line and become “disability harassment.” Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the school must address the harassment.

Specifically in August of 2013, The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) issued guidance with an overview of school districts' responsibilities to ensure that students with disabilities who are subject to bullying continue to receive free appropriate public education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under IDEA, States and school districts are obligated to ensure that students with disabilities receive FAPE in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

This guidance explains that any bullying of a student with disabilities which results in the student not receiving meaningful educational benefit is considered a denial of FAPE. Furthermore, this letter notes that certain changes to an educational program of a student with a disability (e.g., placement in a more restricted, “protected” setting to avoid bullying behavior) may constitute a denial of FAPE in the LRE.

Read the letter [here](#).

What is the Prevalence of Bullying for Kids with Disabilities?

- Only 10 U.S. studies have been conducted on the connection between bullying and developmental disabilities, but all of these studies found that children with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be bullied than their nondisabled peers. (Marshall, Kendall, Banks & Gover (Eds.), 2009).
- Research says that teens would be bullied at a higher rate for those with the worst social skills. What's more, students with disabilities who spent more time in mainstream classrooms tended to face a higher risk of bullying.

- Researchers discovered that students with disabilities were more worried about school safety and being injured or harassed by other peers compared to students without a disability (Saylor & Leach, 2009).
- The National Autistic Society reports that 40% of children with autism and 60% of children with Asperger's syndrome have experienced bullying.
- When reporting bullying youth in special education, kids were told not to tattle almost twice as often as youth who were not in special education (Davis and Nixon, 2010).

The numbers paint a grim picture... but how can schools address system wide culture issues when data is not collected or aggregated? *Let's Be a Part of the Solution!*

Remind your Schools, Districts, and Legislators that:

- Many of the Anti-Bullying Campaigns and techniques approved to be implemented within School Districts DO NOT include children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
- Data must be collected and aggregated regarding prevalence of Bullying & Cyberbullying of children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
- A close eye on retaliation by peers and staff must remain a focus for children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
- Multidisciplinary approaches must be sought and applied to address Bullying as a systemic issue and to ensure School Culture change.

Contact Hanni Raley at hraley@thearcofaurora.org or 720-213-1420 to take formal action!