

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Bullying

Will, a 12-year-old boy with autism, is in middle school. During his IEP meeting it was decided that Will would have a paraprofessional aid him in the classroom, but Will would be responsible for moving between classes. During the first week, Will handled the transition well. Early in the second week, a group of students in the hallway walked by Will, whose mannerisms often drew attention. A student jumped in front of him and screamed as if to startle him. Will's eyes welled up with tears, he plugged his ears with his fingers, and sat down in the hallway. Will was frozen, fearful, and unable to recognize what he should do next. Will remained seated in the middle of the hall until the class period began and his paraprofessional came to look for him. Will's IEP team met again to consider strategies to address Will's sensitivity to loud noises and crowded, socially confusing situations, such as the school hallway.

Students with disabilities who are eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The IEP can be a helpful tool in a bullying prevention plan. Remember, every child receiving special education is entitled to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), and bullying can sometimes become an obstacle to receiving that education.

The IEP team, which includes the parent, can identify strategies that can be written into the IEP to help stop the bullying. It may helpful to involve the child, when appropriate, in the decision-making process. Such strategies include:

- Identifying an adult in the school who the child can report to or go to for assistance
- Determining how school staff will document and report incidents
- Allowing the child to leave class early to avoid hallway incidents
- Holding separate in-services for school staff and classroom peers to help them understand a child's disability
- Educating peers about school district policies on bullying behavior
- Ensuring regular reassurance from the school staff to the student that he or she has a "right to be safe" and that the bullying is not his or her fault
- Shadowing by school staff of the student who has been bullied. Shadowing could be done in hallways, classrooms, and playgrounds.

When talking with your child's IEP team, consider what strategies, with those listed above as a guideline for ideas, that might be effective for them to address bullying.