

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 supplementary aids and services, program modifications and supports to address Will's sensitivity to loud noises and crowded, socially confusing situations, such as the school hallway.

Children with disabilities who are eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will have an IEP (Individualized Education Program). The IEP team can work together to develop goals, benchmarks or short-term objectives, and identify supplementary aids and services or program modifications or supports to help prevent and intervene against bullying. Include the child in the decision-making, as this can improve the likelihood of the child meeting his or her IEP goals.

For example, the IEP could include **goals and objectives** that address the following:

- Improve social skills such as sharing, taking turns, or thinking before acting
- Develop ability to carry on a 2-way conversation
- Identify social norms for the child who does not catch on to them by him or herself
- Participate in friendship group to practice social skills with peers under direction of school staff
- Increase self-advocacy skills so child can say “no” or “stop that”
- Improve speech intelligibility so child can interact with peers
- Identify and practice direct and indirect ways to react to, handle, and avoid bullying behavior

Examples of **supplementary aids and services, program modifications or supports**:

- Hallway or playground monitoring by school staff
- Allowing child to leave class early to avoid hallway incidents
- Use social stories to help child understand difficult situations when they occur
- In-service school staff to understand child's disability and vulnerability
- In-service classroom peers to help them understand child's disability and/or child's use of assistive technology, paraprofessional, or interpreter (i.e. things that are “different”)
- Educate peers about school district policies on bullying behavior
- Set up no-questions-asked procedure for child to remove him or herself from a situation where bullying behavior occurs