

## Bullying and Exclusion



*Here are some further tips and strategies that can be used to help autistic girls deal with bullying and exclusion:*

- ⇒ She may misinterpret bullying. Help her to identify a situation that might be an accident verses someone who is intentionally being nasty.
- ⇒ Many schools adopt a restorative practices approach to bullying. Where she has been involved in an incident ensure that she has time to process what has happened and provide her with assistance to enable her to communicate her version of events accordingly. It may also be preferable to exempt her from a restorative practices.
- ⇒ Teach her the difference between what she can problem solve herself, for example sorting out a disagreement with someone; verses what she should get help for from an adult, for example physical or covert bullying.
- ⇒ Offer lunchtime structured activities such as drama, music, art or reading group which she can participate in it when she is not coping in the school yard or needs time out from friends.
- ⇒ Sometimes she may not be able to articulate how she feels so it may seem that she is coping when in reality she is not. She may be good at internalising her emotions so check in with her more regularly, especially if there is a change in her usual behavior.
- ⇒ She may have low self-esteem and may think that the bullying or excluding behavior she is experiencing is her fault. Help her understand that she is not doing anything wrong and that repetitive bullying or excluding behavior is never her fault.
- ⇒ Ensure she has a 'safe' person and place (e.g., teacher, principal, support staff, trusted friend) she can access if she is being bullied or excluded.

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- ⇒ Empower her to access this support group through a variety of methods (e.g., verbal, written, direct or indirect requests) when needed. A 'Bully Box' held at the office for students to anonymously report situations can be helpful for her to use if she is not comfortable revealing her identity.
- ⇒ Be aware of the different types of bullying. It can be less obvious for females and often takes more 'covert' forms (e.g., hidden or out of sight actions, including making up stories to get someone in trouble or spreading rumours).
- ⇒ Actively promote positive, inclusive attitudes through a whole school approach that actively involves students, staff and parents.

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## Class Rules



*Here are some further tips and strategies that can be used to help autistic girls understand and follow class rules:*

- ⇒ **Be mindful that she may have a strong sense of right and wrong so rules will either be followed or questioned, in particular if they don't make sense or seem fair. If this is the case you may need to explain that the rules are there to keep the classroom safe or to help her focus better.**
- ⇒ **Encourage her to be a part of the class discussion to create the class rules with her peers. She may be more willing to follow them.**
- ⇒ **Ensure that there is consistency with how the rules are applied and that they are followed, in particular if there is a different teacher taking the class.**
- ⇒ **Pre-state any consequences so that she knows what will happen if a rule is broken and it is not unexpected. It is a good idea to write up the rules and also write the consequences next to them. Be aware that she may be overly critical of a mistake that she has made and be prepared to support or reassure if this is the case.**
- ⇒ **Help her understand why the rules are in place and be ready to provide a logical reason rationale that she can understand and relate to.**
- ⇒ **Be clear consistent and explicit.**
- ⇒ **Avoid idioms, metaphors and figurative language e.g., say what you want to happen – if you say “your desk is getting very messy” she may not pick up the implied meaning that you expect her to clean it up.**
- ⇒ **Explain the unwritten rules to the class and ensure she understands them.**

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## Completing Tasks and Executive Functioning



*Here are some further tips and strategies that can be used to help autistic girls complete tasks and help with executive functioning:*

- ⇒ **Ensure that she is ready to start a task by not seating her or pairing her up with a child who will distract her.**
- ⇒ **When completing a task, have an option of spaces that she can go to such as the library or a quiet space if she needs time out or to break for a few minutes.**
- ⇒ **Check in with her at the start, middle and the end of a task to ensure that she is on track and has sustained attention. Sometimes she may forget what to do next or remember where she is up to. Keep visual instructions that she can go back to and check in when she looks unsure.**
- ⇒ **Be aware that she may present different levels of executive functioning depending on her engagement in a task. For example, she may show sustained attention for a topic she likes but may struggle to complete a task if she is emotionally distressed.**
- ⇒ **Her executive functioning does not only affect her school work. It may also impact her social interactions because of challenges with her response inhibition, flexibility and her emotional control.**
- ⇒ **Provide her with clear written or visual instructions to reinforce what you have said.**
- ⇒ **Regularly check for understanding of verbal and written instructions as she may not ask for help.**
- ⇒ **Give her the big picture. For instance she may benefit from understanding the end result before beginning her work.**

## Completing Tasks and Executive Functioning

- ⇒ Help her understand time. For example use an analogue clock so she can see time passing and plan how to use it. Also break tasks into smaller steps and help her determine the time needed to complete each step.
- ⇒ Help her get organised with lots of visual prompts, including colour codes for each subject or picture sequences.

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## Internalising and Hidden Anxiety



*Here are some further tips and strategies that can be used to identify and help manage anxiety in autistic girls:*

- ⇒ **Provide trigger warnings for topics that may cause her distress at school. She may tend to be more empathetic and may become overly sensitive during class discussions. For example about injured animals or people who died in the war.**
- ⇒ **Try not to over stimulate the classroom with too many posters or visuals as she may become overwhelmed. Keep these items to a minimum. As sensory overload may directly contribute to her increased anxiety.**
- ⇒ **If she “stims” in class as a way of managing her anxiety do not to stop her if this is what she finds comforting. For example rocking, clapping, vocal humming, hair twirling. Her stimming is most likely assisting in her ability to self regulate and concentrate.**
- ⇒ **Manage emotions in the classroom by having an “anxiety box” that she as well as other students can put notes in to and the teacher can check regularly.**
- ⇒ **Be aware of perfectionist traits that can come out when she is stressed or anxious. For example she may want to complete a task even after the bell has gone or she may be overly critical of a mistake that she has made.**
- ⇒ **Check in with her regularly. It's best to be discreet and offer her a variety of ways she can approach you. For example, in early years, a visual sign that girls can use to identify that she needs help is effective, and in older years being allowed to email the teacher directly can improve communication.**
- ⇒ **Get to know her. Understand her individual triggers for anxiety and dig deeper if they are not obvious - she may be camouflaging them. It is also worth checking in with parents as they will have great suggestions as to what is helpful for their daughter.**

## Internalising and Hidden Anxiety

- ⇒ Establish a safe haven or quiet place for her to access in the classroom or on the playground and provide her with a discreet exit strategy to access these when needed.
- ⇒ Allow her to have her comfort items close to hand e.g., fidget or sensory tools, soft toys.
- ⇒ Lastly, requesting or forcing eye contact can increase her anxiety and make it harder for her to complete work. A common misconception is that avoiding eye contact may signify a lack of interest when in fact it is helping her to process information, and keep focused on the task at hand.

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## Peer Relationships



*Here are some further tips and strategies that can be used to help autistic girls with navigating friendships and peer relationships:*

- ⇒ Her friendship group may best be identified in terms of the common interests she shares with her peers. For example, if she is a “gamer“ or is “arty“ then she may gravitate more towards girls who share these interests as well.
- ⇒ Respect that peer relationships come in different forms and this is ok. On observation she may be the loudest in a group, may have more friends that are boys. She may have one close friend or may have lots of friends. She may prefer to spend time on her own or might be selective with friendships. She may have more friends who are older than her or friends that are younger.
- ⇒ Help her to understand that a friend does not want to play with her on a particular day it does not mean that they are no longer friends. Just like she may need space or time out her friends may need the same.
- ⇒ Have a peer system in place that helps her in social situations. Implement a buddy system at school or ask other children who are socially aware to help her navigate social situation.
- ⇒ Encourage her to be herself rather than try and fit in. She will more likely attract meaningful friendships with peers who think like she does and who have similar common interests.
- ⇒ Work with her to choose a classroom and playground buddy so she has a built in ally or ‘go to person’ that can support her in unstructured times.
- ⇒ Create a culture at the school that promotes inclusion for all e.g., set up a friendship bench, reading nook or lunchtime clubs that provide more opportunities for semi-structured play during social times.



## Peer Relationships

- ➔ Provide explicit teaching about how she can join groups, how she can check to see what the children are playing, how to leave a group if she no longer wants to be a part of the game e.g., use social stories.
- ➔ Understand she might find it easier to connect with students who are older or younger than herself rather than students her own age. Allow her to access all play areas if she wants to.
- ➔ Girls who have just one or two very intense friendships may need help widening their circle and understanding why this matters. Help them find other young people or peers with shared interests.
- ➔ Remember that autistic expressions of friendship may sometimes look different to the 'norm', but are equally valid and authentic. Inclusion goes both ways, and it is important to teach neurotypical students to be truly inclusive and accepting of their neurodivergent peers.”

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## Teamwork



*Here are some further tips and strategies that can be used to help autistic girls work better in a group:*

- ➔ **Be mindful that she may struggle with large group discussions. This can be due to her having processing issues when keeping up with conversations. An option is to create smaller groups for her to be a part of.**
- ➔ **If she seems anxious about working in a group or not wanting to speak in a group give her a role that she can do such as being a note taker, time keeper, writer, etc.**
- ➔ **Don't give her the role of public speaker if that is not what her strength is. It will only result in increasing her anxiety.**
- ➔ **Structure any group work so that free time is spent constructively. Keep in mind that neurotypical girls spend free time "talking" and this may cause anxiety if "chit chat" is not her strength.**
- ➔ **Allow her to choose who she does a group activity with, or alternatively facilitate the choice of groups. This will reduce the anxiety of not being picked or chosen."**
- ➔ **Allocate specific roles within the group and play to her strengths e.g., she may prefer to be the note taker or writer if she is anxious about public speaking.**
- ➔ **Balance the amount of group work in the day with individual work to allow her downtime.**

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