Bullying towards students with special needs

Did you know that students with disabilities are 63 percent more likely to be affected by bullying than their peers? (Iqbal, bin Nordin and Hasyim, 2021).

Students with special needs are more likely to be bullied than other pupils. This can happen because they might have difficulty when talking, because of his/her appearance, or how well they work in school... Sometimes, they might not understand social rules or have trouble expressing themselves. This can make them more vulnerable to bullying.

In some cases, students with special needs may be isolated or excluded from chatting with class colleagues, making them even more vulnerable to bullying. Bullying can also hurt their ability to learn and grow. It's important to know that bullies often target those kids who they think are weaker and won't fight back.

It's important for everyone to stand up against bullying and support each other! Remember that EVERYONE deserves to feel safe and respected at school.

What is the Impact of Bullying on Students with Special Needs?

Have you ever felt feelings of sadness, of fear and/or shame when talking or going to school? Have you ever felt very lonely or excluded socially ? Have your sleeping and dietary habits changed at any time ? Have you ever experienced a lack of interests or passions for different activities?

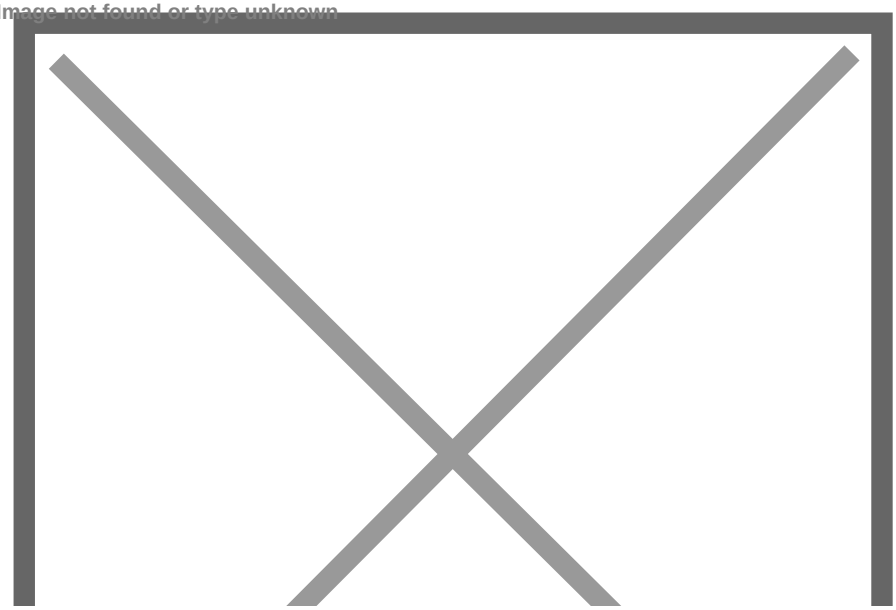
All of these unpleasant feelings and changes of habits can be consequences of bullying. Bullying can also make you feel increasingly anxious, can worsen your self-esteem and your confidence, and negatively impact your concentration and your motivation for any activity or task that you are supposed to do. You might be aware that bullying causes a decrease in academic achievements and school attendance, as well as depression, violent moods, substance abuses, stomach aches and headaches, suicidal thoughts, self harm and even suicide…

Now, think how bullying affects a student with special needs.

Here is a video for you to understand the impact of bullying on students with special needs: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38mZLDWMNe4

Bullying can occur ANYWHERE, from school to social media. If you think that it is not bullying because it does not happen in the cafeteria, or in the classroom or in the hallways… your thoughts are not right ! it is important to be vigilant in all circumstances to prevent and avoid that your mates are being bullied, especially if he/she has special needs.

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When we see someone being bullied, it's important to remember what **empathy is**. Setting yourself in other shoes and imagining how they might be feeling. If you've ever felt sad, scared, or excluded, you know how much it can hurt. Students with special needs may already face unique challenges, and bullying can make things even harder for them. By showing empathy, we can understand the impact bullying has on them and support them in a kind and caring way.

Remember, empathy is a superpower that allows us to understand and share the feelings of others. Let's use our superpower to show kindness, support, and acceptance to all students.

Activity: Empathy and Relationships

In this activity, you will find some phrases that describe a person who has the ability of expressing empathy and a person who does not express empathy at all. Please, try to categorize the sentences in the table below.

1. “If I were you, I would (...)”
2. “I completely understand how you are feeling (...)”
3. “I just felt the same way as you are feeling right now, you are not alone (...)”
4. “Come on, get over it, there is no single reason to keep thinking about it”
5. “Oh my God, that’s a shame”
6. “Please, if you need someone, you can always count on me”
7. “I will solve the problem for you”

8. “Do you want to tell us what happened yesterday?
9. “Anything you need, let me know”
10. “It is completely ok to feel that way”

Express empathy	Do not express empathy

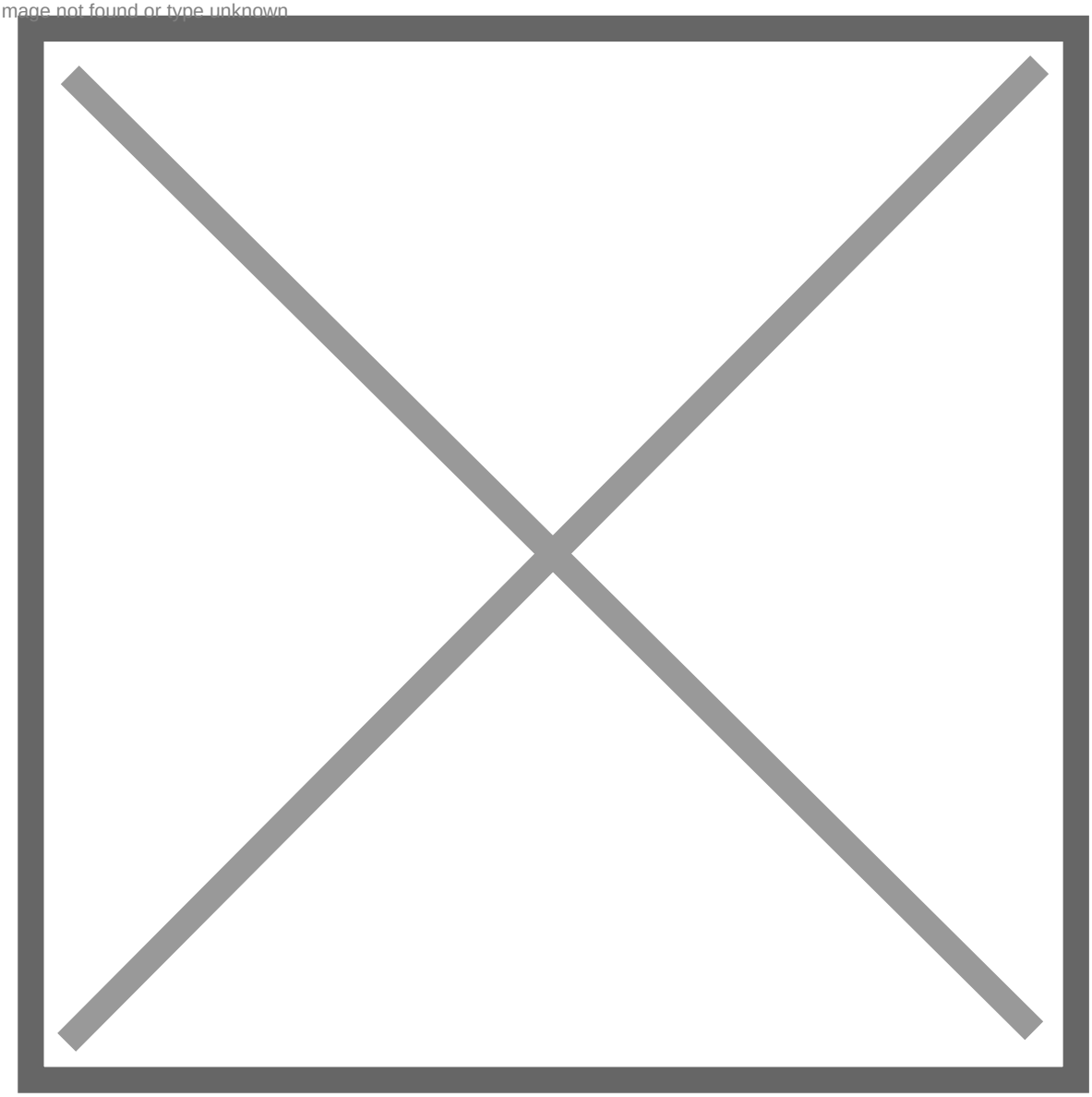
How can we intervene to address Bullying toward Students with Special Needs?
At this point, you are probably wondering how you can intervene or do something to help your mate with special needs to stop being bullied. We are here to give you tips and techniques to do so in the best way possible!
First, you have to know that everyone in the school environment is responsible to stop bullying from occurring. If you are bullied or you witness it, it is normal, and even a very good thing, to talk about it to your teacher, your supervisor or any school staff member and to ask for their help. You can also discuss it with your parents or adults in whom you trust to ask for their advice or intervention. It is very important to talk. Please, NEVER hesitate to say something and to ask for help. Some ways of becoming an defender is to include the student (with or without disability) within your group of friends, communicate with him/her as you do with everyone, create a trusting relationship with him/her and make him/her understand that he/she can talk to you about anything, including negative feelings and bad moods. This can really help and benefit the student with disability to feel included and confident in the classroom. Moreover, you can ask him/her to explain his/her disability, preferably in front of the class, in order for everyone to understand the condition and consequences of the disability, and later on be more equipped to help. Another good tip that we can give you is to advocate for your bullied classmate. This basically consists in providing support for classmates who are being bullied, are vulnerable to being hurt, or are isolated from other students.

Having this in mind, what can you do in practice to advocate for your freind? Well, it is simple. It only consists in speaking up on behalf of each other when witnessing an act of bullying.

It is also very important to help your mate to develop self-advocacy, the ability to speak up for himself/herself. You will surely agree that this is extremely complicated, especially when being bullied and with low self-esteem. Therefore, what you can do is create a safe place and a relationship of trust with your

mate, so that he/she feels supported when denouncing the bullying situation.

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If you are an ambassador against bullying, your role in helping students with special needs who are facing bullying is super important! Here is what you can do to support them:

1. Be a friend: show kindness and invite your buddies to join activities, games….
2. Speak up!: If you see someone being bullied, don't just stand by… speak up! Report the bullying to any trusted adult.
3. Spread awareness: talk to your classmates about the importance of being respectful with students with special needs.
4. Be a role model: Show others how to treat people with respect and kindness. Your actions can inspire others to do the same!

Remember, being an ambassador against bullying means you have the power to change things, to make a positive difference. You can help students with special needs who are facing bullying to feel happier, included and supported.

Don't hesitate to check this website !https://www.early-years.org/respecting-differencel
Here you will find six media messages. The media messages are cartoons exploring differences associated with race/ethnicity, cultural differences associated with sectarianism, physical differences and disability, helpful and hurtful behaviors, inclusion of students from the Traveller Community and rural living, inclusion, transition, shared education, sporting and community activities.

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