

BULLYING AND ADHD



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NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2016

Bullying

Bullying is a hot topic among parents currently. In the last few years, the media have depicted tragedy and great suffering in children who were bullied. The following articles follow links between ADHD and bullying. This is a must read if you are a parent of an ADHD child.

ADHD, Autism, and Bullying

A study published in the journal, *Ambulatory Paediatrics* reports that children with both attention deficit or attention deficit hyperactivity disorders *and* autism are four times more likely to bully than children in the general population. The researchers cautioned strongly against labelling these children simply as bullies.

"This is the first nationally representative study of bullying behaviours among children with autism. The majority of parents of children with autism and ADD or ADHD were concerned about their children's bullying behaviours, but there is much we do not yet understand. It is too early to label these children as bullies." said Guillermo Montes, Ph.D., senior researcher at Rochester, N.Y.-based Children's Institute.

"These children may have pent up energy that needs to be properly channelled, or they may have other underlying behavioural or medical issues that have not been addressed."

The study was based on disaggregated data from pulled data from the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health conducted by the National Centre for Health Statistics. The sample included 53,219 children ages 6 to 17. As a point of interest, the researchers did not find that children with autism alone had a higher rate of bullying. Bullying presented at a significantly higher rate only if the children were autistic *and* AD/HD. Those with both disorders showed a rate four times higher than children with just autism and with children overall. They also had a higher rate of bullying than children with ADD or ADHD but no autism. AD/HD occurs in about half of children with autism spectrum disorders. The study may assist health care providers to assist parents in understanding bullying behaviours and obtaining assistance in managing the behaviours.

"It would be helpful for clinicians to be aware that so many parents of children with both autism and ADHD are describing bullying behaviours," said Jill Halterman, M.D., M.P.H., associate professor of Paediatrics at the University of Rochester Medical Centre and second author of the paper. "These children may benefit from additional support services, such as from a behavioural or mental health specialist, depending on the severity of symptoms. These services may be available through community based organizations or from the broader health care system."

Cyber-bullying and ADHD

The July issue of Archives of General Psychiatry reports a study that finds teens who "cyber-bully" others via the Internet or cell phones are more likely to suffer from both physical and psychiatric troubles. Additionally, their victims are at heightened risk from both physical and psychiatric troubles.

The research team was led by Dr. Andre Sourander, from Turku University, Finland, defines cyber-bullying as aggressive, intentional, repeated acts using mobile phones, computers (including e-mails and Facebook) or other electronic media against victims who cannot easily defend themselves.

The study is relevant to current trends in the use of electronic media by teens. Researchers at the JFK Medical Centre say that the average teenager spends a total of over 3,400 electronic [text] messages every month or surfs the Internet at bedtime. In January of 2011, national media focused on the death of 15-year-old Phoebe Prince. Prince, a Massachusetts teen, committed suicide after months of relentless cyber-bullying. The online Healthgrades.com site reports a recent U.S. survey of children aged 10 to 17 found that 12 percent were "aggressive" to someone else while online, 4 percent were victims of this type of online aggression, while 3 percent reported being both aggressors and targets.

The national spotlight on these trends has caused many parents to become increasingly concerned about both cyber-bullying and their children's Internet safety. To evaluate cyber-bullying, Sourander and team surveyed almost 2,500 teens. More than 7 percent of teens reported that they bullied other teens online. Almost 5 percent said they were targets of cyber-bullies while 5.4 percent said they were both bullies and bullied.

The researchers' data were quite compelling; teens who were victims of cyber-bullying were more likely to come from broken homes and felt unsafe at school. Furthermore, they also had problems with concentration (ADHD), emotional problems, sleeping problems and behavioral problems. The teens reported that they found it difficult to associate with their peers and were often prone to headaches and abdominal discomfort. It was quite apparent that psychological trauma was induced by cyber-bullying. Oddly, the cyber-bullies had their own problems; they too were also more prone to suffer from problems with concentration (ADHD), emotional problems, sleeping problems, and behavioural problems. They too, found it difficult to associate with their peers. Cyber-bullies also frequently smoked or got drunk, reported headaches, and were more prone to not feeling safe at school.

It is important to discuss this behavior with your child. That discussion should set strict limitations on the type of communication your child sends and receives. It should also include a cyber-bully plan of action so your child knows what to do if bullied. The first step in that action-plan should be to report bullying immediately to parent or teacher.

