# 7 Steps to Take A Stand Against Bullying

Unfortunately, children with autism are especially vulnerable to bullying. A 2012 study by the Interactive Autism Network found that a total of 63% of 1,167 children with ASD, ages 6 to 15, had been bullied at some point in their lives.

Autism Speaks is committed to providing resources and tools to help take a stand against bullying, so that no child or adult on the spectrum experiences the terrible feeling of being bullied at school, at work or out in the community.

In 2012, Autism Speaks partnered with the [National Center for Learning Disabilities](http://www.ncld.org/), [Ability Path](http://www.abilitypath.org/) and the [PACER Center's National Bullying Prevention Center](http://www.pacer.org/bullying/) to create a movement toward a bully free world through our [BULLY Project](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/). Together with our partners, we released a [Special Needs Anti-Bullying Toolkit](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/) full of resources and information specifically tailored to parents, educators, and students dealing with bullying and children with special needs.

Based on this Toolkit, we have put together seven steps that you can take to help take a stand against bullying. The Special Needs Anti-Bullying Toolkit contains a number of additional tips and resources to accomplish each of these steps. The links are included with each step.

### 1. Start the Conversation

Because individuals with autism may not realize that they are being bullied or may be unable to communicate what is happening at school or in the community, the first step is to get the conversation started so they understand what bullying means and why it is not okay. Teach your child or your student to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate treatment from classmates. Make sure your child feels comfortable telling you when he or she feels bullying may be happening. Encourage him or her to talk to you about his or her feelings at school. Be supportive.

The Anti-Bullying Toolkit contains sections for [parents](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/conversation_starters) as well as [educators](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/talking_about_bullying) on how to talk to your child about bullying. Resources to help your child understand bullying roles can be found [here](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/bullying_roles).

### 2. Develop a Plan

Your child's IEP is a great resource you can use to combat bullying. You can work with your team to map out precautions to put in place to prevent bullying, as well as procedures to stop it if it does happen. The IEP should include mechanisms to keep your child safe based on his or her unique abilities and challenges.

The Anti-Bullying Toolkit contains sections for [parents](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/bullying_and_ieps) on how to use your child's IEP as an anti-bullying tool. Read more [here](http://www.pacer.org/publications/bullypdf/BP-4.pdf).

### 3. Teach Tolerance

It is of utmost important for educators and administrators to teach tolerance in schools. The environment at school sets the tone for how potential bullies behave and how safe students who may be bullied feel. Develop lesson plans to teach students about the importance of tolerance and the effects bullying can have on individuals. Bring in speakers so students can learn more about celebrating differences like disabilities.

The Anti-Bullying Toolkit contains a section for educators on [how to teach tolerance at school](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/teaching_tolerance) and another section on [how to create a zero-tolerance atmosphere](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/zero_tolerance). If you are a parent, share these resources with your child's teachers and school administrators.

### 4. Increase Awareness and Acceptance

One good way to increase awareness and acceptance at school and in the community is by educating the students and staff members. Though some parents may not feel comfortable doing so, others have found that teaching classmates about their child's disability has helped prevent bullying, as well as made their child feel more accepted by his or her peers. It can help to work with your child's school on this as well.

In the Anti-Bullying Toolkit contains [tips to teach your child's classmates about his or her disability](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/talking_about_disability) and let them know about his or her strengths and unique abilities, the challenges he or she may face, as well as ways they can best support your child in school. More information on teaching classmates can be found [here](http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c101.pdf).

### 5. Encourage Self-Advocacy

While parents and educators can put plans and supports in place to prevent bullying, it is also very important to teach students to advocate for themselves to the best of their abilities. Once they learn how to spot bullying when it happens to them, they need to learn how to put a stop to it.

It is essential to teach your child or student how to advocate for him or herself, especially when it comes to bullying. Help him or her understand why it is important to stand up for him or herself and communicate in his or her own way in order to stop the bullying and prevent it from happening again.

The Anti-Bullying Toolkit contains [information for parents](http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c95.pdf) on how to teach self-advocacy, as well as [information for students](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/self_advocacy) on what self-advocacy is and how they can practice it. Download a Student Action Plan Against Bullying [here](http://www.pacer.org/bullying/pdf/StudentActionPlan.pdf)!

### 6. Learn Your Rights

Most states have laws about bullying, and some have specific laws relating to bullying of children with special needs. It is important to know your rights and your child's rights when incidents of bullying take place.  According to [stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/index.html), state and local lawmakers have taken action to prevent bullying and protect children. Through laws (in their state education codes and elsewhere) and model policies (that provide guidance to districts and schools), each state addresses bullying differently.

Find out how your state refers to bullying in its laws and what they require on the part of schools and districts [here](http://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/index.html).

### 7. Speak Up

Whether you are a parent and you know your child is bullying, a teacher who sees that bullying is happening at school or a student who feels that you are being bullied, the first thing you should do is speak up! Let school administrators know about what is happening and tell them that bullying is a violation of the individual's rights, as well as his or her IEP. If the school isn't doing enough to stop the bullying and prevent it from happening again, you can reach out to an advocacy organization for assistance.

When you are reporting incidents of bullying, it is important to have the information in writing. Click [here](http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/publications/" \l "disability-info) to learn how to write a letter to the school to notify them about bullying. The PACER Center also provides [Steps You Can Take If Your Child is Being Bullied at School](http://www.pacer.org/publications/bullypdf/BP-15.pdf).

[The resources above are only a glimpse into the wealth of information that can be found in the Special Needs Anti-Bullying Toolkit for parents, educators and students. Learn more here!](http://specialneeds.thebullyproject.com/)

Find more bullying resources from the PACER Center's National Bullying Prevention Center [here](http://www.pacer.org/bullying/)! Visit PACER's [kidsagainstbullying.org](http://www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org/kab/) and [teensagainstbullying.org](http://www.pacerteensagainstbullying.org/tab/) for great anti-bullying tips and tools for kids and teens.