

Subject: Direct Experience of Students With Disability
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I'm writing to let you know of the experiences we have had first hand with a child diagnosed with a disability in school.

He is currently 11 years old, was diagnosed with high functioning aspergers (ASD) in 2009, subsequently has been diagnosed with ADHD and anxiety.

Bullying:

Because he is different and is sensitive to social situations and cannot read social cues, he has been constantly bullied. Of course I have heard constantly about these so called 'no tolerance to bullying' slogans over the years and have found that statement to be a total farce. He gets ridiculed and bullied, even in front of me at times, and nothing is ever done about it. Teachers are not interested, tell him to walk away (if he does that, these kids follow him and continue), if he does lash out, he is suspended while the bullies themselves are laughing at the 'suspended retard', yes i have heard them say it myself. Of course nothing happens to them. Why?

I have been friends with people in positions of authority in a local scout group who are unable to deal with bullying due to 'rules'. One such friend pulled out of this organisation as her own son was bullied and she felt powerless as she couldn't say anything to his bully or the parent. Why?

Suspension:

Having a child on the autism spectrum is bloody hard work for all involved. I'm lucky I have such good staff at his primary school that genuinely care for him and help us out BUT again their hands are tied when it comes to bullying and dealing with meltdowns due to being overwhelmed, which is common with a child on the spectrum. Busy schools are tiring for these kids as they are on alert the entire day to the point they struggle to concentrate. They cannot shut off to classroom noises around them and if the teacher themselves is not trained and just stands at the front of the room blabbing on, then they shut off. Of course this often leads to the child jumping to conclusions due to being unable to taking social cues, the teacher either trying to ignore the behaviour or making it worse by engaging with a child that is already escalating. By then all it takes is a snigger or even a glance by another child and there can be a lot of bad language, storming out of the classroom, at times, furniture being thrown. Yes it is dangerous, but when you have a clueless teacher in front of the class that has no idea what is happening and can't intervene before the child hits def con 5, then it's chaos for all involved.

These kids have low self esteem so when they are suspended for things like swearing, which to me is just petty, yes it needs to be addressed but when you have a child on the spectrum that goes from calm to irate in less than a nano second, it's best to stand back and leave them be. When they escalate it's out of their control. Suspending them for something they can't help is unfair and detrimental to their mental health.

As a parent I cannot work a normal job as dealing with suspensions often means I would be called away and well, I would end up losing the job which puts more strain on a family that is struggling with paed visits and various therapies that are not cheap.

How does it also look to the child who when they come out of their meltdown, that they are being punished for things out of their control.

Also how does it look to these children that had just been bullied to the point they retaliated, they are the ones suspended, not the bullies themselves which means the bullies will carry on with this behaviour.

My son had been suspended 6 times from the start of the school year till May. A couple of times for swearing while escalated. Punching two bullies after they had been taunting him first. Once for scaring a young prep girl thinking he was playing and once for losing his temper at a child he misread their body language. Yes there need to be strategies in place, at the moment it just looks like they are being thrown out of school to give everyone a break!

If it wasn't for the fact I own my own business and can be flexible about when I work, I would not be able to hold down a job. I'm just lucky my husband earns a good wage, but we have a lot of expenses due to our sons diagnosis including medication, psychiatrists and therapies. On top of this we have the stress of dreading any phone call from the school in case there is another suspension which puts even more stress on our family. I understand there are parents out there that couldn't care less, but you will find there are a lot of us that do and are willing to do what it takes to help our kids, but we need to be met halfway and the suspensions need to stop.

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