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March 25, 2022

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Presentation Overview

- The pressure to be social and the struggle to fit in
- Friendships, including supporting your daughter in initiating, maintaining, resolving conflict and how to stay safe
- The importance of peer support and role-models
- And finally, how to address bullying

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Importance of Friendship

- Most autistic girls need a lot of time to themselves
- But also want to feel a sense of belonging and to feel accepted by our classmates.
- Friendships are important, because they offer companionship, can be a great source of support and can protect us against bullies.

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Embrace Who Your Are

- Feeling different to everyone else or feeling left out is a horrible feeling.
- It can be tempting to try and be like everyone else and to try to fit into other people's expectations so that they can make friends.
- Masking (pretending to be someone you're not) is exhausting and will eventually affect your daughter's confidence and self-esteem.

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Useful Conversation Starters

- Pre-prepared conversation starters can help to avoid awkward silences and reduce social anxiety.
- Examples, include:
 - What are you doing this weekend?
 - Have you seen a good movie recently?
 - Which songs or music artists are you listening to?

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Finding Like-Minded Friends

- If you daughter is having trouble finding classmates who she has something in common with, encourage her to join a school club that interests her.
- This will give her the perfect opportunity to meet other teens who she may have something in common with.

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Art of Conversation

- Sometimes, autistic girls can get really enthusiastic about what we're talking about, especially when it relates to our intense interest. Some people may find this annoying.
- Support your daughter by teaching her to always make a point of showing an interest in what other people are saying.
- Warn her not to hijack the conversation so that all she talks about is her own interests.

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Edit What You Say Aloud

- Autistic individuals have a tendency to be blunt.
- Make sure to reinforce that when your daughter is chatting and interacting with others, to be careful not to say anything which might be perceived as rude or inappropriate.
- Remind her that sometimes being too honest can hurt someone's feelings and upset people.

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Be a Good Friend

- Being a good friend essentially means that you treat people the way you would like them to treat you.
- When thinking of how to treat other people, encourage your daughter to put herself in their shoes.
- Friendship is a two-way street. In other words, both people have to work to make it a good friendship.

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Everyone Makes Mistakes

- If your daughter has upset or offended friends or classmates in the past, try to deconstruct what went wrong and learn from the experience.
- If she's worried about unintentionally doing or saying something that may upset her friends, I suggest that you encourage her to be open and honest about this.

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Work on Understanding How Other People Feel

- Seeing things from someone else's point of view and understanding how someone else is feeling are important social skills.
- In order to be a good friend, it helps to know what your friends may be feeling.
- Having said that, trying to understand how other people feel is incredibly difficult, so encourage your daughter to be patient with herself.

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Asking Her Friends for Their Supporting

- If your daughter is open about some of her challenges it will help them to understand her better.
- If they understand why she may behave and react differently to other kids, they will in a much better position to help and support her.
- If your daughter feels comfortable enough doing so, encourage her to tell her friends about some of the challenges she faces that may affect the way she behaves or responds to certain situations.

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Avoid Gossiping

- Gossip is a form of bullying.
- It's hurtful and cruel, especially if it embarrasses or humiliates the person being gossiped about.
- Remind your daughter not to forget that someone who gossips and says unkind things about another person, is also very likely to spread gossip about her.

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The Art of Apologising

If your daughter makes a mistake and needs to apologise, below are some suggestions as to how to do so:

- Encourage her to apologise to her friend in person and to be sincere when she says sorry.
- Remind her not to make excuses for her behaviour because it may seem as if she isn't taking responsibility and isn't truly sorry.
- Encourage her to do something nice to make things up to her friend. For example, she could bring her friend some cookies or write them a note.

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Avoiding Toxic Friendships

- Not all friendships are healthy. Some friendships can be toxic.
- Instead of making you feel good about yourself, these friendships make you feel awful about yourself.
- These friendships are dangerous, because they can wreck your daughter's sense of self-worth.

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Importance of Alone Time

- We need alone time to recharge our social batteries and to calm our overactive senses.
- If your daughter is not feeling up to it, don't force her to socialize.
- Well-meaning parents and family members may worry that she spends too much time alone and try to encourage her to spend more time socializing.
- Most autistic people find socializing emotionally and physically draining. Spending time alone is the way we settle our minds and sooth our senses.

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Definition of Bullying

- **Bullying** is when a person or group sets out to repeatedly hurt, intimidate, scare or humiliate someone who they perceive as vulnerable.
- Bullying can take many different forms, including:
 - being called names, being insulted or taunted
 - being teased, ridiculed, embarrassed or humiliated
 - having false rumours spread about you
 - being excluded from social groups or being ignored
 - having your belongings taken or destroyed
 - being threatened or intimidated
 - having people make things up to get you into trouble
 - being pushed, hit, kicked, pinched, slapped or physically hurt

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Banter vs Bullying

- Bullying is distinguished from harmless banter by the following four factors:
 1. The negative actions are repeated and are intended to humiliate, distress and/or harm.
 2. There is an imbalance of power (in many instances, the bully is supported by classmates, whereas the target is alone or may have a very small social group).
 3. The incidents are one-sided.
 4. Your daughter is being negatively affected, whereas the bully is not.

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Why Me?

- Bullies are experts at identifying vulnerable people to target.
- Bullies look for someone who is different and who they think won't stand up for themselves.
- It can be devastating for your daughter's self confidence and self-esteem
- Many children blame themselves, their autism or learning differences for being bullied, but bullies will use any "difference" as an excuse to target someone.

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Dealing With Your Daughter's School

- Create a template that includes the following prompts:
 - the time, place and location where the incident occurred
 - the names of the people involved
 - the names of any witnesses
 - what the bully said (including any insults, threats)
 - what the bully did to your daughter
 - whether there have been any previous incidents
 - how it made her feel
 - the effect the bullying is having on your daughter

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Bullying Strategies

- Ignore the person who's bullying you
- Tell the bully to stop.
- NEVER suffer in silence.
- Avoid bullying danger zones.
- Don't blame yourself, its not your fault.
- Find inspiring role models.
- Focus on a hobby.
- Lean on an anti-bullying charity.
- Consider moving to another school.
- Is it a disability hate crime.

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Overcoming Bullying

- Being bullied can knock your confidence and your sense of self-worth. It can also have a devastating effect on your physical and mental health.
- Overcoming the trauma of being bullied is a hard thing to do. Building your daughter back up will take time.
- One approach that really helped me was to use my bullying experience to help others who are being bullied.
- Wherever you live, the odds are that there's a local or national bullying charity or organisation that your daughter can become a part of.

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Importance of Role Models

- When I was growing up there weren't any autistic role models to look up to and be inspired by.
- To build up your daughter's confidence and make her less self-conscious about being different, I encourage you to highlight and celebrate the accomplishments for autistic individuals.
- There are so many of us out there that are making incredible contributions to society.
- I think it's important to emphasize this, instead of only dwelling on the negative aspects of autism.

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Closing Remarks

- In closing, there are some unique challenges that autistic girls face, in particular in relation to their social interactions and developing friendships.
- However, with the right understanding, guidance and support it is possible to overcome these challenges so that she can have a positive school experience.

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