

Bullying rates remain higher for children with disabilities, even as they mature

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More than 22 percent of children ages 12-18 say they have been bullied in school within the last month; a significant portion of those children have disabilities. However, little research exists on how bullying rates for individual children change over time. Now, a University of Missouri researcher and bullying expert has determined that children with disabilities are victimized by bullying at a much higher rate over time than their peers without disabilities. The study also revealed that this discrepancy in victimization and bullying perpetration rates remains consistent as children age. Chad Rose, an assistant professor of special education in the MU College of Education, says this indicates that children with disabilities are not developing adequate social skills to combat bullying as they mature.

"This study points out the necessity for [special education](#) programs to teach appropriate response skills to children with disabilities," Rose said. "Schools need to further develop these programs by tailoring social development goals for each individual student to ensure they are learning the [social skills](#) that will help them prevent bullying from occurring. Prior research has shown that children with disabilities, when bullied, may react aggressively when they lack appropriate response skills. Teaching these students how to communicate more effectively with their peers and with teachers can help them react to bullying in more positive ways, as well as prevent it from occurring at all."

Over the course of three years, more than 6,500 children from grades 3-12 were surveyed about their experiences with bullying; 16 percent of

the children surveyed had disabilities, specifically learning disabilities, emotional disabilities and [autism spectrum disorders](#). Rose and Nicholas Gage, an assistant professor from the University of Florida, found that bullying rates across the board peaked in third grade, were reduced drastically in middle school and then rose again during high school. However, while mirroring this trend, bullying rates for children with disabilities remained consistently higher than those without disabilities.

"Studying how individual children are victimized by bullying over time has revealed that children with disabilities are not learning how to effectively respond to victimization," Rose said. "As children continued to mature, we expected to see that they would slowly develop social skills that would help them combat victimization and close the gap with children without disabilities, but that was not the case. Their rates of bullying victimization remained consistently higher, which shows that current intervention approaches are not effectively preparing these children who are most at-risk for [bullying](#) involvement."

Rose says that many schools have devoted less and less time over the years to teaching social skills to all students, in exchange for increased focus on common core subjects and standardized test preparation. He says schools should refocus some of their efforts on teaching important social skills, especially to [children](#) with [disabilities](#).

The study, "Exploring the Involvement of Bullying Among Students With Disabilities Over Time," was published in *Exceptional Children*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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