Social development of children with allergies & asthma

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Abstract
Every child needs special attention in order to develop to their fullest potential. Children struggle with problems big and small as their minds and bodies develop, whether it's a fear of reading aloud, or serious health concerns. There can be serious consequences if a child's parents and peers are not aware of their needs, including something as seemingly small as allergies and asthma. Consequences range from having a rash, to experiencing a fatal reaction if not dealt with (Maisa, 1998). In this paper, I'm discussing the importance of awareness and the issues that children with allergies and asthma face every day and how a new form of bullying is taking place in our schools.

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Social Development of Children with Allergies & Asthma

A Research Paper

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

Nicholas Mohwinkle

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May 2010
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Approved:

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Abstract

Every child needs special attention in order to develop to their fullest potential. Children struggle with problems big and small as their minds and bodies develop, whether it's a fear of reading aloud, or serious health concerns. There can be serious consequences if a child's parents and peers are not aware of their needs, including something as seemingly small as allergies and asthma. Consequences range from having a rash, to experiencing a fatal reaction if not dealt with (Maisa, 1998). In this paper, I'm discussing the importance of awareness and the issues that children with allergies and asthma face every day and how a new form of bullying is taking place in our schools.
Social Development of Children with Allergies & Asthma

Each and every child sees the world through a different set of eyes. Their world views are different from one and another and from adults. It is important we work with children as they grow and develop physically and emotionally. It is important for adults to try and meet the needs of every child no matter how great or small the need may be. The more children's needs are met, the less bullying will take place in the schools.

According to Maisa (1998), there are some psychopathological affects to having allergies and such health concerns. A child may even develop anxiety and depression because they're faced with different needs, and may not be able to take part in everyday activities with peers. A child's anxiety can stem from fears of having an allergic reaction, being bullied for their differences, or breathing difficulties and asthma attacks. A child with health concerns such as food and environmental allergies may start to display traits of obsessive-compulsive disorder. The child begins to worry that they may have been exposed to the food they are allergic to and begin to obsess about having a reaction. Due to these worries, a child may compulsively wash their hands and worry about cleanliness.

In schools today, it is more common for children with asthma and allergies to face bullying. Bullying is defined as, “... verbal, physical, or psychological abuse or teasing accompanied by real or perceived imbalance of power (Donna, 2007, p.32).” An article posted on the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2008) web site discussed the vast number of children who are being bullied in schools. “Research suggests that somewhere between 30 and 60 percent of American school children report being bullied (ASCA, 2008, para.1.).” This means that at some point during the school year, half of our students face some form of bullying that makes it harder for them to be
successful in the school environment. Bullying has taken a turn, and now students with allergies and asthma have become the victim of bullying. There have been reports of bullying children with peanut allergies by throwing peanut butter sandwiches at them or sneaking up on them peanut butter. This is a dangerous – life and death – form of bullying. This paper will take a look at the social stigma and social development of those students with allergies and asthma, and how bullying can be prevented to help those in need.

Children who experience bullying all react in different ways. Some children are able to walk away, while others begin to avoid the situation and skip school. “One recent survey found that 58 percent of school children claimed they stayed home from school on at least one day to avoid being bullied (ASCA, 2008, para. 2).” If a child is choosing not to come to school, they are not receiving the education they deserve. This avoidance begins to effect the child’s development in education and social life. A child is missing out, not only, in their education but peer interactions. A study states, “research indicates that bullying--with its accompanying fear, loss of self-efficacy, anger, and hurt--negatively affects the school environment and can greatly diminish students' ability to engage actively in learning (Donna, 2007, p.32).” So children may be impacted through bullying by class attendance, their mental health, and social development.

There are several different views and perspectives that can influence a child’s social development. Gupta’s study of 2008 discussed the views of the parent on children with allergies. The study found that parents thought, challenges associated with daily living such as attending school, going to restaurants, and visiting friends, had a major impact on parental quality of life, as well (Gupta, 2008). Parent’s way of living is
changed to meet the needs of their child. They reported having experiences of feelings such as fear, guilt, and even paranoia. The parenting viewing a child with such caution creates social stigma in the parenting of their child. Maisa’s article discussed parents that have a child with asthma may not use appropriate behavioral restrictions on their child (1998). The article states, “Parents may fear upsetting the child or feel guilty about the child’s distress, and thus be ineffective at ignoring temper tantrums, delivering consequences and refusing requests made by a child.” The article goes on to explain parents feel this way because they don’t want the child to have an asthma attack (1998).

The Gupta (2008) study discussed the social stigma of allergies in the general public. The findings were that most people had no idea how prevalent food allergies are in society today. Researchers also found that the general public’s perception of children was incorrect when discussing the most common dysfunctions of allergies and asthma. This study says that the general public’s lack of understanding may cause mislabeling and the judgment of a child and their parents, which in turn, results in negative effects on the suffering child’s social development (2008).

Maisa’s (1998) article discusses the peer relationships that children with allergies and asthma may have. The article stated that children have difficulty with peer relationships. This is mainly due to being different and isolated at time through school activities due to health concerns. Children may be excluded from group activities if there are peanuts involved, making them feel left out and isolated. If there is a lot of running in an activity, the child with asthma has to sit out. Maisa’s article also discussed findings that children’s feelings of isolation due to asthma are similar feelings of experienced by children with allergies. This type of exclusion may cause peers to view the student as
different. Most bullying takes place when the child is perceived as different from the other students.

As children develop, they interact with others differently during each age milestone. According to Yardsticks (2007), children start to have friends around age 5. These friends come and go rather quickly from age 5 to 7 years old. The peer social stigma wouldn’t be as easy to see in this age range. When a child becomes nine, they begin to develop friendships that last a little longer. Wood begins to discuss how they begin to become critical of themselves and others (Wood, 2007, p.110). By age eleven the child may be cruel, and even sometimes, physically aggressive. This is normal for a child’s social development, but can be hurtful to a child that may not be able to participate with other children due to health issues and physical constraints. Schools need to become aware of this social gap, and counselors should play the important role of bridging those gaps in aggressive social situations.

As school counselors, it is our responsibility to advocate for those who have needs that are not being met. If a child is feeling unsafe in the school environment for any reason, it is the school counselor’s responsibility to make them feel safe. A safe environment will help inspire an active learning environment and create a better environment for peer interaction. Both articles, Donna (2007) and ASCA (2008), discussed that bullying must be addressed in schools, in order to have a safe learning environment; however we must do more than support the victim and punish the bully to better the situation. It is time to get more people involved and begin to work towards a bully free school.
Bullying can no longer be ignored. More and more students are being affected by bullying each day, and children with allergies and asthma have become the new targeted population. The ASCA (2008) is has new research that is developing a plan on how to minimize bullying. The ASCA starts off by saying, “It’s not surprising that researchers have discovered we need to do more than punish bullies and support victims (p.2).” This means we need to look beyond the individuals that are directly involved in the situation. These individuals need to be worked with, but there is much more that needs to be done than focusing on the victim and the bully.

First, you need to determine who is being targeted by the bully. This can be done by a small assessment or a survey at the beginning of the year, semester or whenever it is needed. Donna’s article stated that all three school had bullying happening in the hallway. This means bullying happens when it is much harder to monitor individual students. Donna’s research suggests that students request more monitoring or adult supervision in the hallways. Other places where students were bullied are in the bathrooms, on the playgrounds or even in the cafeterias. Minimizing the number of students roaming the hallways and getting more eyes out in the hallways is an important step to minimizing bullying. This kind of bullying in high traffic areas inflicts fear in children when they are in vulnerable situations, could lead to antisocial behaviors. It is important to keep these “hot spots” safe in the school.

Environments where children with allergies and asthma may be isolated and feel different cause children to become targets for bullies. The identified “bullying hot spots” have been identified in the school, and it is important to look for reasons why certain students are being targeted. Such reasons may be because a child is overweight, not
dressed like the other students, even a child perceived as homosexual, and they may have allergies, asthma or other health constraints. These types of characteristics are a few reasons why a child may stand out from the rest of the students, and maybe viewed as different. The other students may feel uncomfortable with these characteristics and revert to bullying as a defense. It is important to teach students that being different is okay and that social difference and diversity can be a good thing. Teaching this important lesson of tolerance could be done in one-on-one sessions, but would be most effectively taught in large group or classroom guidance sessions. Focusing on these areas would help children understand differences in social development, and work together.

It is also important to look at the bullying situation and the individuals directly involved. How do they interact with one another? "The most common defense strategies that students reported using when confronted by bullies were: walking away, saying mean things back, hitting back, or telling the bully to stop (Donna, 2007, p.35)." These strategies can work, but may not be effective enough to stop the bullying when it takes place. There is more that can be done to help the situation, whether other students learn to voice concerns as bystanders and witnesses. These bystanders can be involved in the situation as much as the victim and the bully are involved by asking the bully to stop, asking the victim to come with them, or even both. This is a great opportunity to have counselors step in and encourage better peer relationships. These ideas come from the Student Assistance- Olweus Bullying Program. This behavior can also be taught in classroom guidance lessons. Another safe haven for bullied children is to ask their adult figures and guardians for help. In Donna’s article, it stated this was the least common method that students used.
Parker’s article (1987) discusses the extreme cases of isolation and poor peer interactions: [the socially withdrawn, socially incompetent and aggressive child soon becomes the socially inept adult social casualty. For example, the most famous mass murderers of almost every country (e.g., Christie, the Black Panther, Blue Beard, the Michigan Murderer, the Boston Strangler, and others) have invariably been found to have had abnormal social experiences in childhood. ... They are usually found to have been loners, quiet types and unsociable people, often dominated by selfish parents, or hounded by thoughtless classmates. If friend-making had been properly learned - or if they had been helped to learn - their violent, destructive and unusual personalities may have turned out in a more rewarding and acceptable form.]

This type of research has put stress on how important it is to work with children in developing social skills, and getting rid of social stigmas by talking about social differences. If there is an issue between peers, there should be steps that children can take to feel comfortable in making a situation better. Adults need to have an active role in teaching this proactive behavior of tolerance and peer acceptance.

Going to an adult for help should be one of the most important and common options for a student to use. It is important to look into why students are not taking this step to stop bullying. Students should trust and know that adults inside and outside of the school will take bullying seriously, and will actually help solve the issue. Teachers that are aware of the situation, and follow through with solving the issues will make students feel safer in the school. “Most students said they were not confident that adults could protect them from being bullied (Donna, 2007, p.34).” Building a trust between students and teachers will make it more difficult for bullying to take place.
These classroom guidance sessions will be an important and an efficient way to reach out to all the students. Here are some important tips from Donna's article (p.34):

[Look for a curriculum that:]

* Becomes part of a school-wide and community-wide discussion (with parents) about values, beliefs about how to treat one another, and policies that reflect these values.

* Poses developmentally and culturally appropriate social dilemmas for discussion.

* Challenges the idea that aggression and bullying are inevitable and expected behavior. Demonstrates how people can resolve tensions and disagreements without losing face by giving detailed examples of people who responded to violence in an actively nonviolent manner.

* Encourages students to express their feelings and experiences concerning bullying and enables students to generate realistic and credible ways to stay safe.

* Supports critical analysis of the issues and rejects explanations of behavior based on stereotypes (such as the idea that boys will use physical violence and girls will use relational violence).

* Helps children and teens become critical consumers of popular culture.

* Addresses all types of bullying.

* Discusses how bullying reflects broader societal injustice.

* Gives ideas for what the adults in the school can do as part of a whole-school effort.

Beware of any curriculum that:

* Ignores such issues as injustice, stereotype, and imbalance of power regarding gender, race, social class, and sexual orientation.

* Focuses on the victim's behavior as the reason for being a target of bullying.

* Focuses on student behavior without addressing school wide climate.

* Emphasizes having students tell the teacher about the bullying and ignoring bullying assaults.

* Focuses on either bullying only or victimization only.

* Portrays victims or bullies as unpopular misfits.

* Promotes simplistic or trendy solutions (for example, "boys will be boys").
* Promotes good solutions, such as peer mediation, but does not provide clear guidelines for when these strategies should and should not be used.

* Lacks evidence-based, population-specific suggestions for design, implementation, training, and evaluation.

Another important factor for a counselor to consider is to create a committee, involving students and teachers. It is important to have student involvement and have them feel as much a part of this anti-bullying movement as the adults. This will help to get more eyes in the hallways and address “bullying hot spots” immediately.

Another great resource that will help with the prevention of bullying is the Olweus Bullying Program. Linn Mar School District is using the Olweus Bullying Program, and it incorporates a lot of these interventions, as well as some group activities. It is important for students to be able to discuss their concerns with one and another. This allows them to see the other point of view on the topic of bullying.

With these steps, tips and suggested programs, bullying will begin to disappear from schools. Getting everyone – adults, administrators, teachers and student peers - involved will make the difference that is needed to make such changes. The more educated children and adults become on the bullying, and steps of controlling it, the more accepting others people will become. Together, bullying can be stopped, and those vulnerable children with allergies, asthma and other special needs can be helped.
References


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