

Why children with autism may be at risk of bullying

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Credit: Lancaster University

Children with autism may be at risk from bullying because they are more willing to accept unfair behaviour say psychologists.

"Our results suggest that [children](#) with Autism Spectrum Disorder might be particularly susceptible to bullies exploiting their lower concern for personal gain and their increased tolerance of unfair [behaviour](#)."

The research by Dr Calum Hartley and Sophie Fisher of Lancaster University involved young children playing trading games with a puppet.

In the Ultimatum Game and Dictator Game, the children offered stickers to the puppet and received offers in return. Children could accept or reject the puppet's offers in the Ultimatum Game, but not the Dictator Game.

Both groups of children – one with ASD and one without – showed a willingness to share equally and neither prioritised self-interest.

But in the Ultimatum Game, children with ASD

were 37% less likely to reciprocate fair offers and three times more likely to accept unfair offers of just one sticker.

"To a child with ASD, accepting an unfair offer may be favourable because it yields a greater physical reward than rejection."

The researchers suggested these differences in sharing between the two groups may be linked to deficits in social and cognitive development.

"Importantly, reduced reciprocity and decreased inequality aversion when sharing could severely impact children's ability to navigate the social world.

"We advocate that anti-bullying interventions address these risks by explicitly teaching children the importance of reciprocating prosocial actions, highlighting cues that indicate they are being treated unfairly, teaching prevention strategies, and role-playing good sharing behaviours."

More information: Calum Hartley et al. Do Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Share Fairly and Reciprocally?, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10803-018-3528-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3528-7)

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