Asperger’s Syndrome and Bullying

Nick Dubin, M.Ed., Psy.S

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Chantal: Hello, and welcome to Moms Fighting Autism.com. I’m the moderator this evening. My name is Chantal Sicile-Kira. Before I introduce our guest this evening, I wanted to make sure to let some people know about some more free information available to you. I now am writing a column for the Examiner.com. It’s a national online newspaper and I am now the Autism and Adolescents columnist. So if you go into Examiner.com and look up Autism and Adolescents columnist, that’ll be me. But I’m going to spell my name for you incase you would like to look or search for it under my name. So my name is Chantal Sicile-Kira and that is spelled C-h-a-n-t-a-l S-i-c-i-l-e (-) K-i-r-a. This evening I’m so happy to present as our guest, Dr. Nick Dubin, who I first met my e-mail, actually when I was first writing my book, *Autism Life Skills*. I first interviewed Nick because I had read a couple of his books or actually one of his book, but I actually read other things that he had written and I heard very wonderful things about him. The book I had read was *Asperger’s Syndrome and Bullying: Strategies and Solutions*. So let me tell you a little about Dr. Dubin before I introduce him in person over the phone. He just recently received his doctorate and so I want to extend my congratulations to him. And he was first diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome in 2004 by a Neuro-Psychologist. Since then Nick has been a passionate advocate on issues that relating to the Autism Spectrum. Dr. Dubin has a Bachelor’s degree in Communications from Oakland University. A Master’s degree in Special Education from the University of Detroit - Mercy and Doctoral degree from the Michigan School of Professional Psychology. Dr. Dubin authored three books and produced three DVD’s, all relating to the Autism Spectrum. Nick lives in the greater Detroit, Michigan area and currently works on his next book about Autism Spectrum Disorders and Depressions. For more information, he does have a website that you can visit. Which is [www.aspergerwisdom.com](http://www.aspergerwisdom.com). And tonight’s topic is Asperger’s Syndrome and Bullying, based on Nick’s book, *Asperger’s Syndrome and Bullying*, which was published 2007 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers. So in this webinar this evening, we’ll be exploring the ethology of bullying among the Asperger’s population, while offering strategies for empowerment, geared towards teachers, parents, schools and individuals with Asperger’s themselves. I wanted you to know that statistically, the vast majority of children with Asperger’s Syndrome will experience frequent bullying. So this seminar in which he’ll be answering questions that have been e-mailed
into us, will aim to provide real answers to help curb this disruptive trend.

So welcome Nick!

Nick: Thank you Chantal.

Chantal: It’s really an honor to have you here.

Nick: It’s definitely an honor to be with you. I’ve been an avid reader of all of your materials for the past few years since I’ve become immersed in the world of Autism and it’s really great to finally meet you.

Chantal: Well I just really enjoyed the information that you share with all of us, because actually I always say that real experts are people on the Spectrum. Because you’ll have lived through it and have developed strategies to help get through situations whether or not you knew you had Asperger’s at the time, you figured out strategies that helped or in hindsight, you have. Do you want to talk a little bit and tell the audience what books and DVD’s you have authored?

Nick: Sure. My first book was Asperger’s Syndrome and Bullying, as Chantal had mentioned and that was written a few years ago. And what really prompted me to write that book was the realization that so many people like me with Asperger’s had gone through similar experiences that I had gone through and I just thought that so much of an emphasis is placed on the gay population when we talk about bullying and while that’s very important, we also have to keep in mind that anybody, I don’t care who you are, but anybody who is going to be perceived as being different from the norm, is going to be an easy target for being bullied. And obviously, those with Autism and Asperger’s behave differently. We have different behaviors that make us stick out in the crowd. So I just thought it was a very timely subject. There hadn’t been many books written about it. I think there was one book written by Rebekah Heinrichs, which was an excellent book and I wasn’t looking to kind of duplicate anything that she had done, but I wanted to write from both a professional prospective and a first person prospective, to kind of add that. And then I also am working….oh, I should just say, I just wrote a book on Asperger’s Syndrome and Anxiety and that was released also through Jessica Kingsley Publishers a months ago and that’s basically a self help book geared towards adults on the
Spectrum. My understanding was that there hadn’t been a book written specifically geared towards stress management for the adult population and I thought that was really important because I really haven’t met any individuals on the Spectrum that don’t experience a good deal of anxiety on a daily basis. I think it’s part and parcel of having Asperger’s. And the current book that I’m working on is a book about ASD and depression. And it’s similarity to the anxiety book, it’s also going to be a self help guide for individuals on the Spectrum as well.

Chantal: I really am looking forward to reading the Asperger’s Syndrome and Anxiety Guide. In fact, for the listeners out there, I will be reviewing the book for my column on the Examiner.com. But you’re right, these kinds of books are so important and anxiety is something and depression are things that the neuro-atypical population also deals with, but no one ever really addressed it at the self help thing for people...for adults with Asperger’s. And it’s so important because, even for example adolescents, neuro-atypical adolescents all know that going through teenage hood or adolescents hood is hell. So on top of that, if you have Asperger’s Syndrome and you don’t really know how to handle all of these things, just through osmosis, it’s really nice to have strategies from someone like you who’s been there.

Nick: Absolutely, and I think the topic is so important because I think just reading a general book on anxiety, if you’re somebody with Asperger’s, is not going to be good enough. It’s not going to give you enough information because it’s written towards a specific population and the fact of the matter is that when you Asperger’s, I truly believe you perceive the world differently, sensory wise, emotionally, even culturally. I think we have different cultural viewpoints. So our anxiety is going to be exacerbated to some extent and its going to be generated for different reasons. And so I think it’s really, really important to address specifically, the Asperger’s population when talking about this and not just give general strategies that can be applied to everyone.

Chantal: One point I wanted to bring up about the Asperger’s and bullying is some information you shared with me one night after questions for the Autism Life Skills book. I think it was from you, saying that sometimes some of the bullying is not perceived as bullying or indirect bullying from teachers. For example, teachers making remarks to a student with Asperger’s. They may not realize the person has Asperger’s, but they don’t get it because the student doesn’t seem to be following what everyone else is doing. And so then that is a
type of bullying, coming from a teacher, that then just eggs on the other students to bully as well. Is that true?

Nick: Absolutely. I think that....I don’t want to just the impression that I think all teachers are bad, because certainly, I think most teachers who go into the profession have their heart in the right place. But I do....

Chantal: Right.

Nick: I think there are teachers who just don’t get it when it comes to the effect that their words have our population. And the fact that the sarcasm the other students would easier pick up on, just isn’t understood by our population, so it can come across as bullying. And then there are the examples of specific teacher bullying, which is done on purpose. I mean there was one instance, I think last year, where some teacher in Florida, I don’t know if you heard about this Chantal, but some teacher in Florida actually had the class vote out that student....

Chantal: Right.

Nick: Because I don’t know what the reason was, but apparently he was being bad. But this is a kindergartener and he....this teacher had the class vote him out of the room and not only that, she had the whole class tell this one child, one thing that they didn’t like about him. Now to me, if that isn’t abuse, I don’t know what is. So I really think that teacher bullying can be just as damaging, if not more so, than peer bullying, because its coming from somebody who’s supposed to be acting as a protector. Somebody who is sanctioned to teach and somebody who’s supposed to have the trust of all the students. And that can really, really leave damaging scars on individuals, so I can’t stress how important that is.

Chantal: Correct and they’re all supposed to be setting an example.

Nick: Exactly.
Chantal: I remember that story and it really shocked me because even if the teacher thought that she showing some kind of....giving some kind of example of a civic class, you know, and about voting about something, it totally was the wrong topic to be doing it on.

Nick: Absolutely. And there are so many other ways to handle that sort of situation. And especially, we’re talking about someone who is in kindergarten. Who developmentally is not going to understand everything that is going on, but is going to internalize it as “I am bad” and that’s what happened. He went home that day and he said to his Mom, “I am not special, I am not special” over and over again. And I’m sure that episode is going to leave lasting scars on him. And just a few weeks ago, I found out that this teacher was reinstated, which absolutely infuriated me. I really don't see any justification for letting this woman back into the classroom, but apparently there were enough supporters on her behalf that got her back into the school system.

Chantal: Well that’s, that’s....I didn’t know that. That is infuriating. Before we continue, I would like to a....well continue. I mean I’m going to....we’re going to be continuing all the way through, but I wanted to actually address a question from one of our listeners and that’s Ernest in Irvine, who’s asking if you could tell us a little bit about Asperger’s.

Nick: Sure. Umm, Asperger’s is a part of the Autism Spectrum. It’s considered a high functioning form of Autism. There’s some people who will debate that. Tony Atwood, who’s the leading expert of Asperger’s, pretty much sets that tune when he says it is a high functioning form of Autism. And basically, the way that I would personally define it is that people with Asperger’s and I’m going to speak in first person since I have Asperger’s, we have a different way of viewing the world. Again, from emotional, sensory and cultural viewpoints. So that we’ve taken the world pretty literally. Our senses are exacerbated to the point where we can be very hyper sensitive to stimuli or we can be under sensitive, hypo sensitive to stimuli. We also have difficulty with friendships. Not that we can’t be friends with people. I think you’ll hear that people with Asperger’s can be the best friends in the whole world. But friendship doesn’t come as easily to us it does to the majority of people. Just because we have trouble with non-verbal queues. We have trouble understanding sarcasm. We have trouble negotiating our way through the social terrain that neuro-atypicals take for granted. An example would be if you were thinking about somebody
riding a bike, it’s pretty intuitive if you’ve ridden a bike enough times to know what to do in regards to pushing the pedals. If you think about socializing like riding a bike, it would be like somebody with Asperger’s getting on a bike and actually have to think about what to do to make the pedals move forward. And that would be a pretty time consuming process and it would take a lot of energy out of you to do that on a daily basis, day in and day out. So I think it can best be defined as a different way of relating to the world, basically. Which can make life a little more challenging than it is for most folks. That’s sort of my abbreviated definition. There’s obviously other things that I can say and I’m sure those things will come up as we go along.

Chantal: When I’m speaking at a conference on adolescent issues and I try to explain to educators and parents about the social aspect, you know putting aside the sensory for a moment, and I try and explain the things we need to help our young people with Asperger’s learn about the social queues, I suggest to think about if you were landing in a different country. Like for example, we’re Americans so we speak English, but if we were in England, they have cultural and social habits that are different from ours and so if we landed over there we’d still be acting like Americans and we wouldn’t have the same queues and we wouldn’t understand some of the habits that they have. And so you think about the things that you take for granted and explain to somebody how they would tell a foreigner who was landing there, how to act in a certain situation. Does that kind of describe a little bit?

Nick: Absolutely. That’s the best definition I could use and I have actually used that definition when I’ve spoken at conferences. Yeah, it’s absolutely true. It’s like landing in a foreign country where you don’t know the language or may be know a little bit of the language and really learning everyday how to be part of that culture. In fear, you know people with Asperger’s are part of the culture every single day. So they sort of have this guilt enforced internally that says “you’ve been in this culture so long, why don’t you get it”? At least if you go to England or China or someplace you haven’t gone to, there’s a bit of an understanding that you haven’t been there before. But here it’s kind of like you’ve lived here for so long, why aren’t you getting it? And I think the fact that Asperger’s is becoming much more understood is definitely a positive sign. And the fact that the movies, like Adam are opening pretty soon will help those with Asperger’s kind of integrate a little bit more successfully then what would otherwise be the case. But up until now, it has not been easy for us. That’s definitely true.
Chantal: Right, but good things....the good thing is that it is moving positively forward. So and thanks to information that people like you are providing. So should we start with some questions here?

Nick: Sure, why not.

Chantal: Okay. Here’s a question from Debbie Small in Kansas City. I have a five year old with Autism Asperger’s. I would like to know how to lay a good foundation with friends, teachers, neighbors and the church to minimize bullying. Please let me know what I can do to be proactive. Thank you.

So she’s trying to ask what she can do in other words to prepare so that there....will minimize the risk of having bullying.

Nick: Umm, well I think becoming as active in your community as possible is really, really important. And the more people understand those with Asperger’s, I think the more tolerance and acceptance there will be. So I think you have to be very proactive in your community and if you’re not comfortable with disclosure, umm, I think that’s something I think you should become comfortable with. Because I think that....I think all the people in your community will benefit from your example and from your son’s....from understanding your son. The more of us understand the Asperger’s experience, there will be kind of like a domino effect, in my opinion. So to lay a good foundation I think you really need to be active in the school, the school system, very in touch with your child’s teacher and the principal and it sounds like you already are. So just kind of keep doing what you are.

Chantal: And let’s talk a little about disclosure. Because I find that to be a hot topic generally with parents. Many parents who have children with Asperger’s or adolescents, think that oh, they don’t want to mention the word because their kid is doing okay. Now how do you feel about that?

Nick: You know I think it really depends of the individual situation. Umm, as a general rule of thumb though, I am in favor of disclosure. It’s real easy for me to say it as an adult. Had I been a child of ten or eleven years old, I’m so sure that I would have been so.... as enthusiastic about it as I’m sounding in retrospect.
But in the other hand, I really think it depends on how it’s presented to the student and to other people. I mean there’s a balanced approach to disclosing Asperger’s. On the one hand, you know, I’ve heard of parents who focus on nothing but the negative. And of course of they focus on only the negative, the child is going to internalize it negatively. I mean that just makes sense. And so will the other classmates. And if you only focus on the positive, and there are a lot of positives to having Asperger’s, such as the sense of justice that we possess. You know, we have a strong sense of right and wrong and we like to see justice prevail. You often hear about people with Asperger’s being little policemen on the playground, because they don’t want to see...

Chantal: Right.

Nick: Somebody get away with a wrong doing. Umm, so there are many, many positives that you can stress. We think that Albert Einstein had Asperger’s, Thomas Jefferson. There have been books about these people. But if you only stress the positive, then what you can sometimes create is the child who not only has Asperger’s, but has Prima Donna syndrome. And thinks that his Asperger’s make him better than everyone else. So I really think that you need a balanced approach when you disclose this to your child and if you take the option of disclosing it to the rest of the class. Now when should you do it? I personally think it when the child views themselves as being different. And that’s going to happen inevitably, no matter who your child is. Because if you have Asperger’s, you are different. I mean that’s just kind of part of the definition of having Asperger’s. So I think that when that happens and you can sort of sense that your child is struggling internally because of this, maybe an explanation, a balanced explanation will sort of ease their worries. It’ll be a weight lifted off their back and they’ll say, “Oh my God, so this is what is going on”. I mean that’s how I reacted at age twenty-seven and I certainly wish I would have gotten my diagnosis a lot earlier in life. It would have explained so much about what happened to me that I previously had no understanding of.

Chantal: Yeah, Michael John Carley, who’s the head of GRASP, who has also written foreword to your books I think or at least two of them, Asperger’s Syndrome and Bullying book.

Nick: Correct.
Chantal: He has said that he’s believes in disclosure because he says that, people with Asperger’s grow up knowing they’re different. They feel different. So in this way, they can put a name on it and then they can find the practical strategies to help them in the areas in which they may have difficulties.

Nick: Exactly. And once you have that piece of information, then you can really capitalize on your strengths. Knowing, kind of, your neuro-psychological, neuro-biological roadmap, so to speak. So if I know for example that I’m not good at multitasking and I know that’s a symptom of Asperger’s, I’m going to avoid situations that involve multitasking. And before I got my diagnosis at age twenty-seven, just because I didn’t know any better, I used to put myself in job settings where I would have to multitask and not surprisingly, it would go disastrously. So now that I’ve gotten diagnosed, not that I avoid things more, it’s just that I strategically place myself in settings where I’m able to succeed and I think that’s really the main benefit. I mean, aside from self acceptance, I think that putting yourself in situations where you can succeed are the two main benefits of disclosure, knowing about one’s Asperger’s.

Chantal: Hmm, right. Here’s one question. Somebody wants to know, Denise Young in Tustin. Are you aware of any informational classes for kids about kids with Asperger’s and other challenges, given by school counselors, psychologists or teachers? You know, people who go in and give information to classrooms of kids about Asperger’s.

Nick: Well, I mean, my, my...I don’t specifically, but my understanding would be that a lot of us advocates....I know that I myself go into a lot of school districts and I talk to either um, the school faculty or I talk to um, sometimes groups of children. Just to kind of explain what Asperger’s is and kind of demystify it. So I would imagine and I’ve talked to a lot of advocates, self advocates and they do that sort of thing too, so. I don’t know of anyone specifically, but I mean, I would think that it wouldn’t be that difficult to arrange.

Chantal: You know, I would suggest to this person, that they contact the local chapter of their Autism site in America. Because I know that a lot of local chapters have people with Asperger’s, as members. And some....those individuals like to go out and do informational training or sharing of...to help the peers accept...be more accepting of the other students. Also, if there are chapters of GRASP. You can go online to GRASP, G-R-A-S-P and I know in certain areas there are
support groups. Now I’m not sure that all of them are people who want to go out and have the time to do training, but some of them may. So that’s a good option I think, to look into.

Nick: Absolutely.

Chantal: Ahh,

Nick: Go ahead.

Chantal: Ok, sorry. (laughter) Here’s a questions from Poway. What recommendations do you have for working with them at elementary schools that ignore bullying or allow bullying?

Nick: I think that’s a really good question and I think that it depends on the state that you live in. Some states are actually pushing for laws which would make it mandatory that these school districts implement bullying prevention programs. That it would have to be taken seriously. There are some states on the books that don’t have any laws and unfortunately, in those states, a parent’s recourse is not as great as it would be if it were mandatory. But I think you have to become really, really outspoken at your school and you know, kind of have to be a pain in the neck to the teacher, without being rude. And obviously, you want to recognize that they have a busy job, but at the same time, this is your child who you’re sending off six hours a day. So it’s kind of like their second home. And I think you have a right as a parent to make sure that your child is being protected while at school. And if they’re not doing their job, then you can go even higher. You can go to the principal, the superintendent and even the city board, if necessary. But I think being proactive and getting a bunch of other parents to be proactive as well, so that your voices are being heard in the community is extremely important. And that’s always makes a difference. Groups of people coming together to support a common cause.

Chantal: Well that brings...bought up a good question and you mentioned laws, but Vicki in Lottsville asks, is there not a federal law now being enacted to prevent bullying of any kind in schools?
Nick: My understanding is that there isn’t a federal law. I’m pretty sure that it goes on a state by state basis and I know that a majority of states have such a law in place. The only states that don’t right now are Alabama, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming. So if you don’t live in one of those states, there should be a law on the books that clearly defines what bullying is. Clearly spells out what needs to happen when it takes place. Clearly talking about what kind of bullying prevention programs should be in place. If you live in one of the states that I mentioned that doesn’t have such a law on the books, then what you need to do is become very active at the grassroots level and organize meetings for a House Sub Committee and just make your voice heard. And the way that these bills have passed through other states is it started with parents. Parents got fed up with the fact that their schools were ignoring their children, they banded together and now the majority of states have these laws on the books. It’s really, really....I can’t stress enough how important it is for parents to be proactive.

Chantal: Yeah, I totally agree. Here’s an interesting question from Jen Caladone in Ontario. At what point does bullying become abuse and need to be addressed within the legal system? When does bullying become abuse? That’s an interesting question.

Nick: Well bullying by definition is a power imbalance. But when it becomes abuse in my opinion is when there’s a threat of intimidation. When somebody’s safety is in jeopardy. I’m not just talking about physical safety. I’m talking about emotional safety too. A lot of these issues are so complicated. For example, cyber bullying. Now in my opinion, cyber bullying is wrong and just to tell you what cyber bullying is, basically it’s bullying over the internet. So it could be saying something on Facebook about someone, you know, very derogatory comments. Putting them up on MySpace, creating fake websites, things like that. And unfortunately, school systems have their hands tied. Because they say it happens off of...off school hours and that’s true. But a lot of parents are banding together and saying, now wait a minute. What happens outside of school affects what happens during school hours. And if a child can’t even feel safe inside his home, he’s probably not going to feel safe in the classroom as well. So, I think there’s so many issues and so many legalities that need to be worked through and bullying is defined differently pretty much everywhere you go. And every state there’s kind of a different definition, even though it’s similar, the wording is different. So you really have to find out in Ontario, since

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I’m not familiar with how they define it there. You really have to find out how they define it and then kind of go from there.

Chantal: Here’s Margo from Syracuse. She wants to know, is it common for Asperger’s Syndrome boys who are frequently bullied to then show bullying behavior towards younger or weaker kids?

Nick: Umm… I don’t know if I want to say it’s common, but I have definitely heard of it happening. Umm… you know, a lot of times people with Asperger’s can bully others almost inadvertently, because they want to be in control of a situation. So, if the situation escalates to something beyond their control, they may exhibit bullying like behavior. Okay, for example, let’s say that Mark, who has Asperger’s, is placed in a group of children to do math work. Okay, now number one, Mark is much better than everyone else at math and number two, it’s a group setting. So he’s uncomfortable with both of those... both aspects of that situation. So he’s going to say, “Mrs. Jones, I’m so much better than them in math. I don’t want to be put with them.” Now that kind of remark can come across as being bullying like, because it’s belligerent. But what is really missing is that there is not a power imbalance between Mark and the other children. As a matter of fact, the other children have the power imbalance over Mark. So that could set someone up for being a provocative bullier or a provocative victim, I should say. Because the bullying that they display turns them into a victim. And the other thing is that yes, if someone is bullied over and over again, for a year or two, umm eventually there’s going to, in my opinion, be some sort of retaliation at some point. Umm… not in every case, but for a lot of kids with Asperger’s, if they feel they have no other recourse, sometimes there’s a straw that breaks the camels back and umm… it’s not a pretty sight. I know a lot of parents who have tried to put in the IEP, the fact that if there is a retaliation and it’s clear that it’s a retaliation, that the child shouldn’t be punished. So, yes I do believe that people with Asperger’s can display bullying like behavior, but I don’t always believe that it is true bullying, if you look beyond the surface aspects of the situation.

Chantal: Right. And Temple Grant always talks about how when she was in school, she was constantly getting called “tape recorder” and teased by her peers. And one day she just got fed up and threw a book. Now that got her kicked out of school. Because she threw a book and hit somebody. But it was all this time of people name calling her that got her to that point. But she was the one that one in trouble, because back then, they didn’t have any understanding about
that. In fact, they still don’t in many areas, but it is starting to change in a positive way. At least that’s what I’ve been hearing. Have you been hearing the same, Nick?

Nick: I do think it’s changing, but I want to go back to your point about what you mentioned about Temple and that is, you know, most bullying does not take place in front of the presence of authority. So all this bullying, all this escalation that’s building up, teachers don’t see that. What they see is the one big incident and that’s usually the retaliatory incident. So what happens is that the victim is the one that gets blamed. You know, the whole blame the victim syndrome. And so they’re the ones who get punished. And unfortunately, we need to change that. We need to stop it before it gets to that point. And that sort of has been my mission over the past two or three years, is to teach educators the behavior that triggers the bullying, not that someone with Asperger’s ever deserves to be bullied, but the fact is that they do display certain behaviors that’s naturally going to trigger bullying from their peers. So I definitely think that teachers have to be much more proactive as far as keeping an eye on what’s going on outside of the classroom. In the cafeteria, in the playground, even sometimes in the bathroom, bullying can take place. On the school bus; these are areas where there’s not a lot of supervision. So there’s where teachers have to step it up.

Chantal: Do you feel that by teaching what’s called “hidden curriculum” to the students with Asperger’s, that that would be helpful in...or a proactive way of minimizing bullying?

Nick: Yeah, I think so. I think learning the hidden rules that most people intuitively grasp, would definitely help. Umm...I mean the fact that most people know that in middle school you’re not supposed wear Velcro shoes. I mean, who teaches you that kind of stuff? Yet, most people intuitively pick it up. Where somebody with Asperger’s doesn’t pick it up. We don’t understand the fact that we’re supposed to be a certain distance away from somebody else in the boy’s bathroom. You know, all these hidden rules that we’re not taught; you don’t read in a textbook. So yeah, absolutely. What Brenda Myles has done as far as the Hidden Curriculum, to me, has been invaluable to the AS community.

Chantal: Actually, she’s done...just put out now, you know, she had put out a Hidden Curriculum calendar. And there’s a new Hidden Curriculum calendar for older
kids, actually adolescents and young adults.

Nick: Oh really.

Chantal: Yeah, it just came out. I just received the review copy. So that might be something you want to look out for. It’s for 2010 calendar. And so where the original Hidden Curriculum originally addressed…the first calendar she put out addressed, you know, the younger kids or the things that people in elementary school should know, she now has a calendar which is for the adolescent and the young adults.

Nick: I think that’s wonderful. And I think I’ve been really outspoken in the last couple of years and there needs to be more material for the older population because that’s when the bullying really escalates, in middle school and high school. I think that’s great.

Chantal: And you know, I might be off the mark here, but I actually recommend to parents if their kids have Autism, but do not technically have Asperger’s, that they use those. I mean, my son is non-verbal, so he’s not technically Asperger’s, but he understands quite a bit, he still needs to know what appropriate behaviors are and I don’t think he knows those things through osmosis either. So I always tell people you can look a lot at the Asperger’s curriculum and work it out to use for anybody on the spectrum, actually.

Nick: I agree. I mean like you said, he has receptive language abilities and he observes the world around him, even if he can’t properly express every moment how he feels. So it’s not like he can’t learn that material.

Chantal: Right. Okay, so now we have a nice question from Marisa in South San Francisco. And I do apologize if I’m destroying peoples names. Especially with the name that I have. I’m very sensitive to it, but...So please umm, excuse me if I mispronounce your name.

So here’s the question...when approaching teachers and the principal with the concerns of kids with special needs who are being bullied, it does not seem to fix the bullying program. It stops for a day or two, but then it goes back to the
same as if I never approached the teacher or the principal. My situation is a child with mild Autism. A lot of social problems. I’ve spoken with other parents as to how they handle this kind of situation. They’ve gone up to all different levels, such as the Superintendent and the Mayor; you name it. They’ve received no answer to the concern of our kids.

Nick: Well my suggestion would be and I have this right in front of me, California is fortunately one of the states where there are laws in place. Where apparently, there has to be mandatory bullying prevention programs and authorities such as teachers and principals are mandated to do something about it when this happens. So I would go and I would do a little bit of research. And I would see what laws are on the books. How you can utilize those laws, because maybe you weren’t even aware that these laws in your state existed. So I would really become proactive in learning what repercussions or what resources you have as a parent to make sure that these people are doing their job.

Chantal: Yeah. I would say that the reason that it stops for a day or two is because they probably just addressed the little symptom, but they haven’t put an overall plan, as to how they’re going to address bullying for the whole school. And isn’t bullying a whole school problem and not just an one person problem?

Nick: Absolutely. It starts from the top, down. And I think that having uniformity in all the classrooms is so important. Some people will say, well you know, but you’re teaching kindergarteners something that you…kindergarteners are so cognitively different than fifth graders, so how can you keep it constant? You have very simple rules that every single person in the school can understand. And when you have it from a whole school prospective, then everybody is on the same page. You know, there’s instances where in first grade, the rules of the classroom are completely different than they would be the next year with a different second grade teacher. So I think that it is important and I kind of compare it to being in a city for example, and let’s say that every block there was a different set of laws that you had to follow. It would become very confusing for adults. Well that’s the same for children. Children need uniformity. They need to know what is acceptable in the whole building, what is tolerated, what isn’t tolerated and I think a whole school approach really solves that program. It does take some motivation on the part of principals to kind of create something and that can maybe come from, you know, the school district. They can have something in place. But it really needs to come from the top, down, in my opinion.
Chantal: Well I just find it kind of extraordinary that it is such an issue in school and they don’t recognize this. Because what we’re talking about here is respect.

Nick: Hmm hm.

Chantal: And aren’t they supposed to be teaching respect at school. You respect your teacher and you respect your classmates. And so if you followed that basic law, then anything that’s not respectful towards another person should be something that’s considered inappropriate behavior.

Nick: Absolutely and I….one reason why I think this isn’t happening, to be quite honest with you, is the fact that so much emphasis is put on these academic test. You know, I’ve....

Chantal: Ohh.

Nick: I’ve talked to so many teachers at these conferences that I’ve spoken at and they say to me, I would address it if I could, but I’m so under the gun as far as teaching to the test and our schools and our districts won’t get funding if these kids don’t perform, so I’m really spending all of my time making sure that I’m teaching them the core basics for you know, no child left behind. And what that really ignores, among other things, the fact that there are other things more important than state capital. Somebody who goes to school and doesn’t feel like they’re being respected and feels like they’re not safe. To me takes a priority over somebody learning about state capital. I think the fundamental

Chantal: Right. Occur

Nick: basis of somebody attending school should be that they are in a safe environment where learning can occur. Because learning won’t occur unless somebody feels safe. I mean, if you look at Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, safety is at the bottom. So unless you feel safe in the environment you’re in, you’re not going to learn. So people should recognize that, in my opinion.
Chantal: Right. That....these are life skills and that’s basically life skills that people need to learn. So if they’re not being learned by the people at school and as well as at home, where are they supposed to be learning these life skills?

Nick: Exactly. They’re not going to pick it up without direct instruction, in my opinion and especially since the peer influence is so strong, you also need to unlearn these destructive skills.....trend. I think basically we’re all born good. I think through influence, we learn negative habits. And I think it’s about unlearning these habits kind of getting back to the essence of who we are, which is good, caring individuals. But we need to be kind of reminded of that as children, I think.

Chantal: Thank you so much for sharing that with us. We’re learning so much this evening. There’s a person here who’s written a very long question, it’s actually an adult and I wondered if umm...can I go ahead and talk about this man who kind of sends in a little bit of his history?

Nick: Okay.

Chantal: It’s Joel from Houston, Texas. But I wanted to warn you that the description a little long but I think it’s interesting, so that people can realize what can happen to adults with Asperger’s if we aren’t helping them when they’re younger. So here we go. Here’s the background.

I’m a forty-five year old former Civil Engineer. Unemployed now for nearly two years and recently diagnosed with ASD PDD Asperger’s Syndrome. I also have major depression and anxiety, that I’ve been treated for, for over ten years. About two and half years ago, in the midst of a great workplace bullying, I began to have panic attacks and extreme claustrophobia and started to have recurring nightmares in which I was audibly yelling and even getting violent with objects in my room while sleeping. These dreams were often involving these workplace bullies or my father. I started to suspect PTSD and while discussing PTSD with a Psychologist, I was diagnosed with PDD and environmental triggers. I should be at the prime of my career right now, but these panic attacks and very strong negative feelings have totally disabled me. My father was an Army Green Beret in Vietnam. We moved over twenty-five times before I finished high school. I was in pre-school in Berlin, Kansas and New Mexico and became very dazed
and numb during that time. My father was diagnosed with schizophrenia and also eventually convicted of child abuse. I am the only one in my family to ever go to college and now all my family thinks is I’m just being lazy. I’m withdrawing now from all relationships for nearly a year because of the depression. I have also read Elaine Aron’s book about HSP, which is Highly Sensitive Persons and find it is a very good description of my situation. My question, can treatment get me over these panic attacks and away from depending on Xanax and can treatment help me to re-learn how to genuinely connect with people? I have become more and more isolated to the point that my only real connections are with animals. And lastly, is there any correlation with Asperger’s and PTSD or so-called complex PTSD? I have to go to a SSA disability hearing soon and I don’t know what I can legally and medically justify.

So the first question is: can treatment get me over these panic attacks and away from depending on Xanax? And can treatment help me to genuinely re-connect with people?

Nick: Joel, I definitely think so. Obviously, I’m very sorry to hear about all the things you’ve gone through over the years. And I’ve heard of similar situations to the situation that you described. But I absolutely think that we can learn how to control our anxiety and control our reaction to things. One of the best treatments that I recommend is actually, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. I’ve actually been in CBT for the last two or three years and it’s worked wonders for me. Joel, let you tell you. I was probably the most anxious person on the planet. I was always thinking ahead. Will something happen? You know, I think I had pretty much a good case of OCD. And the CBT helped me to kind of slowdown, monitor my thoughts, monitor what was going on in my head and think about what was accurate and what was fantasy. And distinguishing between what’s accurate and what’s fantasy is invaluable because then you can kind of live life umm...live life as if you are a part of it rather than just living within your head, which takes a lot of energy out of you. It would take a lot of energy out of everyone. The other thing I would suggest Joel, is I really think that it’s important, if you haven’t already, to connect with people on the spectrum. I wasn’t sure in your question if you eluded to that, but I think that it’s so important once we find out that we have an Asperger’s diagnosis, to meet others on the spectrum. I know Michael John stresses this a lot too because we kind of see we weren’t alone through the process. That there were other people who were going through similar circumstances and reacting similarly. There were other people who were having meltdowns when we were having meltdowns. There were others who had issues relating to having problems with transitions or employment or whatever. So I think kind of that
comradery that you can build with other human beings. And I think it’s wonderful that you have a connection with animals. I know a lot of people on the spectrum really, really connect with animals. But I also think that if you can connect with people too, it would really give you more of a sense of strength and you could find your strength in others, rather than just within yourself. And I think when others can help and give you that strength, especially people who you have something in common with, I really think that’s going to benefit you Joel.

Chantal: Before I move on to the other question, because that’s really good advice, would it be correct that I suggest or we suggest to Joel to look online for GRASP for resources of other people on the spectrum that he can connect to with? Or do you have other resources?

Nick: Umm...I know that there is some sort of Asperger’s group that I’m going to be speaking at in Houston in December. I think it’s the Aspie of Houston. It can easily be looked up on in Google. Joel, you can probably come and see me. I’m going to be there in early December. But umm...yes, absolutely. I don’t know if GRASP has a chapter in Houston. Even connecting online and looking at the positive influence that certain members of GRASP have had on the AFC community. I think that in of that itself can be very therapeutic.

Chantal: Okay. And finding a cognitive behavioral therapist is kind of the same. You try and find other people who have used one who they would recommend.

Nick: Absolutely. And I think Joel, it’s really important that you make sure that the person has a little bit of familiarity with Autism Spectrum disorders. I’ve seen therapists who’ve had no clue about Asperger’s or Autism and they’ve tried treating it with a cookie cutter approach. I mean they tried basically treating me as if I was Joe Schmo off the street and that doesn’t work. You really need an individualized approach and that can only come about when they understand what Asperger’s is and how it manifests in you. If the therapist says, “I’m really busy. I see twelve clients a day”, then you can say, “Fine. Seems like you’re doing enough business. You don’t need mine”. So you really want to see somebody who has expertise in Asperger’s and at the very least if they don’t, very willing to learn a little more about it.
Chantal: Okay. And the next....last part of his question: is there any correlation between Asperger's and PTSD or so-called complex PTSD? And he’s asking this because he has to go to a SSA disability hearing soon and I don’t know what I can legally and medically justify.

Nick: My understanding is that there is a correlation between Asperger’s and PTSD. I don't know the exact percentages, but if you think about it, it makes sense. I mean even from the realm of bullying. We get bullied more often than most people. So that’s going to manifest later on as PTSD. I mean for example, when I go out and I deal with other people, sometimes my interactions are a bit strained. Because if I run into someone that reminds me of a former bully, that kind of triggers a PTSD like reaction in me. Umm...at the moment it’s kind of unexplained, but then later on, I reflect upon it and I say wait a minute, this person really reminded me of someone that bullied me. So that kind of thing....parents who didn’t understand us, teachers who kind of belittled us for causing trouble. I mean the environmental circumstances are in place to create situations that are very, very harmful to our wellbeing and can easily cause us to feel bad about ourselves. Not to mention, I’ve seen statistics that say that people with Autism are at a greater likelihood to be abused sexually, unfortunately. So yes, I do believe there is a correlation between the two.

Chantal: Very good. Gosh Nick, you’re really a wealth of information.

Nick: (laughter). Thank you.

Chantal: Seriously. Okay. So here’s Annette from San Diego. Would you recommend play acting bullying at home as a way for our kids to think about what they would do? If so, can you give an example that would be appropriate. I guess it’s like play roll.

Nick: Yeah...one thing you can do and I’m assuming this person is asking this as far as how to react to people who are bullying our child? Does it say?

Chantal: Correct. Like how would they react if they get bullied.
Nick: Yeah...I think that coming up with assertive scripts and I know that Rebekah Heinrichs sometimes talks about this. Things like “Hey pal, watch it or back off”; something that somebody can memorize can really do wonders. I mean you want to keep it as generic as possible. So you’re not insulting the person especially if the person is two feet taller than your child. But a child who stands up for himself is less likely to be picked on than the child who overreacts to something and goes crazy or just kind of umm...shrivels up in his shell. Someone who’s assertive, but not aggressive is going to keep the bullies at bay. The other thing is I think that sometimes doing role plays can help. Where you and your child role play what the bully might say and then you come up with things you can say to the you know, the parent is playing the part of the bully and the child is being himself and you role play it. So that the child can say, “what would Timmy say in this circumstance?, and the child would say that and you kind of play it out. And I think another thing that can help is looking off of the TV for shows that the child likes. Because we know that kids with ASD can sometimes watch a movie and have that movie memorized within two or three times of viewing it. So I think that using characters on TV while the situations are dramatized and they’re not totally real, they can sort of give a sense of kind of what would Superman do in this situation? You know, kind of vicariously putting your child in the place of a character on TV is kind of similar to comic strip conversations. Where you’re putting yourself in the place of a character that you’re creating on paper. So I think those are a few things.

Chantal: Very good. I have to say...I’m going to read a question now, but I have to say that when I read this question, I find it very upsetting that people have to go through everyday and that kids have to go through this everyday. It’s really heart-wrenching because I don’t see how parents can really feel comfortable. It’s so hard for a parent knowing that they’re sending their child not fully prepared and you don’t know what kind of environment they’re going to be in.

Here is a question from Carey in Saginaw. Hi Nick, my son has high functioning Asperger’s. He has been the center of a bullying ring and whenever he has complained about it, the principal says he is lying or talks him right into believing he’s lying, so he changes his story. Well I caught the bullying first-hand myself and I wasn’t too happy. It happened to be just the last day of school last year and of course the principal wasn’t in. So my question to you is, how do I approach this at the beginning of school this coming year and stay professional, when the principal is always coming up with excuses because he is not going to allow it continue. My son is only in third grade and when he enters school, he totally shuts down. He loves to learn and I want to know he is safe when he goes to school.
Nick: What I would say is....first of all you live in Saginaw. Which is not too far away from where I live and I would be very happy to do a presentation at your school to kind of shed some light on this issue. But I think that what you need to do is go higher up than the principal. If the principal is blowing you off or not giving you what you need or making it worse, then you go up the chain of command. And if worst comes to worst, I know of parents who have taken their kids out of a particular school, placed them in a school, maybe a little bit further away, but with a more understanding principal or teacher or whatever. So I think that sometimes drastic action has to be taken and if you’re not getting what you need and you need to be getting what you need, because again, this is your child safety, then you have to do whatever you need to do to sort of rectify the situation.

Chantal: I also want to comment to parents because sometimes it’s painful to this, but I would say, document everything. You should have a little notebook that you are writing every single little, tiny thing down. And I would hope for example, the parent was able to write down what happened and at least send a letter to the principal. Because I know from having filed due process twice, not nothing having to do with bullying, but still my unsafe situation or negligent behavior or situations that my son was not safe but not do to bullying from a students. And the thing is if you document every single little thing, you know, you’re basing it on fact, not on emotion, and also the school district could not possibly have had the time to document everything because they don’t even know everything that is going on. So here you have everything documented and it’s a good factual basis to start off from and it’s really necessary in these emotional issues to also have these facts to back them up.

Nick: Absolutely. I couldn’t agree more.

Chantal: Okay, here’s from Nancy Bradley in Cape May. My son does not like school due to difficult transitions from one elementary school to another within the district. The move to a different school every three, for example. He tends to become overwhelmed and melts down. He becomes non-verbal, runs away, yells, hides in closets. Because he is high function most of the time, most children do not notice this behavior at a younger age. Now what friends he has no longer want to be friends and make it known to him, as well as his siblings, that they don’t like him. Boy, this happens a lot when kids get older, doesn’t it? It has become
school wide to the point that I have to keep him home from school several days. How do I make a sad face smile again? Should I make a request to the school to have social training for the kids in general classes or is that too much?

Nick: Well, I think there needs to be a plan in place when the child is about to have a meltdown. First of all, you teach the child to recognize that there is a build up. I mean, whenever a volcano is about to explode, it doesn’t just explode out of thin air. There’s always a build up. So you teach the child to recognize those times and then I think every child...I’m sorry, every school could have like a room dedicated to when the child is about to have that meltdown, they can politely excuse themselves and go to that room. Because it makes them look very, very different if they’re going to have that meltdown in public. If they’re able to excuse themselves, go into that room, let out all the steam that they need to let out and then return fifteen or twenty minutes later. While they are leaving the classroom and that might create you know, some stares, it is better than actually having that meltdown in the classroom where everybody can view it. So I mean, Chantal, I kind of compare it to throwing up. I mean that’s a gross analogy, but when you throw up, you don’t do it in front of everyone else. You get the warning signs and then as soon as you know its about to happen, I don’t care if you’re in play, an airplane, wherever, you’re gonna do everything you can to not do it in front of others. Not because its wrong per se, but because it’s better to do something like that in private. So I think that schools really need to kind of create a chill room (C-H-I-L-L) or some sort of safety room where kids can go, not abusing the privilege of course, but a room where they know they can go to have those meltdowns.

Chantal: I think that’s a very good analogy you made. And what about what Nancy says about making a request to the school to have social training for the kids in general classes?

Nick: As far as how to response to that one child? Is that what you think she means?

Chantal: Should I make a request to the school to have social training for the kids in general classes or is that too much? I’m not quite sure what she means, but I was thinking more in terms of perhaps...I think peer training, but not...even training, but like an informational thing about what is Asperger’s, but you know, in a positive way. And how some people who have Asperger’s may react. So, for example, when my son is main stream he can’t speak but he can write on
his light writer or on his talking power point. He prepares it before the start of the school year, then he gets permission from the teachers and then he gives a five minute spiel. His machinery speaks for him and it’s all about how he may look like he’s not listening and he can’t get his body to move. Sometimes he has to get up and leave because he doesn’t have control over his body. So people don’t think why is he acting so weird all of the time or for someone with Asperger’s, it might be different. But a lot of times, kids are afraid of what they don’t understand. So if kids don’t know anything about what it is like when you Asperger’s or why someone does become non-verbal, because they’re stressed out, then sometimes if they know about this then it easier for them to accept the person. I don’t know if that makes sense what I’m saying?

Nick: Absolutely. I think that does make sense. And I think the other thing is peer mentoring, I think is hugely successful

Chantal: Oh yeah.

Nick: When it comes to eliminating the bullying. I mean we have a program here in Michigan called the LINX program, where individuals who are in Special Education, it can be an Asperger’s individual, somebody learning disabled, somebody who is emotional impaired, are placed with a link, which is really a mentor and that person kind of shows them the ropes. Integrates them into the mainstream setting. So, the typical ASD child is going to sit alone at lunch and we know that kids who are isolated are the ones most likely to be bullied. So with link, the link says, “hey, come on, sit over here” and then if anyone gives that kid a hard time, the link is there to kind of say, “hey, what are you doing? Knock it off”. So peer monitoring I think is really, really effective and the school systems that I’ve gone to pretty much say it solves that problem. I don’t want to make it too simplistic, but when you integrate that kid into the social setting so that he’s not longer by himself and he’s with a group of people who understand him. And remember these people are taking classes for credit, so they’re learning about Asperger’s and they’re learning about Autism and they’re learning how to react when the kid has a meltdown. It can really be almost a lifesaving tool, in my opinion.

Chantal: Great. Here’s a question from Bella in India. What is psychotherapy for Asperger’s Syndrome? And what does a therapist do in a therapy session?
Nick: You know I don’t think there’s been a certain kind of therapy that’s been created for somebody with Asperger’s. And I’m talking about for adults. For children, obviously, if we’re talking about young children, there’s different kinds of therapy like ABA, Floortime. What I’m really looking to see happen in the future is therapist becoming more aware of the adult population. And as far as people with ASP seeking adult therapy because really there’s not a lot of awareness when it comes to psychotherapist treating our population. So, I really believe that CBT, as I mentioned before, is umm….

Chantal: Do you wanna umm….do you mind describing to people what Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is?

Nick: Sure. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is basically looking at your thought process and making sure that your thoughts accurately match up with reality. So typically in a CBT session, the therapist will challenge you to rethink about some of your assumptions. Sometimes with the black and white thinking that people with Asperger’s sometimes display, and we can get so caught up in our black and white thinking, that we need an objective voice who isn’t our parent, who isn’t in the thick of it with us, somebody who’s kind of on the sidelines saying now wait a minute, have you thought about rethinking this. The other strength about CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) is it plays to a person’s logic, right. And we know that people with Asperger’s are very logical. So if we get them to look at things in a more logical way, kind of not there logic, but the logic of what’s really going on, it tends to be really successful.

There’s a book that I would recommend by Valerie Gauf (G-A-U-F), and it’s a book about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with adult Asperger’s Syndrome patients and I recommend that pretty much to every therapist that I meet who is looking to work more with our population.

Chantal: Great. Thank you so much for explaining that. Here’s a question from Christina in Pittsburgh. As a teacher’s aide, what are some strategies (clearing throat) excuse me….strategies or techniques that I can put in place when one of my students is being bullied. We have no bullying policy in our school district, however I’m wondering how I can empower and make them understand.

Nick: Okay. I think that umm….and I don’t know if I talked about this previously tonight,
but I think that umm, umm...peer intervention when somebody is being bullied, is the utmost important piece of any bullying prevention program. So in other words, bystanders need to get involved when they see one of their peers being victimized. Unfortunately, that doesn’t happen very often cause most people don’t want to associate themselves with the victim because they’ll be seen as the victim’s friend. So it’s really a political thing that’s going on, on the playground. And I think that any bullying prevention program, any whole school approach, should focus primarily on what to do when you see somebody being victimized. That it’s not only the right thing to do to tell the teacher, but it’s the right thing to actually confront the bully head on. So when you have a group of students who come together and say, “hey, wait a minute...this isn’t cool, knock it off”, then what you’re really doing is taking away the incentive to bully. Because most people bully to become popular. And if you’re taking away the incentive of popularity, then you’re really handcuffing the bully and saying, “wait a minute, this isn’t going to work”. So the whole mindset at a school needs to be changed and that’s what I would recommend. And I know there are bullying prevention programs in place that mention or I should empathize bystanders support. Any successful bullying prevention program will have that piece.

Chantal: Great. That’s good information. Connie from Rockford just asked what is PTSD. So I think it’s Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but how does that relate to umm...for example, Asperger’s Syndrome?

Nick: PTSD is a reactive. It’s most associated with wartime veterans coming home where they’ve seen some pretty bloody scenes and battle and react back home as if they’re living through the battle again. And as I said earlier, I think that a lot of us with Asperger’s live through some pretty horrific situations growing up whether again we’re misunderstood by teachers and constantly ridiculed by them, ostracized from our peers, maybe we had parents who really didn’t understand what was going on. See a lot of people in our generation, I’m in my early thirties, we weren’t diagnosed until adulthood. I think the gift that people with Asperger’s who are growing up in this generation have is a lot more self understanding, because the diagnosis is now prevalent. So I predict actually that PTSD will go down, just because there’s a lot more awareness what Asperger’s is and how to best help the child with AS.

Chantal: Thank you. Here’s another adult who’s written in. Charles Robson from Johnson City, Tennessee. While I don’t remember significant bullying, I do
remember many testing how much abuse I would take. I learn to stand my ground possibly due to my objections to injustice. However, when I didn’t understand something, e.g. a joke everyone else seemed to get, there were eye rollings and laughter at my expense. Occasionally, someone would offer an explanation, which is all I wanted and I would feel relief from the puzzle and bewilderment from to the others responses. Do I understand correctly that a possible explanation might be my detailed, logical left brain didn’t get it as my right brain didn’t offer big picture, illogical explanation? I am fifty-seven years old and diagnosed at the age of fifty-four.

Nick: Well that definitely is a possibility. I know that many people with AS, particularly those with non-verbal learning disabilities, have what Byron Rourke deemed left hemispheric dysfunction, which I’m sorry….right hemispheric dysfunction, where the left brain is really far superior than the right brain. So we’re able to kind of synthesize things. You know, Simon Baron-Cohen talks about the extreme male brain, but we don’t get the big picture. And I think that’s true for a lot of people with AS. We understand details. We’re very detail oriented, but when it comes to grasping the whole picture, we have some difficulties. So, I think that that could definitely exacerbate teasing when for example, we don’t understand the non-verbal queues that are taking place or we don’t understand sarcasm. Those kinds of things go over our heads and we’re missing….we’re missing a lot of what going on. 85% of communication that takes place is non-verbal. 15% is verbal, but even with verbal communication there can be differences in tone and intonation. You can say one thing, one way and mean it totally different if you say it another way. So absolutely, I think that’s a plausible explanation.

Chantal: Good. Vicki from Patton wants to know how do you explain to a young teenager the difference between mild teasing or joking and being made fun of?

Nick: And that is true. I think a lot of us with AS have difficulty in sort of deciphering when we are being kind of just joked around with or when’s its true bullying. And I think for those instances, you really need to kind of isolate what happened with your child in school and talk about exactly what situation took place. And then kind of look at it for a cognitive viewpoint. Well, what you think he meant by that? The other thing is that you really need to teach children to pay attention to the past actions of the person who they’re interacting with. So has this person been nice to you before. If so, maybe they truly are a nice person. Have they offered to have you sit at the lunch table. Maybe what they meant...
maybe they were just teasing. Typically if a person is nice for the first time and you’ve had some dealings with them for many, many days over the course of a school year, you can pretty much assume that they’re laugh at you at your expense. Not always of course, but the odds are good. If they’ve never taken the opportunity to be nice to you before and this is the first time they’re doing it, there should be sort of a suspicion factor going on, like “hey, what’s going on here?”. And I think kids with AS because we tend to be gullible sometimes, we don’t think about those things. And I think keeping that in mind, as far as the past actions of other people can be really important...as far as deciphering when someone is truly blowing off or when it’s truly just teasing or joking.

Chantal: Thank you. Okay, now here’s not a question, an invitation from Linda Dutwilder in Encinitas, which is just a few towns over from me. I’m in lovely San Diego. And she says we have this very topic on the docket for Parent Info Night, slated for Thursday, March 26th. Any chance of you presenting? We’re in beautiful San Diego North. Maybe we should give her your website so she can contact you.

Nick: That would be great! I would love to come to San Diego. I have cousins who live there and I have a couple of nieces who live there and it’s beautiful, so I would love to present. So please contact me. My website is www.aspergerwisdom.com. And my e-mail address, which I’m happy to give since it’s public information is nickdubin@hotmail.com. And yeah contact me. I’d love to set something up.

Chantal: Okay, well you’ll have to let me know if you do come in town.

Nick: I sure will.

Chantal: Okay. Here’s another question from Annette in San Diego. My son receives ABA therapy at home and they are getting ready to include bullying in his drills. He’s not getting bullied yet, but I’m sure one day he will. What should I be looking for as far as topics and material that they should be covering along with that? Now I don’t know how old her son is, but

Nick: Yeah, I don’t know how old her son is
Chantal: What kind of....I guess I kind of wonder....what kind of things should you be teaching them now when it’s not happening yet? You know, it’s kind of proactive.

Nick: Right...right. I think that umm that kind of thing can be taught as far as umm...I don’t know if ABA would be the best way that I would recommend, because what I found with ABA is that it doesn’t always generalize. So you can learn....does that make sense Chantal? You can learn information in one context and in a very strict context with drills, but yet if it’s in a different setting and with different people and the tone of voice is different, then the person who is doing the drilling, it doesn’t always work out well that way. So I’m not sure if I would really even recommend ABA for the purposes of....I think it has to be in a more spontaneous setting where the person is maybe doing role plays or watching something on TV or creating social stories or even doing comic strip conversations. Something where it’s a little more engaging. I don’t mean to be putting down ABA. I just don’t think it would be great for this purpose.

Chantal: Actually, I understand what you’re saying but.....and I know that there’s a real problem with the way ABA therapy in done in a lot of places and also I know many of the providers in San Diego and some providers do not at all do generalization. But if ABA is done correctly, the way it was originally meant to be, once something is learned, it is supposed to be generalized. There’s really lots of different steps to the generalization and so I don’t think it’s a full answer to the bully question. I kind of agree with Nick that it needs to be more in a natural setting. But it can be introduced, I think in ABA, but again, unless you have that generalization piece, then it is a drill. I totally agree with you there.

Nick: And let me clarify it. I think....I agree, if someone is doing ABA well, it will generalize. But the majority of the time the parents that I have talked to, not everybody does ABA the way it was meant to be, like you said.

Chantal: Correct.

Nick: If you can get in a natural setting, that would be optimum, but I think maybe it could work with ABA. It just wouldn’t be my first choice.
Chantal: Right. I understand exactly what you’re saying. Okay, here’s Jennifer from Buffalo. I am wondering what your thoughts are on disclosure with children in late elementary or middle school. My son was not diagnosed until late (fifth grade) and the school he attended at the time told us he was teased because children didn’t understand him and that if they only knew, he would be treated better by his peers. We felt that kids at that age would simply have more reasons to bully him and choose not to disclose the information….and we chose not to disclose the information. I am all about educating children on various forms of learning disabilities and how they can effect children, but feel it is up to the school systems to embrace different learning styles and meet all the children’s needs regardless of any difficulties they may face. Because these are bright children, they’re often labeled as lazy or immature. He is now in a public school, but a special program for children with Asperger’s and Autism and he is doing quite well. We were reluctant to place him in a Special Ed program at this point. He’s now in eighth grade because we were concerned that either he would regress or that it would be difficult to the peer issues at this already difficult time in adolescence. The reason why he has been able to do so well however, is because he is supported and so well understood. If the teacher’s are all supportive of the children with any special needs, I feel the other children follow their lead.

Nick: And that seems to be a comment that this woman was making and I agree. I mean if disclosure is done well, ultimately that is what will happen. I’ve heard of some instances where disclosure is made and then the child is ostracized. Not kind of in a bullying kind of way, but oh he’s weird, let’s stay away from him. So it can kind of backfire. But I think if disclosure is done well, the child feels good about him or herself, differences are embraced and it’s not kind of….it’s not like the end of the world if somebody has Asperger’s. It’s, they function a little differently. You know, I think that’s the key Chantal. Now that I’m verbalizing it out loud.

Chantal: Right.

Nick: It’s that we don’t get into such a dramatic production of he’s an alien from outer space. We’ve got to treat him differently.
Nick: No...you know what I mean? He functions a little bit differently and maybe that’s even the wrong way to say it. But they’re just different things. Look at somebody like Albert Einstein, who created the theory of relativity. He was a little bit different at school and a lot of people thought that he couldn’t learn. So teaching it in that sort of way where it’s not over dramatized, I think is really important.

Chantal: Right. Okay, so now here’s a very long statement/question from Liz in Audubon, New Jersey. When is verbal....when is verbal abuse considered bullying by law? What’s the fine line between someone being just plain mean as opposed to crossing that line into verbal bullying? I need examples or references to go on. If this is happening at public school, when should a parent speak with a school official about this after the first bullying incident? And when....and which school official is best to speak with in order to get things resolved? Okay, that’s the start. I don’t know if you want me to continue and read everything and then go back over the questions one by one?

Nick: Yeah...I’ll kind of answer that first question.

Chantal: Okay.

Nick: As I said earlier, it depends on where you live and each state defines it differently and I have these definitions in front of me. I’m not going to read every one, but school kind of umm....not school, each state kind of lays out what they define as bullying. You kind of have to look at the state that you live in for those guidelines, cause each state is going to be different.

Chantal: Yeah, you know, it sounds like from all the questions, that this person has in here, she really needs to have some legal advice and this is in New Jersey. I don’t really know the name of the organization in New Jersey, but every single state has a protection advocacy agency. And well in California it’s called Protection Advocacy, but in every state there is one and these are who translate the Special Education laws into lay language for parents to be able to understand. They are usually translated into a zillion different languages as
well. And the whole point is so that everyone knows what their rights are. And if you go online in your state and look up Protection Advocacy, you should be able to find it. If it’s not exactly that same name, you will find something just by looking up “my special education rights”.

Nick: Yeah and actually....I’m sorry to interrupt....

Chantal: Go ahead.

Nick: I was going to say to Liz, that she should go to www.bullypolice.org/nj/law.html. Because that....I just did a quick search online as we were talking and that pretty much give the guidelines for what is considered....for example, her “harassment intimidation or bullying” means any gesture, in New Jersey, means any gesture or written, verbal or physical act that is reasonable perceived as being motivated either by an actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity....so it gets very specific and there’s like three or four pages of it. So let me repeat again just incase she didn’t write it down the first time. It’s Bully Police....www.bullypolice.org/nj_law.html. And that sort of spells it out for you.

Chantal: And it goes on with Liz’s question. She talks about whether the child would have more protection under a 504 or an IEP. I think that’s the kind of thing you really need legal advice in your state. And again, often in these states under Protection Advocacy, there’s often someone you can talk to for free. At least, the way it works in the state of California, you have to leave a message they don’t get back to you for two or three days. So you really have to plan ahead of your IEP or whatever meeting your having with the school. But I would definitely check in your state and I think that’s really good advice to look at what Nick’s just given you. But I hate to get more into it. I’m not an attorney and I don’t think....Nick you’re not an attorney either, are you?

Nick: No. My dad’s an attorney, but I decided not to go that way in life. (laughter)

Chantal: Well, we’re certainly glad you decided not to. (laughter)
Okay. So let me see. We have so many more questions here. Okay, here’s from LD in Los Angeles. How should we respond if during a meeting with one child’s IEP team, they react with silence when you say you’re concerned with unkind treatment and bullying?

Nick: Boy. Again, as Chantal eluded to earlier, I think that you should document that and save whatever reactions that anyone had and whatever anybody said, I think you should be writing it down and be saving it for future use. And again, in California, my understanding is that there is a law on the books which mandates someone to do something about it. So you can pull out that law. Do some research. Maybe go on the Bully Police website www.bullypolice.org, because I think it has it for every state that has the law. That’s what I did just a few seconds ago. I went on Bully Police and I pulled up New Jersey and it had everything about New Jersey, as far as what needs to be done, bully prevention programs, what the definitions are of bullying. So I think having that at the IEP meeting and saying you need to do this by law. And when you frame it in terms of law, they really are not going to want to go to court. That cost money, time consuming, so if they can do something that settles it out of court, I think they’re going to do that. And if they know you’re threatening that with that, then I think that they are going to try and appease you. That would just be my take on it.

Chantal: Okay. I’m gonna respond also, not as a legal person, but as a parent and as a lay advocate. I would say that I would be documenting what the unkind treatment and bullying is and if you already have those, that’s great. I would ask for another meeting and I would ask....I would give them....I think it’s still 24 hour notice, but you need to check that. In the state of California you give 24 hour notice and allowed to tape record. Because then you can tape record the silence or you can tape record whatever remark they make and I would also, because I know a lot of states there are a lot of meetings....they’re so busy that if you go in there with a plan, then you’re going to have a reaction to a plan. So I think I would also come up with some ideas of here’s what I’m concerned with and here’s some ideas of how to resolve it. Because they obviously don’t have any ideas if they’re reacting in silence. So that’s what I would suggest. And I think that if you read Nick’s book and also look at some of the websites that he’s mentioned. There is that last one. It might give you some ideas as well.

Okay.
Nick: Yeah. My book and Rebekah Heinrichs’ book are both really good resources and her book, I don’t know exactly the title, but it also has to do with Asperger’s and bullying. You can look that up on Amazon.com.

Chantal: Yeah, umm....I really like both the books. I like Nick’s book because I get from his perspective, someone who’s been there and Rebekah’s might be one a principal might be more in tune to because it really talks about it from a systems down. And sometimes they get that better if they’re dealing with systems. But both of them....I like both of the books together. I think that you have two really excellent tools there. I think Nick’s is more practical, but the other one might be something that systems people more relate to. I don’t know if I’m examining myself correctly there.

Nick: No, that makes sense to me.

Chantal: Okay, so here’s Yvonne Bale from Gulfport. We have a forty-one year old son that’s recently been diagnosed with Asperger’s and we also have a grandson who is autistic. Our son (so that’s the forty-one year old) has turned into a giant size bully and will not understand why the family is mean to him. I know it is a matter of perception on his part, but if any of us disagree with him, he goes into such a rage. I am frightened of him. He was also molested at the age of nine by my babysitter’s daughter. At the time there was not a lot of information about molestation and I was told he was just going through early puberty and not to worry. Now some thirty plus years later I am at my wits end with his behavior and frankly, I do not want him around my grandson. We are becoming kinship guardians for my grandson and he will be coming to live with us. His uncle (which is the forty-one year old son) lives only blocks away and he appears to be very jealous of our grandson. I do not know what to do in my current situation. Is there any help? I always have hope.

Nick: Boy, that does sound like a sticky situation. Again, umm...I’m sorry to hear what you’ve gone through. And I don’t know how much behavior I would subscribe or up scribe...I don’t know how much I would assign to the AS. There probably has been some severe PTSD that’s taken place as far as him being molested. Umm...studies show that those who are molested are likely to molest themselves or act violently later on in life, so.
Chantal: If it hasn’t….if it hasn’t been dealt with, that’s true.

Nick: Exactly and I think it does need to be dealt with. I’m not an expert in this area, as far as handling post traumatic stress from being molested as a child, but I definitely think there has to be some sort of intervention or action that takes place.

Chantal: Okay. It is really a tough situation. Umm….here we are. Jerry Lavale from Orlando. I honestly believe that the more people become familiar with Asperger’s Syndrome, the more they will appreciate what creative, bright people they are. When we go places we usually run into someone that knows our son from school, church, etc. They always have a smile and a happy greeting for him. This always amazes us because we have the day to day care of him and forget what a cheerful boy he can be. That does not mean that he doesn’t get bullied, he does. Our problem is when he comes home, he bullies his younger brothers the same way he was bullied. It doesn’t….he doesn’t understand the gestures and words that he is using. How do we stop him from passing on the bullying? That’s the second question that kind of….somebody else had kind of asked that same question before too.

Nick: Yeah. Well let me address the first question first. I think it is true that once you meet someone with AS, you sort of have a different appreciation about what AS is. But there’s also the saying that if you met one person on the Spectrum, you’ve only met one person on the Spectrum. So we are a very diverse group of people and we’re as diverse as neuro-typicals are from each other, in my opinion. And so yes, once…the more of us can kind of be out there, even as children (nine, ten, eleven years old) and kind of express who we are, the more there is going to be an appreciation for people like us. Especially if its facilitated properly in the classroom with teachers. You know I have a cousin who is the head usher at his temple. He is in charge of homeless week and he’s a hero at his temple. And people know about his Asperger’s, but they don’t really appreciate him because of his Asperger’s, they appreciate who he is as a person. And I think that’s the important thing. Is to look at who we are holistically. We’re not just our diagnosis. We’re much more than that. But I think knowing about the diagnosis, really gives us insight into who we are and makes you kind of appreciate that there isn’t an Autistic stereotype. That we are individuals and we are capable of greatness just like anyone else is, so.
Chantal: Okay, so that’s the first part and the second part is, how do we stop him from passing on the bullying? In another words, he gets bullied at school then he comes home and does the same thing that happened to him earlier.

Nick: Well you know a lot of that is going to be projection and that’s basically a Freudian term. But when I was at school, I would get bullied a lot and then I would come home and having kept myself together throughout the course of the day because I didn’t want to have a meltdown at school, I then unleashed it all on my parents because they were my target. They were who I could direct my energy to. All the energy that I wouldn’t have wanted to direct towards my targets or the bully that were targeting me, it was being displaced onto my parents. So displacement is what I was looking for, not projection. So basically you know, you want to give the child opportunities to let out that frustration, whether it be buying a punching bag…I also recommend exercise as a way to do that. Whether it be letting him swim in the pool. Swimming seems to really help kids with Autism. Ways to get that aggression out, but in a healthy way. Rather than displacing the angry that they’ve had to hold together all day long on the bullies and they take it out on you. That’s pretty common among those with Autism and Asperger’s. We hold it together all day long and then we get home and who are our targets, our siblings and our parents. So I really think having other outlets for that anger can be really, really helpful.

Chantal: Thank you for that. Ahh…Denise Jackal in New York. How do parents handle it if children use all the techniques and the ones who are socially acceptable don’t want to lose their status by associating with the victim and just remain neutral or join in or just be a by-stander because again they don’t want to lose their status? And those kids would wind up being left out as well. What do we tell our kids?

Nick: That’s a great question Denise and that’s what I addressed earlier in the conversation, as far as having a whole school and having the kids have the mindset that bullying other children is not acceptable. And if they see somebody doing it, they would intuitively come to the aid of the person being victimized, where it wouldn’t be seen as uncool. You know if you think about it, if only one person is coming to the aid of the victim there’s kind of a risk involved in that, because I don’t want to do anything on my own, I want group support. If I have group support, then I’m not the only one doing it. So there’s safety in numbers. There’s strength in numbers. And when you can get a group of people to
confront the bully, rather than just one person, you’re setting up a situation where the bully is going to find it a lot harder to do what he’s previously been doing. And it’s kind of like what we would do as adults. I mean, if we saw a mother abusing her child, we would probably take action. We’d call protective services or we’d call the police. We would intuitively do the right thing probably. And that’s what we need to teach children. If you see something like that, they need to do the right thing. And I think again, as I said earlier, it’s already within them to do this. We just need to remind them what the right thing to do is and we kind of need to de-condition from what they’ve learned instinctively from their peers. And I think that people with AS kind of instinctively know how to do that. They’re the ones who usually are the ones who come forward and say Jimmy is being teased by John or....again, they’re the little policemen. They want to see justice prevail. And I think that almost if we could use the example of someone with AS and say this is something that people should be doing. Let’s follow Tim’s lead. We can kind of place him in a positive light in that regard. Where a lot of teachers I think view that as being tattling, starting trouble or something along those lines.

Chantal: Great. Joan in Binghamton. How do you help teenagers with Asperger’s Syndrome understand that someone who has been bullying them is not truly their friend? Gosh, I get this one a lot at conferences when I speak on adolescent issues. We have teenagers with Asperger’s Syndrome who have such a difficult time coming to grips with the fact that their typical peers who seemingly befriend them, but in fact telling them to do inappropriate acts and ridiculing them. Our students continually go back to those who are bullying them and continue to be bullied time and time again.

I just wanted to make a comment that also...this has come to my attention around the country that people have come and told me stories about what happens to their kids at school. And I’m bringing this up because one area that parents don’t like to deal with too much is explaining to their kids about sexuality and sex and what is sex. And those issues are really important because that’s how some of the bullying happens that I’ve heard of is where....for example, a teenage girl will want to be friends with these other teenage girls and she thinks that they’re befriending her. What they’re doing is telling her to do, to see Johnny and perform a sex act. Now she doesn’t realize that it’s a sex act and she doesn’t realize it’s inappropriate. And I know many neuro-typical people listening right now are going to think, oh my God, how could that be. But it’s true. If you don’t tell people something and explain to people especially with Asperger’s, there are things that they don’t really get and then these people get not only bullied, but abused. Because that’s sexual abuse, I’m sorry. And so
it’s really important and I’ll let Nick answer that question, but I wanted to make
sure that I tell parents out there that if you think your kids are not interested in
sex or the sex act, you need to clarify what those are to teenagers. Because
even if they’re not interested, they’re going to be hearing about it. Don’t you
agree Nick?

Nick: Oh absolutely and that’s something that I hadn’t thought of, but I think it’s a really
good point. Is that, especially is middle school and high school, sex becomes a
main topic of conversation among students. I mean it’s on people’s brains so to
speak. So umm, yeah and that would be something that people would use
against those who are gullible, to get them to do humiliating things and that is
sexual abuse. I really hadn’t thought of that, but that’s a really good point.

Chantal: I’ve heard quite a few stories across the country because I’m speaking on
adolescent issues and so that’s why they ask me about that. But I’m not trying
to scare parents, I’m just saying to be proactive about these kinds of things.
So, to answer this question, what do you about teaching the teenagers with
Asperger’s who are having a difficult time coming to grips with the fact that
their typical peers who seemingly befriend them, are in fact telling them to do
inappropriate acts and ridiculing them.

Nick: That’s a tough one and again I think it’s a matter of teaching people the black and
white rule that not everybody who is friendly to you is your friend. And I think
that’s something that people with Asperger’s have a hard time accepting,
because you know, if someone is friendly to me, they’re me friend. I mean
there’s kind of a rigidity and thought and I think people really...

Chantal: Right.

Nick: Look at the big picture ask themselves again...has this person been friendly to me
before, what they’re asking me to do, have I ever been asked to do this before,
if not, it might not be something I should do. You know, does it sound like a
typical request. So people with AS really have to think about these things
mechanically, but they have to think about them instead of just along with what
people tell them. And I think if you tap into the logic, the inherent logic that
people with AS use, you can really have some good results as far as teaching
them the social rules. And you can pretty much teach them that anything that
you’re asked to do of a sexual nature and you….I mean I know it’s uncomfortable for parents to talk about this issue, but sometimes it needs to be talked about to avoid a humiliating situation. And you can kind of go through it and say don’t ever do that. If anyone asks you to do that, I don’t care how friendly they are or how much they entice you or what they want to give you for doing it or how cool you’ll be for doing it, just don’t do it.

Chantal: I also think in terms of these others things that are non-sexual, but someone has a hard time figuring out if they’re appropriate or not appropriate. If the parent sees that this kind of thing is going on where the judgment still isn’t there because they don’t really know of….and you can’t as a parent know absolutely everything that’s going to be happening in the school day. I like the idea that Zosia Zaks comes up with. Do you know Zosia Zaks? Are you familiar with her book, Nick?

Nick: I believe so. I think she’s on the board of GRASP, if I’m not mistaken?

Chantal: Right.

Nick: She wrote a book...(inaudible)

Chantal: What is the name of the book?

Nick: Love, Life and Learning or something like that. I don’t know if I got the title exactly correct, but something like....

Chantal: Well I’m having a senior moment, but I can see the book and I know it’s green and I know it’s by Zosia Zaks

Nick: She’s in (inaudible)....

Chantal: Life and Love or Love and Life

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Nick: Yeah

Chantal: And Strategies for Living with Autism or something like that. But if you put Zosia Zaks (Z-O-S-I-A Z-A-K-S)....she has a great idea and that is, that you have a friend or you have a peer. And there are some good people in all these situations in at school. And you teach....and this is good for when they’re adults and living on their own, but this person with Asperger’s has someone that they go to say here’s what’s been proposed to me. Is this an appropriate thing to do? Is this a safe thing for me to do? Okay. And then in those situations, they can either go to that person or over time they’re going to learn enough of these situations to know that it’s not a good thing. So that way they can check things out. As an adult it becomes really important, especially people who are living on their own and let’s say they want to date, so they go online dating and then somebody makes an appointment to meet them somewhere at night, you know like your apartment. Well that friend that they have could tell them that that’s not such a good thing if you’re going to meet someone for the first time, that you’ve never met before. Meet them at a Starbucks in broad daylight. You know, for an hour at 10 o’clock. That’s it. They have to learn those rules of....it’s probably not a good thing to go to somebody’s house that you’ve never before, that you just met online.

Nick: Exactly.

Chantal: But umm...

Nick: I totally agree.

Chantal: She’s got some really good tips like that. Don’t you think it would be really good to have a friend like that at school?

Nick: Absolutely. And again, that kind of goes along the lines of what I was speaking about regarding the whole peer mentoring thing. That if a mentor could be used in that capacity in the high school years to run those kinds of questions by that person, especially if the person with AS doesn’t really have that many friends to begin with. This is kind of like the “go to” person or the “go to” people, if
there’s more than one. Because these aren’t things that you’re going to run by your parents. A lot of these questions are personal.

Chantal: Right.

Nick: And you don’t talk about sexual things with your mother if you’re a guy, typically. So, yeah…I think it’s invaluable. And I think that….I think I remember reading that from her book, but umm…that’s a great strategy.

Chantal: I have….I’m going to share something a little personal here because I just…its just really funny and I had never thought about this before, but my son’s twenty and he’s looking for love and a girlfriend. Not necessarily both the same place (laughter). Anyway, so the thing is when you’re a parent, you know that your children are going through this, but usually if you have a neuro-typical child it’s like, you know, they don’t share certain aspects with you and so my son….I now have him going to see a therapist every other week, where he can discuss these things and maybe evolve in a certain direction….whatever that may be. Well the last time we went he picked up my handbag and took me to the door and said he wanted to go because we had been there, I don’t know, four or five times and he said it wasn’t working because she hadn’t got him a girlfriend yet. And he’s also mad at me because I haven’t gone to the store and gotten him a girlfriend and I usually get him therapies, so he has quite understood why he hasn’t gotten that girlfriend yet. Because we’re working on it, but it’s supposed to happen now. (laughter) So it is….gets a little hard when you’re a parent. You know, you get to these certain areas and it’s funny because I speak to everybody about these adolescent issues, but especially when you have a child who’s non-verbal, it’s like he has to have someone who communicates with him, to be able to write his personal journal or communicate with a therapist and Mom wants to be out of the picture. So you have to find a trusted person, who he can be having his discussions with or you know, maybe doing some online dating with. Because I don’t want to be….it’s not that I don’t want to be, but he needs a little freedom. Who wants your Mom doing that for you? So ahh…

Nick: It helps to foster independence when you can go to somebody besides your parents because you know, you kind of have a life of your own and it’s not like the other person is making all the decisions for you.
Chantal: Right.

Nick: But everyone needs a friend to run things by. I mean I don’t it’s unique so much to people with AS.

Chantal: No, it’s not, but it’s interesting because as you say with AS, they have...you don’t have all those things that people know or take for granted through osmosis, in place. So it is difficult, not difficult, but it is something to think about. Who is that person going to be that you’re going to trust when it comes to those more intimate areas of your life?

Nick: Exactly and I think that a parent can maybe do some searching and maybe go on the GRASP website and e-mail somebody from GRASP and say hey, is there somebody who my son can run something by if somebody....if he....if the situation comes up. And even if....so if finding somebody at the school is going to be a difficult thing, then there might have to be some leg work that needs to be done and some creative solutions that need to follow. But that’s what I....that’s what I would suggest.

Chantal: And that’s what’s great about the internet. You can find resources more easily. I mean it takes a lot of leg work out of the research.

Nick: Exactly.

Chantal: Okay, here’s Jen from Canada. I am worried about my seven year-old daughter with Asperger’s, as she is wanting to fit in and seems to be taken advantage of by her peers. Again, it’s the same type of question, though she’s younger. She does not seem to understand what a healthy friendship is. Is there a way to help her understand and learn assertiveness? I’m especially worried about her when she gets older and can become easily victimized by boys. She has extreme difficulty with personal boundaries.

Nick: Well again...
Chantal: I...I have one suggestion here. I don’t know....I’m....of course I’m not you Nick, but go...so go ahead.

Nick: No, no. I would like to hear yours first and then I’ll piggyback off of that.

Chantal: Okay, well I’ve...and I don’t do this...I don’t recommend this just for people of Asperger’s, I recommend it for anybody on the Spectrum who does not always understand what’s appropriate or inappropriate, so I always suggest to parents that they teach....they have an icon, a picture icon with someone who’s got...like a stick figure with clothes on it and it says public and then you have an icon with a stick figure who’s just wearing underwear and it says private. When they’re little you teach them public and private. So like for example after a certain age they’re not supposed to be running around the house naked. So that’s a private behavior that you do in your bathroom and in your bedroom. Okay, so when they get around to when they’re doing things such as masturbation, okay that’s a private behavior in your bedroom. It’s not something you do elsewhere in the house. Or doing certain behaviors that are appropriate in your home that are not appropriate in public. So you learn about private behaviors and public behaviors and you also learn as you get older you can apply those to conversations. Like there are certain conversations in have in private and there are certain conversations you have in public. And so when...for someone who’s that little, who’s seven, you can start working in that idea of public and private, which becomes appropriate and inappropriate. And that kind of helps with the personal boundaries because you can also teach like here are the appropriate things....you know, this is okay to do with the private circle of people and your private circle is whose at home. And then you have the big hug circle which might be your uncle and aunts and people you know really well. And then there’s the handshake circle. Those are people that you know at school. Well, things that are appropriate at home, but in private or not out in public. And so you kind of teach them a little anarchy of things, so they have this thing to think about as they get older. But that is just a general way of setting a foundation.

Nick: Yeah, I think that’s a great strategy. I mean it involves the visual modality which we know many people with Asperger’s are much stronger visually as far as what they learn. It’s very concrete. It’s kind of like the five point system, similar to that.
Chantal: Right.

Nick: So yeah, I mean I think it’s a great strategy. And the more concrete it can be, the more easily learnable it’ll be. So that’s a great answer, Chantal.

Chantal: And the thing about learning assertiveness. I think you kind of went over that before, but did you want to talk more about how? Because I think when you were talking about assertiveness you said if they could learn the keys answers that they give to a bully. But in this situation she’s not talking about bullying, but she’s talking about in a friendship. You know you have to sometimes be assertive about the boundaries. Do you have any suggestions for Pat?

Nick: Umm...when you say the boundaries, the boundaries as far as overstepping boundaries?

Chantal: Well she said she...in here the only thing I know is that she said her child has extreme difficulty with personal boundaries. So she’s afraid of her being victimized, but right now she wants her to learn assertiveness. So there’s not really any...it’s not assertiveness to stand her ground against a bully, it’s just already naturally to be assertive.

Nick: So if I understand the question correctly, she worried her daughter won’t know what to do if she’s in a situation where she can’t be assertive enough to say no to whoever is coming on....you know, bullying her, doing something she doesn’t want done to her. Is that kind of what she’s asking?

Chantal: Yeah, because she doesn’t seem to understand what a healthy friendship is, so she wants her to understand what a healthy friendship is and learn assertiveness. Which is what you need for a healthy friendship. You know, so someone is not dominating the relationship.

Nick: Exactly.
Chantal: You know, because she’s a seven year old. That’s how sometimes they get dragged into situations, because they don’t know how to assert themselves.

Nick: Right. I guess the way I would teach assertiveness is to just umm...tell your daughter that sometimes saying no....if she has a problem saying no, sometimes you just have to teach to say the word “no”. It can be difficult if you’re so use to trying to appease people and sometimes I find that people with Asperger’s because they don’t have a lot of friends, they go out of their way to kind of appease people because they want friends. And I think sometimes we need to be reminded that not everything that everybody is asking of us is a good thing. So saying “no” I think can even gain respect from our peers. Because if we’re always saying yes, you know people view us as not having a backbone, so to speak. So I think being assertive and standing one’s ground is really important.

Chantal: Good. Now here’s an interesting comment from a...and a question...from Jeff in Tualatin. Are we really born good as you stated? Empathy like...what?

Nick: This came in as we were still doing our interview.

Chantal: Right.

Nick: Okay.

Chantal: Are we really born good as you stated? Empathy like safety is at the bottom of any survival skills. This should change our global teaching assessment. The morality and ethnical product we hope for everyone is acquired over time. Asperger’s Syndrome results in misaligned thought processes. Approaching the learning process by assuming a person is good is distorting their actual needs, inhabiting an on-going critical review.

Nick: Well I tend to look at it in a...in a positive way and I think that when I see young children who have not been exposed to a school setting, you will notice that they do say things like, “are you okay” or they do things that they’re conditioned once they get into school not to do because of peer pressures or whatever. So I really do believe that it is a matter of unlearning certain
behaviors that we learn from our peers in order to gain popularity. I mean I really think its as simple as that. And I think that when you look at all the educational models that assume that children are good, we’re talking about, you know, a lot of the progressive schools that do that. John Dewey had the philosophy that humans are born good. His model was very progressive. So that’s kind of how I view human beings. I don’t think we’re born evil. I think umm...I don’t subscribe to that view and everybody believes differently so you can take whatever approach that you want to, but that’s just my personal opinion.

Chantal: Very good. Okay, here’s a question from Jean in Tennessee. What type of school do you recommend for Asperger’s? Private, public or special centers? I home school, but would like the year off to attend college. I’m struggling with the decision and none of our schools have chill rooms because they feel that they would abuse the privilege of this. Our public schools all work (inaudible), but kids in the bigger classrooms and we need to stay in smaller settings to not get stressed out. What cities are the best to live in for schools and therapies? Thanks.

Nick: I’m not sure about cities, but there are some good schools in New York. I think Sarah Boris use to work at umm...

Chantal: Right.

Nick: Do you know the name of that school off the top of your head?

Chantal: Umm, no because it changed names. It was also associated with Valerie Parades.

Nick: Yes, yes, yes.

Chantal: Valerie Parades started it. But if you contact GRASP, because Sarah Boris is now working at GRASP. She might be able to tell the people or the person where....how to contact the school. It changed names, but it does still exist and it’s in Upstate New York. That’s one place. You’re correct.
Nick: And I think that just in general it really just depends on the person. I mean I’ve seen...I’m pretty much in favor of inclusion when it can happen, but when the situation is escalating to abuse and nobody is doing anything about it, sometimes it is good to be around people who you have a lot in common with. You know I’ve met a lot of kids who attend schools where there are other people with ASD, non-learning...non-verbal learning disability and they see how much in common they have with these other kids and it really accelerates the learning process too at the same time, so. And then there are other people who decide to home school their children and some people would say, aren’t you taking away socialization opportunities by doing that? And what I would say is, no. They can still be involved in their favorite activities. They can still gain valuable, social...social practice, but it just doesn’t have to be in abusive setting. They can still go to camp. They can still you know, if they like tennis, they can still go to tennis lessons. And they can meet and play and social with other kids, they’re just not doing it in a school setting. I’m not really even against home schooling.

Chantal: Now we have time for one more question and it’s not really specific about bullying, but I think it’s kind of related and it’s a good question. Jill from Villanova. My eleven year-old son still engages in a clapping, shouting, sub-stimulatory behavior. He tries to control it, but cannot stop it completely. He knows his friends accept it, but he is aware that it is ruining his reputation with kids that don’t know him. How have other kids handled this or these situations? You know having a stem is not so acceptable.

Nick: I can tell you that the urge to stem, at least in my case, never really goes away. So one thing you might have to accept as a parent is part of the experience of having ASD is that there is an urge to stem. I’ve just learned over the years not to do it in public. So when I go to my condominium, I’m able to stem as much as I want, because I’m in the privacy of my own home. I sometimes tell adults to stem in the workplace. That if they really need to stem, take themselves out of that setting for a few minutes, maybe go to the bathroom, go to the car and do it. So I really think that maybe you need to teach your child that stemming isn’t inherently wrong, because I don’t think the child should be shamed for it. I think that’s one more thing that they can internalize as being bad about themselves and I think that’s not a good thing. But I think again, like Chantal was saying about certain places are acceptable for doing, you know, certain things are acceptable in public and certain things are acceptable
in private and stemming as a matter of course isn’t really something people do in public. And if you teach the child that, then maybe....maybe they can control themselves even though I know there are sensory issues and environmental issues that cause the stemming to happen such as bright lights or loud...high pitch noises that cause the stemming. But you just have to kind of teach it fundamentally like certain places are okay if you can hold it in for a couple of extra minutes. There’s a big sensory room waiting for you with a trampoline and a tire swing. Ideally, if a school had that equipment. But umm....that’s kind of what I’m saying.

Chantal: Yeah, that’s a good point and I think that...trying to find a stem that can replace the one that looks so obvious or you can do secretly that people aren’t....can’t really tell, is one thing. But also, an eleven year-old, he’s still learning how to self regulate. I would hope that there’s room in his program to have a sensory break or that he’s allowed to take a break and go off and have a place to do you know, the stem that he needs to do. Because I know it’s hard to do something like that in public if you’re going to turn off all these people who could be potentially friends, but on the other hand it is definitely a need. So I would see if it could fit into school that he could do that. Like with Jeremy now, we have rules where he’s carrying around an age appropriate book or guitar magazine, but then he can go off every couple of hours and have stem time with a piece of string. And you know at home he can do the stemming, but when it’s work time or we’re out in public, the book comes out and the stem toy goes away. You know we just have rules about it. But he still gets time to stem. It’s necessary.

Nick: And there maybe kids who actually do a better job of learning of when they’re standing up. I mean like for example, I couldn’t learn unless I was pacing around. So like during study hall, I was allowed to pace and it kind of became normal after awhile because people got use to it now and after awhile it wasn’t that big of a deal.

Chantal: Exactly.

Nick: I would kind of take in the information much more easily. If somebody said to me, sit down, don’t move, look at your book, be still, that wouldn’t have worked. So I think sometimes we have to accommodate the needs of these kids and say to ourselves, if they’re going to learn better doing it their way, not our way, let’s
do it their way and let’s see if we’ll get results that way.

Chantal: That’s great. ’Well Dr. Nick Dubin, this is the only time we have now. We’re going to have to stop now. I think we got practically all the questions, which is great. I would like to repeat for everyone, your website, which is: www.aspergerwisdom.com and also the names of your books. The newest one is: *Asperger’s Syndrome and Anxiety* and the one which is the topic for today is: *Asperger’s Syndrome and Bullying*.

And thank you so much for being on the show, Nick.

Nick: You’re very welcome. Thank you for inviting me, Chantal.

Chantal: You are welcome. So this has been a webinar on Momsfightingautism.com. Our next webinar will be on August 25th and our guest will be Dr. Cynthia Norall, who has a new book being published which is about social skills. So next month will be about social skills. Thank you again Nick and for everyone out there, go out there and be the change you want to see and enjoy the rest of your summer. Thank you.