

Bullying Victimization and Mental Health Disorders in Teens With and Without Autism

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Overview

- Background
- Goals
- Methods
- Results
- Actions

Background

Bullying in autism

- Autistic teens more likely to have experienced recent verbal, social and physical bullying
- Autistic teens more likely to have ever engaged in bullying behavior
- Autistic teens more likely to have both ever been bullied and ever engaged in bullying behavior

Bullying and Mental Health

Teens who are bullied are more likely to

- Experience depressive or anxiety symptoms
- Be diagnosed with depression or anxiety
- Withdraw from social interaction
- Attempt self harm



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Bullying, Mental Health, and Autism

Among autistic teens:

- Those who are bullied are more likely to be anxious or depressed
- Those who are anxious or depressed are more likely to be bullied



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Bullying, Mental Health, and Sex

Girls who are bullied may be more likely than boys to

- Think about self harm
- Attempt or complete suicide



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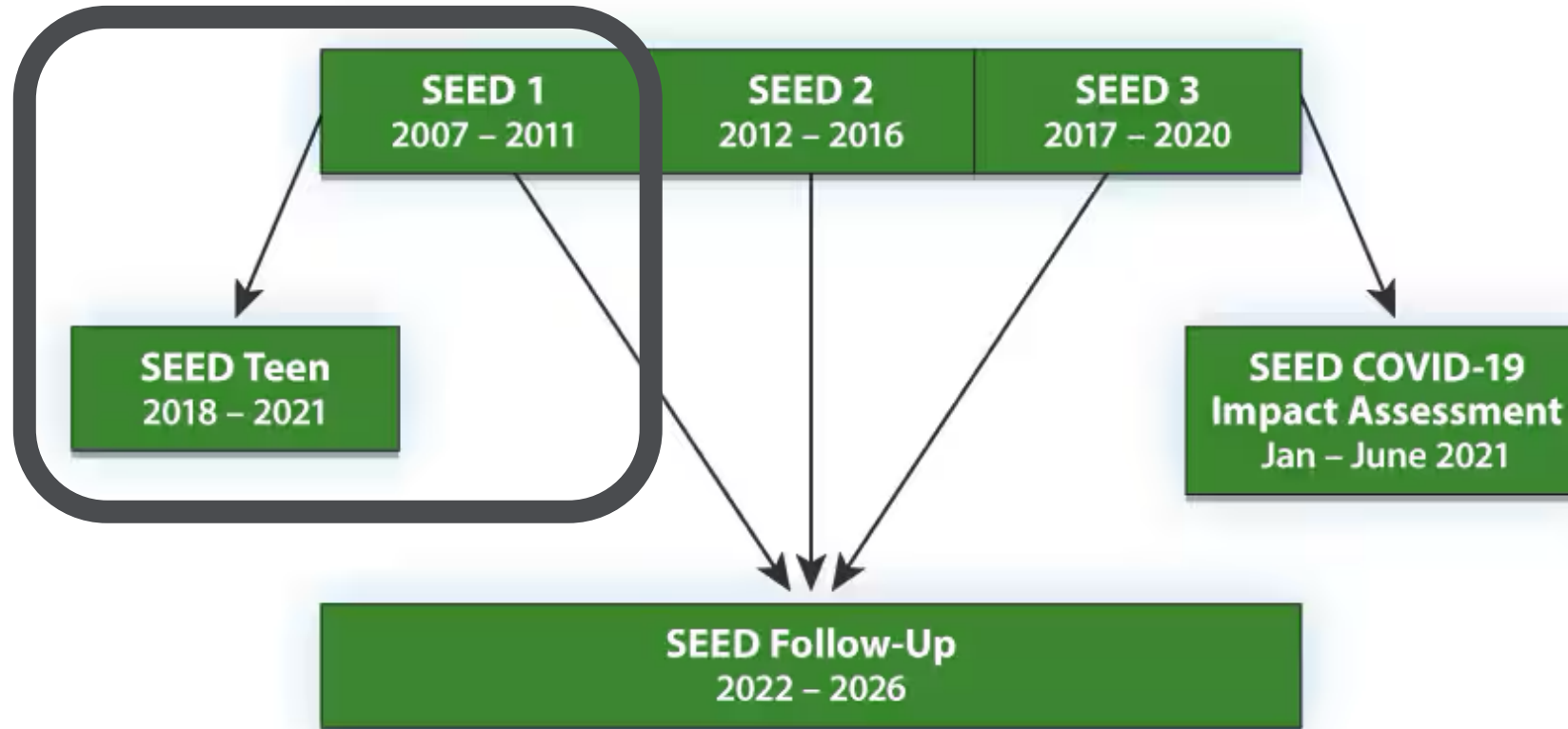
Goals

- 1) Are teens who have been bullied more likely to have each of the following mental health conditions?
 - a) Anxiety
 - b) Depression
 - c) Self injurious behavior
- 2) Is the risk for mental health disorders for teens who are bullied different for autistic teens than non-autistic teens?
- 3) Is the risk for mental health disorders in teens who are bullied different for girls and boys?

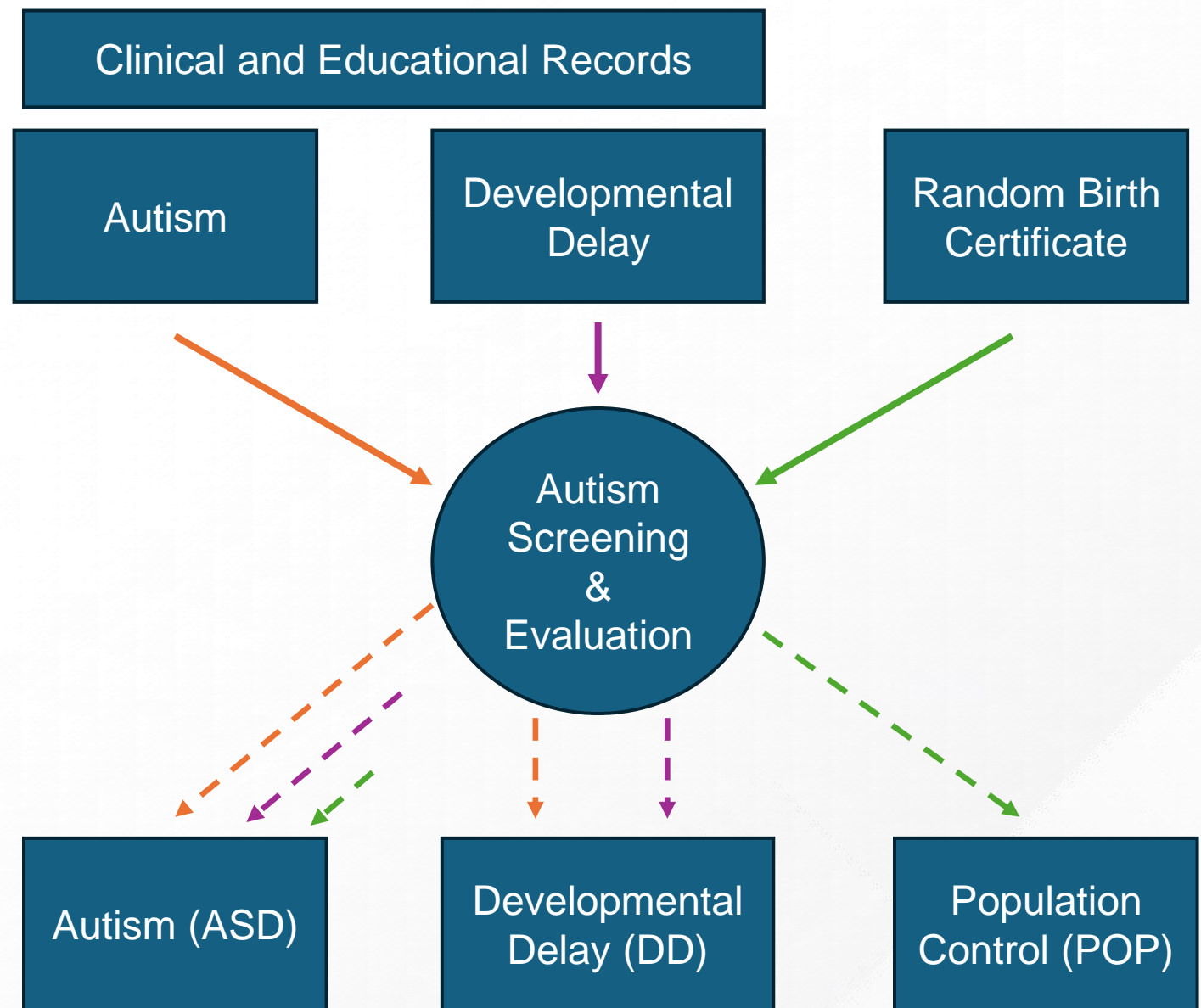
Methods

Overview of Activities

Study to Explore Early Development (SEED)



Case Control Study with “Broad Net”



Bullying question for parent or caregiver

1) During the past 12 months, has this child been bullied by another child?

Mental health questions for parent or caregiver

- 1) **Has a doctor or other health care provider ever told you that this child has...**
 - a) Anxiety
 - b) Depression
 - c) Self injurious behavior
- 2) **During the past 12 months, has this child taken any prescription medication because of difficulties with any of the following?**
 - a) Anxiety
 - b) Depression

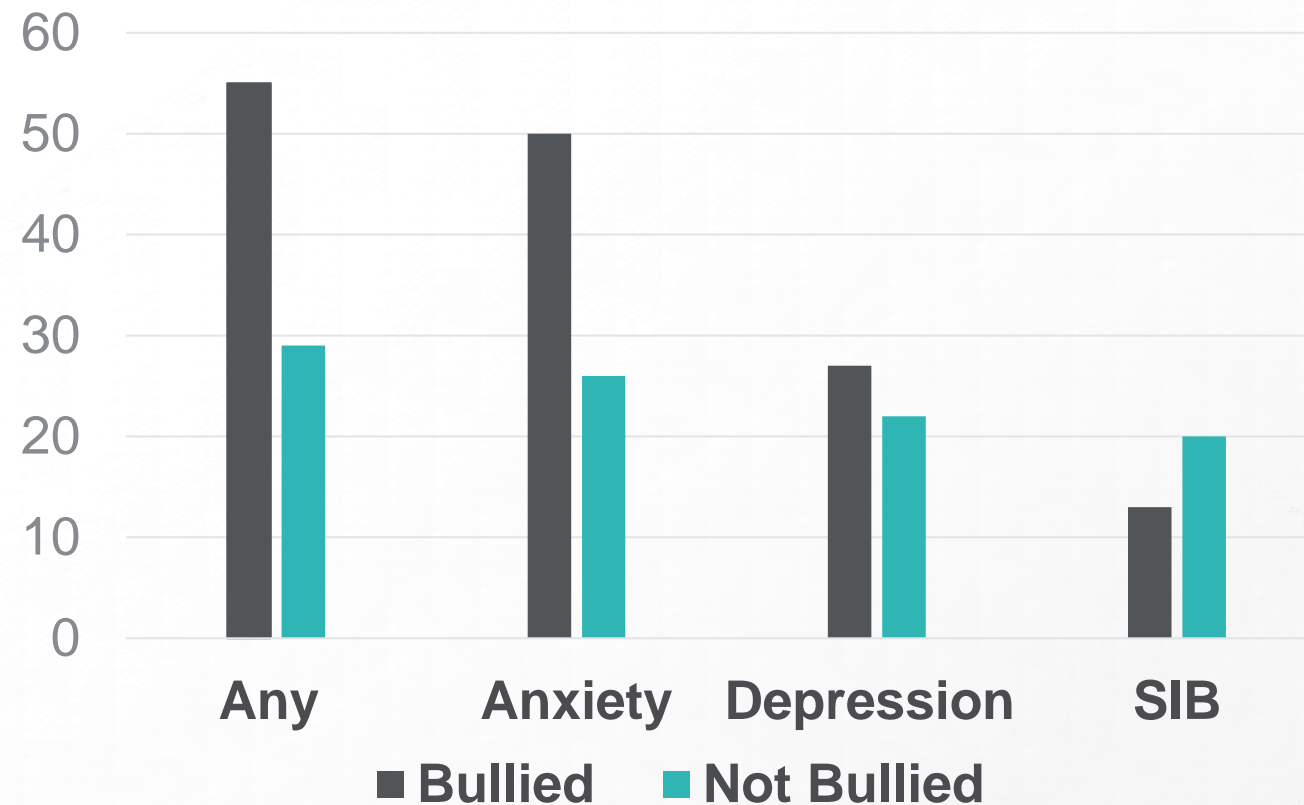
Results

Who does this study include?

- 163 autistic teens
- 304 teens with developmental delays
- 287 teens from the population sample

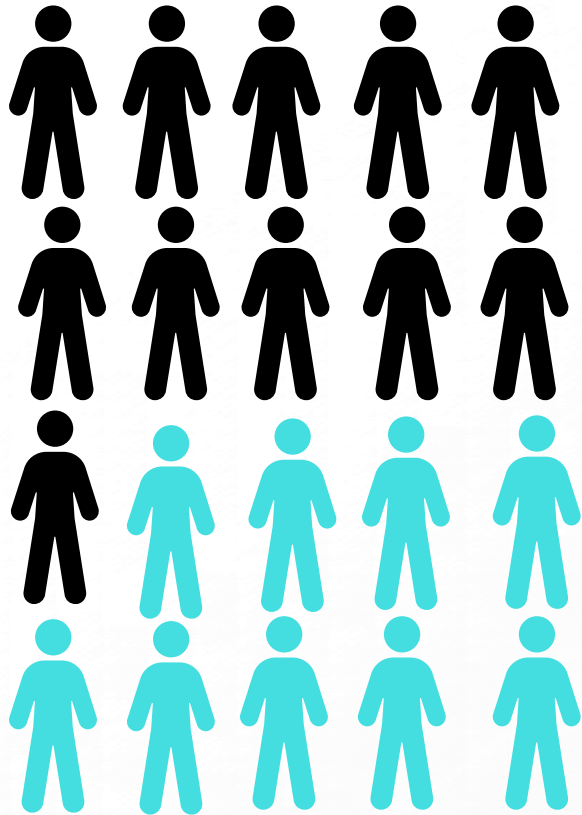
- Average age: 14¾ years
- Male: 62%

Percentage with mental health disorders among teens who were bullied or not bullied in the past 12 months

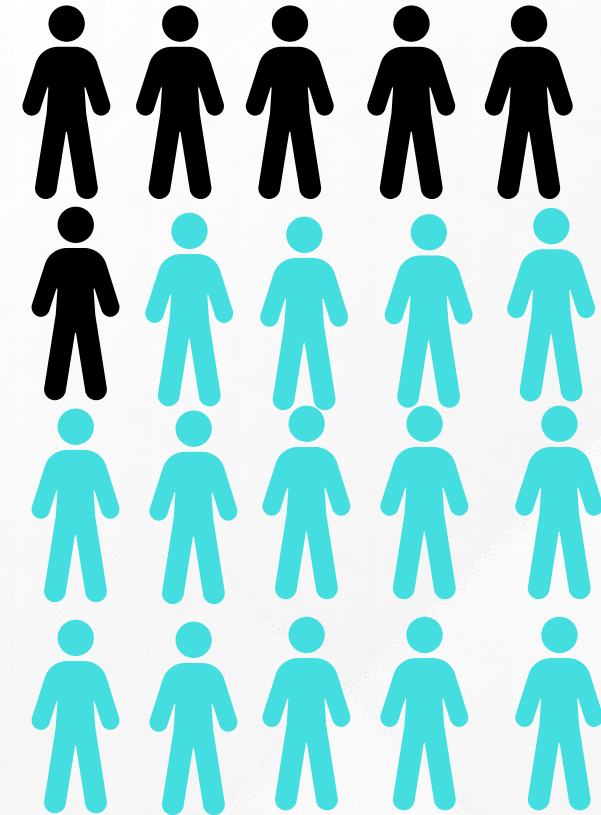


Any mental health disorder among teens who were:

Bullied

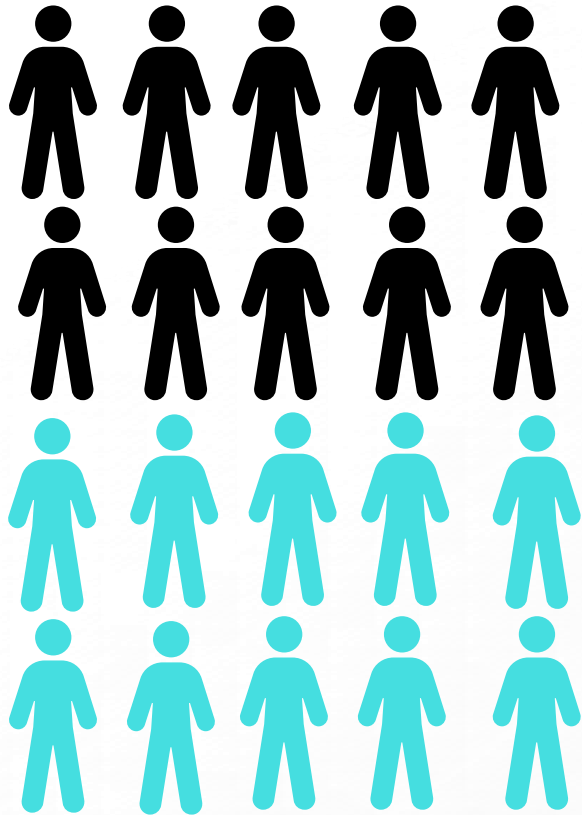


Not Bullied

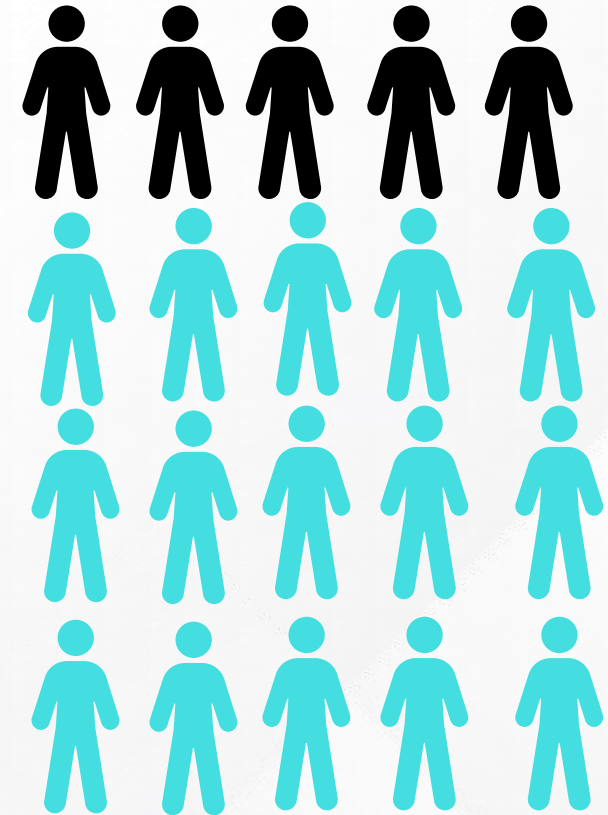


Anxiety among teens who were:

Bullied

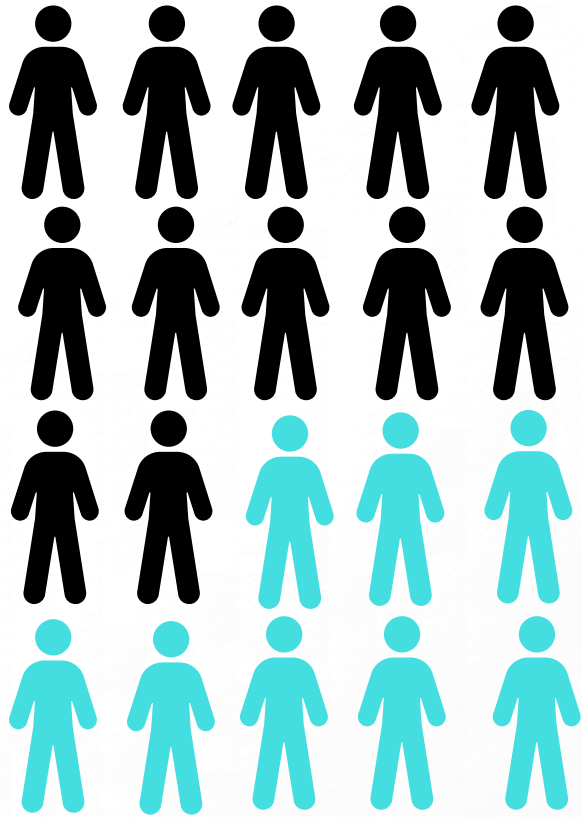


Not Bullied

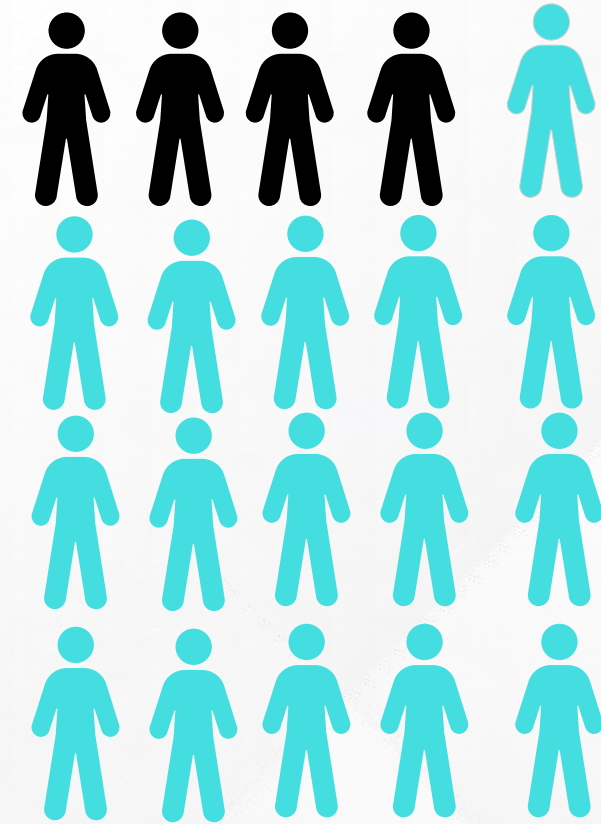


Depression among teens who were:

Bullied

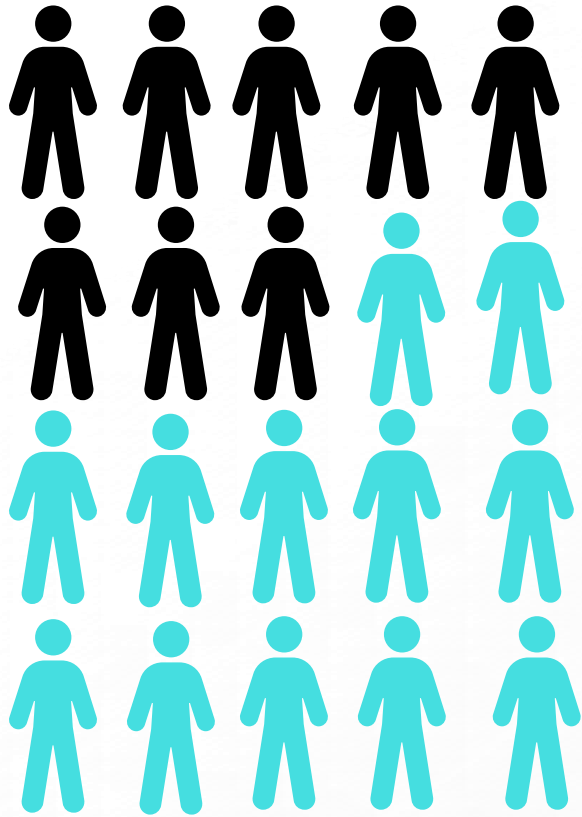


Not Bullied

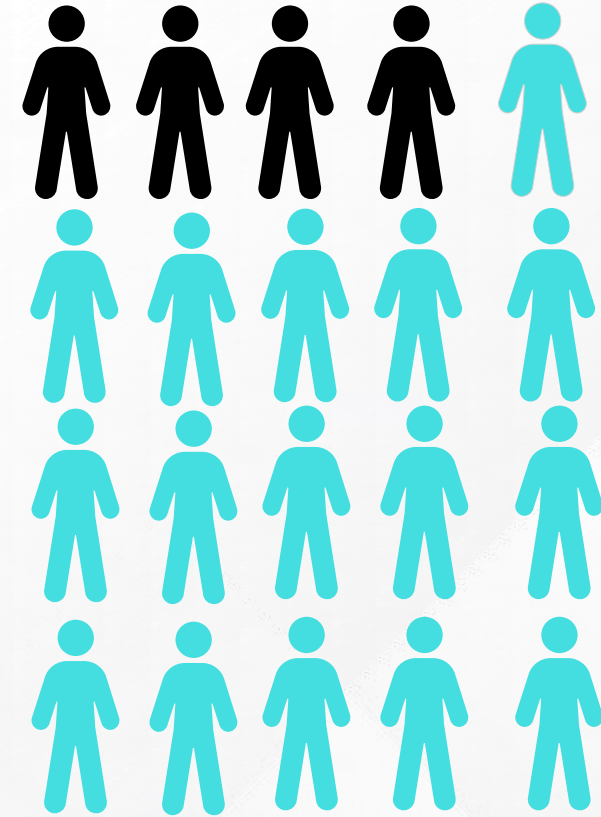


Self-Injurious behavior among teens who were:

Bullied



Not Bullied



Is the risk of mental health disorders different for autistic teens who are bullied than non-autistic teens?

Mental Health Outcome	Difference?
Any	No
Anxiety	No
Depression	No
Self-injurious behavior	No

Is the risk of mental health disorders different for girls who are bullied than boys?

Mental Health Outcome	Difference?
Any	No
Anxiety	No
Depression	No
Self-injurious behavior	No

Key Takeaways

- **Teens who are bullied are more likely to have mental health disorders including anxiety, depression, and self injurious behavior**
- **Regardless if a teen is autistic or not, bullying increases the risk of mental health disorders**
- **In both girls and boys, bullying increases the risk of mental health disorders**

Considerations

Bullying

Parent report may not capture all bullying



Mental health

Parent report may miss undiagnosed conditions

Chicken or the egg?

Bullying may lead to mental health disorders, or mental health disorders may lead to bullying

Acknowledgements



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Cooperative Agreement



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UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**

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Autism Research Grant



**All of the Children and
Families who Participate
in SEED**

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS



PROTECTING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

How teens can care for their mental health:

Find a trusted adult who:

- Allows you the space to change, grow, make decisions, and even make mistakes
- Listens to you and shares with you, both the good and bad times
- Respects your need for confidentiality so you can tell them anything
- Validates your feelings and emotions without judging, teasing, or criticizing
- Works with you to figure out what to do the next time a difficult situation comes up

How parents can talk about mental health

Try leading with these questions, and actively listen to your child's response:

- Can you tell me more about what is happening? How are you feeling?
- Sometimes you need to talk to an adult about your feelings. I'm here to listen. How can I help you feel better?
- Do you feel like you want to talk to someone else about your problem?
- I'm worried about your safety. Can you tell me if you have thoughts about harming yourself or others?



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School based approaches

- Implement strategies and approaches that can help prevent mental health problems and promote positive behavior and mental health of students.
- Help students cope with emergencies and their aftermath.
- Provide safe and supportive environments—whether in person or virtually.

Examples:

- Integrating social emotional learning.
- Supporting staff mental health.
- Reviewing discipline policies to ensure equity.

Multi-Tiered System of Support



Mental Health Screening in Colorado Schools

- Features
 - Screen students for the risks of mental health disorders
 - Provide interventions, resources, and support based on student's risk.
 - Notify parents and designated school professionals of students who are high risk within 24 hours

<https://bha.colorado.gov/about/programs-we-fund/schools/6th-12th-grade-mental-health-screening-program>

- Interest form due by **May 1st**

Universal school-based cognitive behavioral therapy

- Delivered to all students regardless of mental health concerns
- Administered in classroom settings to reduce mental health symptoms and promote well being
- Decreases in both anxiety and depression symptoms
- Equally effective when administered by school staff or mental health professionals



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Targeted school-based cognitive behavioral therapy

- Individual level
- Intervention implemented by trained school staff or mental health professionals
- Appropriate for ages 10-17
- Decreases seen in anxiety and depression
- Most effective when administered by a trained mental health professional



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Summary of Implications and Conclusions

- **Teens who are bullied may be at greater risk for mental health disorders**
- **School based screening programs can help detect mental health concerns among teens**
- **Mental health intervention, either individually or at the school level can improve outcomes**

Resources

- <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth/mental-health/index.html>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health>
- <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/findings/mental-health-targeted-school-based-cognitive-behavioral-therapy-programs-reduce-depression-anxiety-symptoms.html>
- <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/findings/mental-health-universal-school-based-cognitive-behavioral-therapy-programs-reduce-depression-anxiety-symptoms.html>

Thank you!
