

# Bully Proofing Your Twice-Exceptional Child

By Amra Mohammed

Casey was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at around 3 years old. His mother noticed that Casey was an outcast at school, and he often felt angry and frustrated. However, as a one-year-old, Casey's speech was fluent. He could recite some nursery rhymes, sing the national anthem, and have conversations with adults. He was a creative child who invented his own games and stories.

School assessments identified Casey as having an IQ in the gifted range, but he often had difficulty with social skills, self-esteem, and self-control. He did not get along with other children, who viewed him as strange and often teased him. Casey seemed to live in his own world, playing by himself.

Unable to manage peers' teasing, Casey acted out. He talked out of turn and too much, left his seat, and fought with peers during group work. Teachers punished him for those behaviors, which only made him act out more. Punishment after punishment and failure after failure diminished his sense of self. His mother reported that he often said, "I don't know why I was born; I'm worthless." Because of this, he hurt himself. When she went to get Casey from school one day during third grade, Casey's mother found him sitting on the floor at the classroom door hitting his head with a sandal, upset with himself that he had been punished. Each day, on the way back home from school, he would complain about how peers and teachers didn't understand him, how they treated him unfairly, and how he felt low and worthless.

Twice-exceptional (2E) students are those who demonstrate a gift or talent in one or more areas and have a disability in another area.<sup>1</sup> One identifying characteristic of 2E children is asynchronous development, or the display of unusual talent or maturity in one or more areas alongside a struggle to develop in other areas. Asynchronous development may exhibit internally or externally. Internally, asynchronous development indicates different rates of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social skills development. In contrast, external traits may include a lack of inclusion with both same-aged peers and age-related expectations of society. These external traits illustrate the importance of special efforts to facilitate healthy social and emotional development in 2E children.

The social and emotional issues that 2E children demonstrate can be as debilitating as their other challenges. Parents see a frustrated, angry, and depressed child; however, parents of a 2E child may also experience similar emotional and psychological issues.

**Hidden issues.** The child's psychological or emotional issues are often hidden behind negative behavior. For example, antisocial behavior may mean a lack of social skills in general or a disability that affects social skills, such as autism. Inappropriate behaviors such as teasing, clowning, anger, withdrawal, apathy, and denial of problems may signal poor self-esteem.

**Frustration.** The twice-exceptional student's lack of initiative may indicate frustration when directly associated with a low level of academic performance.

**Discrepancy in expectations.** In addition, the discrepancy between the 2E child's own high expectations and performance in gifted areas in contrast to areas of disability can also be an underlying cause of social and emotional difficulties for 2E children.

**Social impact.** 2E students often struggle with developing healthy social relationships and frequently suffer from isolation, teasing, or aggressive bullying. Negative social experiences leave these children wounded and alienated from peers, in many cases well into adulthood.

**Lack of school support.** Furthermore, it is often difficult for schools to provide the specialized attention and learning environment that these children require.

### **Strategies to Help**

Parents can play a vital role in helping their 2E child build resiliency—or the ability to “bounce back”—in the face of difficulties by intervening and advocating on several levels.<sup>5</sup> Early identification and support in problem areas is the most effective way to support positive social and emotional development, and parents have the earliest opportunities to provide vital input and guidance to their children. Furthermore, students who know, understand, and accept their strengths and weaknesses are more likely to achieve desired outcomes. One activity that enhances deeper understanding and self-esteem is for 2E children to learn about famous people who are also twice-exceptional. Through learning about such people and how they have overcome their exceptionalities, 2E children can see that they, too, can excel.

Even with a tailored learning program, 2E children will experience negative emotions and setbacks. During these times, children need to talk openly about their feelings and problem-solve to resolve negative emotions. This support can take place in informal discussions with teachers, parents, or peers, but in some cases, a more formal intervention may be appropriate, such as individual counseling for mild issues or therapy for more severe issues. With practice, your child can become bully-proof.

### Resources

Assertiveness <http://practicalkatie.com/2012/01/13/10-tips-for-teachingassertiveness-skills/>

Building Resilience [http://southernearlychildhood.org/upload/pdf/Dimensions\\_Vol42\\_3\\_Petty.pdf](http://southernearlychildhood.org/upload/pdf/Dimensions_Vol42_3_Petty.pdf)

Bullying <http://blog.connectionsacademy.com/No-One-Should-Have-to-Fear-Going-to-School/>

Communications Skills <http://www.betterparenting.com/teachingkids-non-verbal-communication/>

Twice-Exceptionality <http://www.2enewsletter.com/>

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