

## NEUROFIBROMATOSIS TYPE 1 (Nf1) and SOCIAL INTERACTION

Difficulties with social interaction can result in peer rejection.

This is where other children reject and will sometimes even ridicule the child who doesn't understand social cues, and refuse to include them in group activities. Sometimes the child with Nf1's attempts at social interaction can be awkward as they are unaware of unspoken/unwritten rules. They may stand too close, avoid eye contact and speak too loudly yet they may object to others being too loud or too close. These attempts and contradictions can make other children shy away, which can result in social isolation.

Where the Nf1 child is passive, this can lead to bullying from their peer group and sometimes the Nf1 child will try to control the activities, becoming distressed if the other children don't want to follow their lead.

The child with Nf1 may require additional time from teachers, which can also add to problems with other children in the class. This poor acceptance by their peers can have negative effects. The Nf1 child may be more willing to conform to peer pressure in an effort to become accepted. This can lead them into trouble, particularly during adolescence, when there is more of a pre-disposition for taking part in anti-social behaviour.

This isolation can also cause low self-esteem, stress, anxiety or even depression. Even if the child doesn't know how he or she feels, or why, it doesn't mean there is no feeling.

Of course not all Nf1 children are the same, but some areas where extra help could make a difference are:

- Awareness and understanding of non-verbal language and cues such as facial expression, body language and gestures
- Identification of the feelings of the child and of others around them. Explain the right time and place for certain behaviours – for example, when is it OK to tell a joke (and when is it not)

- Giving and receiving feedback, both positive and negative. For example, accepting positive feedback without making a scene
- Structured play times and lunch times
- The time and place for personal information. For example, knowing what types of information are OK to share and which are not
- The anticipation of problems and strategies for solving them – especially when in a stressful situation or environment
- Normal conversation, for example where turn taking is prevalent