



Book Review

A Parent's Guide to Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism. By Sally Ozonoff, Geraldine Dawson, and James McPartland New York, Guilford Press. 2002. ISBN 1-57230-531-2.

Reviewed by Susan Martin

This is a book with its feet firmly on the ground. It brings a breath of fresh air to a subject that, due to its complexity, is often presented as a series of academic debates, difficult for even an intelligent lay person to access.

The book is divided into two parts. The first runs through a comprehensive debate about what constitutes Asperger syndrome and high functioning autism, while the second part adopts more of a problem solving approach – a design for daily living.

In Part One the history of autism is discussed. Some useful insight is given into how the different categories have evolved and the difficulties diagnosis still presents. There is still some doubt as to whether Asperger syndrome is part of the spectrum of autism or if it is a separate disorder altogether. Acknowledging this uncertainty can paradoxically be a real help for parents. It offers an understanding of why it is sometimes so difficult for their child to be given a diagnosis that will then open the door to other services. Case studies illustrate this point and show clearly that precision can still elude the best intentioned clinicians when deciding which camp a child falls into. Diagnostic categories overlap and you will often end up with

the physicians preferred diagnosis. This is fine as long as it coincides with what the parents were hoping to hear! It is understandable that clarity does not always follow diagnosis and consequently effective future planning can still remain an elusive goal.

Part Two is much more practical. It informs the parents that their unique knowledge of their child is not only an invaluable asset in designing programmes to minimize difficult behaviour and maximize progress, but that no programmes can run without their input. Far from control being taken from the parents they are further empowered. This then gives them the confidence to take charge of a situation, working effectively in partnership with others including members of their family and friends as well as professionals.

Parenting strategies are offered for handling common challenging behaviours that occur in the home, school and social situations. It presents simple stepwise solutions, using lateral thinking and innovation. It looks at home, school and social situations. The particular problems of adolescence are addressed. It does not lose site of the fact that life must go on in the real world and that in this world there is not

a solution to every problem.

This is an academic book, but not just for academics to read. I gave it to three sets of parents, all with boys between 8 and 16 years old who have had considerable difficulties making sense of the health and education systems in relation to their sons' needs. All found it useful, making comments such as 'it made sense'; 'I felt that what I had been trying to say all along was right'; 'it said what I knew, but put it better'; 'the practical suggestions were a real help', 'I let my son read it – he kept saying 'I told you that''; "it gave us lots of new ideas, new things to try".

How does it define a successful interaction and outcome? When all parties involved, be it parent and child, child and teacher, child, parent and doctor all have a picture that coin-

cides and the treatment suggestions generated by this fit with the child's strengths and weaknesses.

The appendix contains a useful bibliography which would need some filtering for a non American audience. However the diversity is such that there should be something for everyone.

Ultimately this book gives children and adults with these disorders, and those caring for them, the message that while challenges may never entirely go away, you can identify and maximize strengths, function better and be happy.

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