

Book reviews

Eating an Artichoke: a Mother's Perspective on Asperger's Syndrome

By Echo R Fling

Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2000, pp240, £12.95, US\$17.95
ISBN 1 85302 711 1

This is a biography of the authors' son, Jimmy, who was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome at the age of 10. The title of the book refers to an artichoke, and represents how the author and others 'have to peel back the thorny layers to get to the heart of what's truly the issue'.

By relating the author's own thoughts, feelings, and struggles to raise Jimmy, this book aims to help others learn about bringing up children with Asperger's syndrome. It also shows how mothers of children with Asperger's syndrome have developed a vast, accessible knowledge of how to manage them. They have developed considerable negotiation and diplomacy skills in managing conflict between government agencies, professionals, and family members. It highlights the need to develop local services. Indeed, the author explains how it took five years of taking Jimmy to doctors, learning consultants, educationalists, and psychologists to realize why her son had been 'difficult' from early childhood.

The impact on siblings who have a brother or sister with Asperger's syndrome is also covered in this publication.

The authors ends the book by describing the qualities, courage, and bravery of Jimmy, and makes a plea for governments to fund and develop research and comprehensive intervention programmes for the many children now being recognized as suffering from autistic spectrum disorders. It is an enjoyable, readable book for both lay people and health professionals.

Asperger's Syndrome: a Guide for Parents and Professionals

By Tony Attwood

Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 1998, pp 240, £12.95, US\$18.95
ISBN 1 85302 557 1

This is a well-known book written by Tony Attwood, a clinical psychologist specializing in Asperger's syndrome for the last 25 years. He has experience of over 1000 individuals with Asperger's syndrome, ranging from preschool children, to a retired Nobel Prize winning Professor.

This book aims to provide a concise description and analysis of the unusual characteristics of people with Asperger's syndrome, and to give practical strategies to reduce those aspects that are most conspicuous or debilitating. It is a slim book, and does not critically appraise and evaluate the various therapies available for parents seeking treatment for their children, or their outcomes. Nevertheless, well-accepted, practical, and achievable strategies for intervention and education are recommended. It is a valuable resource in order to plan services for children with Asperger's syndrome or higher functioning autism. The numerous quotations from people with Asperger's syndrome give poignant insight into their problems.

The diagnostic screening questionnaire section, called

'Frequently asked Questions', and the brief summaries at the end of each chapter deserve particular commendation. It is one of the best books for parents and teachers about Asperger's syndrome and higher functioning Autism. Written in an accessible style, it is also a useful reference for lay readers, professionals, as well as those with Asperger's syndrome.

Pretending to be Normal: Living with Asperger's Syndrome

By Liane Holliday Willey

Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 1999, pp176, £12.95, US\$17.95
ISBN 1 85302 749 9

This is an autobiography of Liane Willey which chronicles her life from childhood, through to being a university lecturer, writer, wife and mother, and a sufferer of Asperger's syndrome. Liane discovered she had Asperger's syndrome when her own daughter was diagnosed with it at the age of seven, and then discovered an explanation for her own years of frustration, insecurities, and self-doubts. It shares with warmth and insight the daily struggles and challenges that face many people with Asperger's syndrome. The reader sees how these challenges change or reach critical points at various stages of life, and indeed how the author's 'Asperger's syndrome traits continue to fade away'.

Having achieved success in life, the author does not wish for a cure to Asperger's syndrome, merely a cure for the common ill of comparing oneself to the impossibly perfect 'normal'.

This book allows families and friends of people with Asperger's syndrome to achieve a new perspective and provides insight into their viewpoints. It is an invaluable resource for teachers and professionals in explaining reasons for unconventional or abnormal behaviour seen in such children. It offers genuine hope for the future, showing that often people with Asperger's syndrome are capable, interesting, and kind, and simply exhibit these qualities in unique ways.

The last part of the book consists of a series of appendices, which provide helpful coping strategies and guidance on issues such as choosing the right career, organising home life, and support groups. This is a thoroughly captivating, humane, and enjoyable book which promotes the welcoming and appreciation of the qualities of people with Asperger's syndrome.

Sameena Shakoor

Mac Keith Press Publication

Developmental Disability and Behaviour

By Christopher Gillberg and Gregory O'Brien, Editors

London: Mac Keith Press (Clinics in Developmental Medicine), distributed by Cambridge University Press. 2000, pp 189, £45.00, US\$75.50
ISBN 1 898 683 182

Those of us in the helping professions who have tried to deal with the behavioural problems of children with developmental disabilities know that the work is often vexing, at times rewarding, and almost always challenging.

'Developmental Disability and Behaviour', a slim but

most informative volume, provides us with a pragmatic, rational, and therapeutically-orientated approach to common behavioural problems in children with developmental disabilities. The editors and chapter authors succeed in fulfilling the aims outlined in the preface, i.e. to give an overview of the behavioural problems of children with developmental disabilities, including coverage of assessment, therapy, and service delivery. In 14 concise chapters, written by specialists in paediatrics, paediatric neurology, child psychiatry, disability psychiatry, and neuropsychology, the various authors from the UK, Sweden, and North America cover a wide range of topics related to the lives of children with disabilities and their families, and to clinical practices of those who care for them. In an introductory chapter, the editors review behavioural problems, behavioural phenotypes, and management strategies. Tightly organized chapters follow, which elaborate on the behaviour of children with learning disabilities, children with visual and hearing disabilities, children with various specific syndromes, such as Rett and Landau-Kleffner syndromes, and children who have sustained traumatic brain damage. Developmental, familial, social, and educational factors are all acknowledged. While there is much-needed attention given to the specific issues related to children with disabilities, similar behavioural disorders shared with the non-disabled population are also noted, particularly ADHD and depression. Practical techniques of applied behavioural analysis and the sensible use of pharmacotherapy are succinctly described, and research findings are cited where relevant. Quite appropriately (though often overlooked in practice), psychotherapy is included as a treatment modality as well. This chapter and the one on sensory disabilities, offer some compelling clinical vignettes. The section on service delivery covers available services written from a UK perspective, but also comments on those that should be available for comprehensive care. Unlike many multi-authored texts, this book has been carefully edited to ensure a relative uniformity in style, organization, and clarity.

Any student or professional involved in the care of children with developmental disabilities can learn a lot from this book. It deserves to be widely read, as it is not only packed with information, but is also a very useful guide for our daily clinical work.

Marc A Forman

Current articles

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