

develop other methods that also contribute to the development of children.

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### **Asperger Syndrome: A Guide for Educators and Parents**

by Brenda Smith Myles and Richard L. Simpson

Austin, Texas: PRO-ED, 1998

140 pages

\$28.00 paperback

**A**sperger syndrome, a unique disorder “characterized by severe and pervasive impairment in several areas of development: reciprocal social interaction skills, communication skills, or the presence of stereotyped behavior, interests, and activities,” has become a widely recognized condition of some children in public schools. According to the authors, Asperger syndrome is often confused with autism because of its behavioral similarities, which include self-stimulatory responses and insistence on sameness. However, Asperger syndrome is distinguished by the presence of normal intellectual and communication development. Unfortunately, because this disorder is relatively new to the United States, there are few resources available to parents, teachers, and other professionals, which has added to the confusion regarding educational programming.

The first four chapters of this book focus on school-related issues from identification to program planning and instruction. Chapter 1, “Understanding the Meaning and Nature of Asperger Syndrome,” deals with the definition and characteristics of this exceptionality. Anchoring the discussion in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.) (DSM-IV; Amer-

ican Psychiatric Association, 1994) criteria, which list six major areas of impairment, the authors then detail each of those domains. Chapter 2, “Assessing Students with Asperger Syndrome,” addresses identification and assessment issues, focusing on obtaining meaningful information about an individual that will guide program planning as well as gathering general, normative data. This chapter is very detailed and provides excellent guidelines with regard to what information should be gathered and how best to obtain it. The guest author, Carlson, also breaks out assessment of children based on age, emphasizing that professionals use a developmentally based diagnostic sequence.

Chapter 3, “Teaching Academic Content to Students with Asperger Syndrome,” is an excellent resource for how to teach individuals with Asperger syndrome. The chapter opens with a discussion of how the impairment impedes academic functioning, providing a rationale for the instructional recommendations that follow (a must for any teacher who is reluctant to provide accommodations to children with disabilities), which cover the gamut from visual stimuli and organizers to motivation. It is clear in reading this chapter that educators need to be mindful of the distinct differences

and needs of individuals with Asperger syndrome. Many of the negative behaviors that are often attributed to attitude and motivation may, in fact, be directly linked to the social deficits of the disorder. Thus, by tempering educator’s responses based on this knowledge, student behaviors and classroom interactions can be addressed through more effective means.

Chapter 4, “Planning for Social and Behavior Success,” guides you through the diagnostic process of identifying environmental variables that may be contributing to the student’s difficulties and delineating effective behavioral interventions. A functional analysis form, information for how to structure the classroom to support students with Asperger syndrome, and a description of various social intervention strategies are provided.

Chapter 5, “Planning for Life after School,” deals with transition to work. Despite the fact that individuals with Asperger syndrome have normal intellectual capacities, they do not fare well in society, making transition planning an important element of their educational program. Reinforcing this point, the authors cite research that documents very low postsecondary training success or options. To support a more success-

ful transition to adulthood, the authors provide information about using a life-span approach with the individual to plan for postsecondary training, employment, and independent living.

The final chapter of this timely and informative book, "Understanding Asperger Syndrome and Its Impact on the Family," takes a very different approach to describing the issues and concerns resulting from the disorder. Real stories are provided that detail the day-to-day struggles of families whose lives are affected by Asperger syndrome. The challenges and successes of Michelle, Brent,

Edward, and Andrew are shared by their parents. These stories provide a richness and quality that is helpful in understanding how Asperger syndrome affects children and their families.

This short, easy-to-read book answers many of the growing questions about Asperger syndrome, including (a) what is Asperger syndrome? (b) how do you identify this disorder? (c) How does the disorder affect the individual's academic/school functioning? and (d) how does this disorder have an impact on the individual at home and in the community? This book is a quick read that will serve

as an excellent resource for years to come for parents, teachers, and others who work with individuals with Asperger syndrome.

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### ***Special Children/Challenged Parents: The Struggles and Rewards of Raising a Child with a Disability***

by *Robert A. Naseef*

Trenton, New Jersey: Carol, 1997

222 pages

**T**he book begins with a letter written by the author to his firstborn son, composed on the day of the child's birth. It is a letter full of the hopes and dreams a father has for his son; it is also a letter the son will never read. *Special Children/Challenged Parents* is an emotional account of the experiences of fathering and raising a child born with autism. More than that, this book represents the intersection of the heart and soul of the parent with the insight and knowledge of the therapist. The book's theme of the difficult and rewarding journey that challenged parents face in raising a child with disabilities is an important one. The book is not, however, an easy one to read.

The author's primary vehicles for conveying his message are his own experience as a parent of an autistic child and the therapeutic process he conducts with his clients. Dr. Naseef frequently draws on his own story and the stories of his clients in his practice to illustrate

the challenges faced by parents of children with disabilities. Through this first-person account, the reader is witness to the intensely personal and emotional struggles that parents experience in raising children with disabilities. At the end of chapter 2, titled "Feeling the Impact," Dr. Naseef quotes Kahlil Gibran, "Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding." This is a book about parents, their trip through the pain and difficulties associated with raising a child with disabilities, and the understanding and triumphs that develop in the process of rearing their child. It is also a book that offers strategies and interventions to parents to assist them in confronting the challenges posed by raising a special child.

The first three chapters revolve around the theme of adjusting to shattered dreams. Dr. Naseef's premise is that, to the parent, the birth of an infant with disabilities can feel like the death of the expected normal, healthy child. The

author draws on the work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, a book about her work with dying cancer patients, to illustrate the grieving process that parents of children with disabilities frequently undergo. Initially, mothers and fathers go through a period of denial, unwilling to accept the child's disability. When denial is resolved, parents become angry. The remaining stages parents experience in this grieving process are bargaining, depression, and finally, acceptance. The key difference between mourning a death and mourning a disability is that the child is not dead at all; hence, there is no respite. The demands of raising the child and the emotional roller coaster continue to confront parents on a daily basis.

These initial chapters provide valuable information to parents for understanding the psychological stress they experience in raising their children. Special educators who read this book will also gain important insight into the unique