

A SPECTRUM OF BOOKS ON *Autism and ASD*



There is an increasing prevalence and a lack of clarity regarding what is (and isn't) to blame for the epidemic numbers of children being diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). As a result, autism has been thrust on to center stage with increasing regularity by the media, in the pediatrician's office, and in homes across the country. The scientific and pediatric challenges that lie ahead may seem daunting. But the heartening news is that parents, educators and pediatricians alike are already well equipped to focus our efforts on building on the strengths that children have. We are in the ideal position to make some

incredibly powerful choices about autism. One such choice is to put the spotlight on books that promote understanding, tolerance, and self-acceptance. Several publishers have dedicated themselves to enriching the lives of ASD children through books, understanding, and the promotion of self-acceptance. The following is a representative sample.

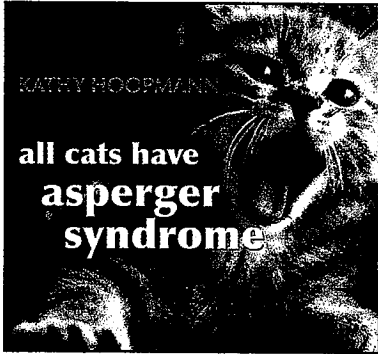
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DR. JANA, section editor and author of Bookshelf, is a general pediatrician, the mother of three, and has a strong interest in early childhood, early literacy, and health communication. Having co-founded the Doctor Spock Company, a national parenting media company, Dr. Jana also serves as a national trainer for Reach Out and Read, the owner of a 200-child education child care center, and co-author of two parenting books, *Heading home with your newborn: From birth to reality* (AAP, 2005) and *Food fights: Winning the nutritional challenges of parenthood armed with insight, humor and a bottle of ketchup* (AAP, 2007). She has nothing to disclose in regard to affiliations with, or financial interests in, any organization that may have an interest in any part of this article.

1 *All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome*

By Kathy Hoopman,
Jessica Kingsley, 2006 (65 pages)

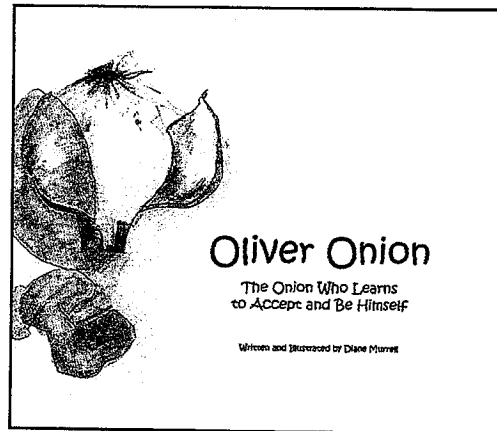


With only one or two sentences per page next to an array of eye-catching and often amusing cat photos, *All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome* will appeal to readers of all ages—especially cat-lovers. Cats are captured striking poses throughout the book that are intended to illustrate the many characteristics of Asperger's syndrome. Some cat tendencies are admittedly more analogous than others, such as cats' exceptionally good hearing, their dependency on routine, and their "amazing powers of concentration." Overall, this book touches on many aspects of the autistic spectrum disorders, and the unique talents that come with them.

2 *Oliver Onion: The Onion Who Learns to Accept and Be Himself*

By Diane Murrell,
Autism Asperger Publishing Company

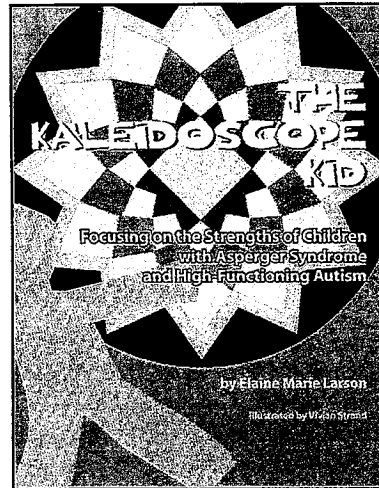
In a literal sense, this storyline involves an onion named Oliver who isn't happy being an onion. In an attempt to "look different and...change...into a new person with a new life," Oliver decides to leave his box of onions, wrap himself in an orange peel, and try to fit in with a new crowd. Instead of finding happiness, Oliver is dismayed to find himself bullied, hot, and scratchy. Uncomfortable in his own skin (or, more accurately, his borrowed peel), Oliver and his readers will ultimately come to the realization that "it's always difficult to be something you are not!" The story concludes with the wise words of Peter the Potato: "Every shape and color is wonderful." The book's overarching message of self-acceptance is relevant to all children, whether they have ASD or not.



3 *The Kaleidoscope Kid*

By Elaine Marie Larson,
Autism Asperger Publishing
Company (35 pages)

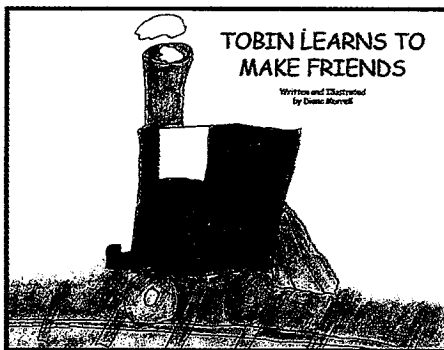
This upbeat and brightly illustrated children's book contains whimsical poems about the strengths of children with Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism. Making good use of a kaleidoscope of colors, this visually appealing book runs through the letters that spell the word "KALEIDOSCOPE KID." Each page has a different letter-related-poem, giving readers a clearer picture of the uniqueness, the inquisitiveness, the "memor-osity" and the "one-of-a-kind-osity" of children with autism. Author Elaine Larson is the grandmother of an autistic child herself and a former preschool teacher. She dedicated the book to her grandchildren, saying "each [child] is like the view through a kaleidoscope—ever changing but infinitely unique and wonderful!" For those who enjoy the book's style, also check out Larson's one-letter-per-page alphabet book *I Am Utterly Unique*, detailing the "enormous enthusiasm," "inventive imagination" and "genuinely goodhearted" nature characteristics of children with Asperger syndrome.



4 *Tobin Learns to Make Friends*

By Diane Murrell,
Future Horizons, 2001

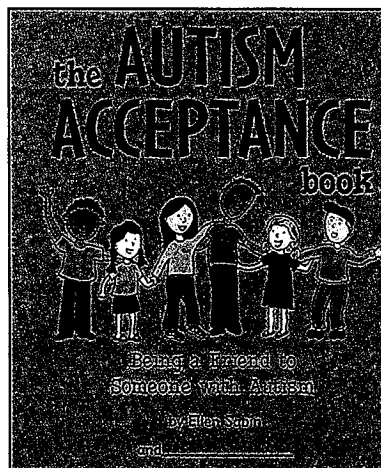
Tobin is a lonely red train engine who really wants to make friends, but his intentions and actions are misinterpreted, so he has to work much harder than others to make (and keep) them. To keep all the other train cars from "quickly, quickly, clickety, clickety" rushing away from him, ignoring him, or getting mad at him, he has to learn some important skills. It's applicable to all children, but particularly relevant to those children with autistic-spectrum disorders. The fundamental concepts of sharing, taking turns, following rules, and using good manners while controlling one's tendency to shout, crowd, and interrupt are all conveyed in this simple yet endearing story. Tobin doesn't always get it right, but hard work pays off in the end of this story.



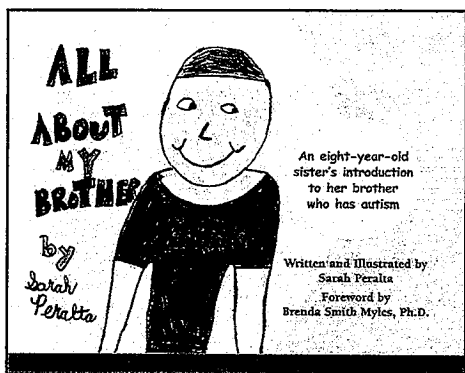


5 *The Autism Acceptance Book: Being a Friend to Someone with Autism*

By Ellen Sabin and _____,
Watering Can Press, 2006 (62 pages)



The fill-in-the-blank space on the cover lets each reader add his/her name as co-author of the book, and a personalizable certificate shows off the reader's accomplishment of learning to understand, accept, and be a good friend to children with autism. With an educational background and a talent for creating "engaging experiences that nurture and inspire children as they grow," author Ellen Sabin has written a book that is both kid-friendly and right on target in its presentation of autism. Each section of the book addresses a different aspect of autism, helping children imagine how it must feel to walk in the shoes of someone with autism. Ultimately, it makes them think about how to "be a good friend to [a] friend with autism." The age-appropriate, thought-provoking questions, combined with its workbook-like format, offers plenty of opportunities for readers to add their own answers, thoughts, and ideas. This is a truly inspired book all but guaranteed to engage its young audience. Be sure to go to www.wateringcanpress.com to find a whole host of additional tools, guides and resources for teachers, parents, and organizations. Sabin has also written *The Giving Book*, *The Hero Book*, *The Healing Book*, *The Special Needs Acceptance Book*, and *The Greening Book*.



6 *All About My Brother*

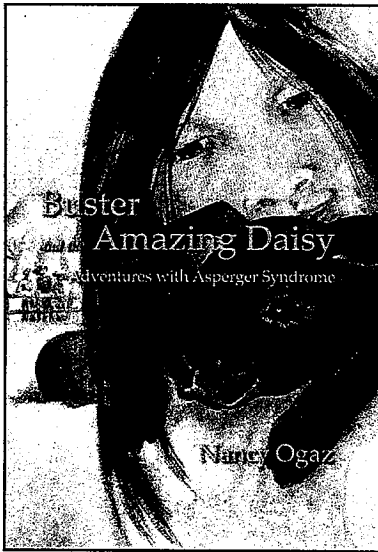
By Sarah Peralta,
Autism Asperger Publishing
Company, (22 pages)

Subtitled "An eight-year-old sister's introduction to her brother who has autism", this book is a valuable addition to the shelf of children's books about autism. Sarah Peralta considers her brother Evan to be "a very special brother." And she also acknowledges that she considers herself to be "a special sister for putting up with him sometimes." Despite her frustration with

not being able to talk with him, she clearly takes pride nonetheless understanding her nonverbal seven-year-old brother. Co-authored with her mother (who has a master's degree in social work), Peralta has written—and illustrated—a sweet, realistic look at how the life of a "typically developing" child is affected by having a sibling with autism. Parents and educators alike will find the introductory guide "How to Best Use This Book" particularly useful.

7 *Buster and the Amazing Daisy; Adventures with Asperger Syndrome*

Nancy Ogaz,
Jessica Kingsley Publishers

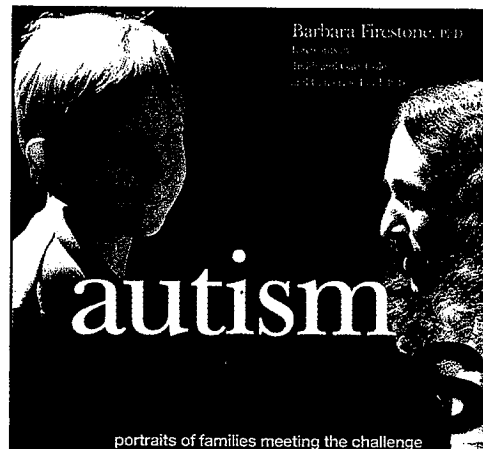


As the new kid in school, Daisy reads well, knows a lot of big words, and loves animals. Yet she struggles to make friends, and finds herself the target of a bully named Marissa. Frequently frustrated, misunderstood, and in trouble at school, Daisy wonders “Why? Why is my life like this?” All school-age kids are likely to relate to and learn from Daisy’s struggle to fit in, the challenges of school, and the desire to make friends. But these challenges are particularly common for children who, like Daisy, have Asperger syndrome. Author Nancy Ogaz (mother of a child with Asperger syndrome) accurately identifies and incorporates these everyday challenges. She tells a story of hope, tolerance, and ultimate success as Daisy uses her special talents to build meaningful friendships. Other chapter books that incorporate ASD into their storylines include Kathy Hoopmann’s *Blue Bottle Mystery* and *Of Mice and Aliens*, and Pamela Victor’s *Baj and the Word Launcher*.

8 *Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge*

Barbara Firestone,
Jessica Kingsley, 2007
(240 pages)

In *Autism Heroes*, author Firestone brings a weighty topic to life through her reality-based vignettes of families living with autism. Each story is accompanied by a black-and-white snapshot that captures family life and show readers the hopes, challenges and perspectives that underlie them. While not written specifically for children, this 240-page hardcover offers an revealing window into the real world of autism for families. It is worthy of a place on the bookshelf, if not on the coffee table.



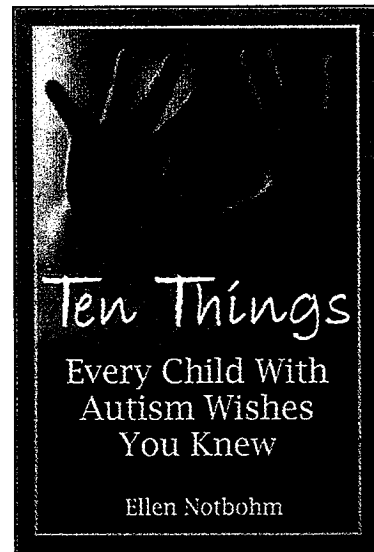


Bookshelf



Ten Things Every Child With Autism Wishes You Knew

By Ellen Notbohm,
Future Horizons, 2005
(111 pages)



Although not a book written for children, Notbohm's *Ten Things* truly is for children in the sense that, as the title promises, it puts into words how children with autism feel, want, and need, and how they can be successful in life. Notbohm does not promise an unrealistically easy journey for children and parents living with autism. Yet her conviction to understand and "grant legitimacy and worth to their different way of thinking," and her ability to humbly "give voice to their thoughts and feelings, even when that voice is wordless," is moving and motivational. □