
Autism Spectrum Disorder

edited by Martin J. Lubetsky, MD; Benjamin L. Handen, PhD; and John J. McGonigle, PhD. In book series: Pittsburgh Pocket Psychiatry. Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2011, 340 pages, \$49.95 (paper, pocket-size).

This is a small book, a pocket-sized book, with a pocket-sized font suitable for fitting its important message into only 340 pages. It is well-written, concise, readable, and comprehensive. Although I expected to find a few overstatements, omissions, or errors, I found that the book presents an accurate overview of the autism spectrum. I recommend this book heartily to others. There are few current publications on autism that better meet the needs of persons who are reading about autism for the first time as well as those who are expert in one or more aspects of the syndrome and wish to understand autism from a broader perspective. Parents, in particular, should find this a useful guide. The editors of the *Pittsburgh Pocket Psychiatry* series (of which this book is a part) should be congratulated for their success.

The book is divided into 14 sections, beginning with a historical overview of autism (including some well-known examples from the 1700s) and a discussion of its diagnostic criteria from Kanner to the *DSM-5*. Current and recommended evaluation instruments are presented, followed by the latest neurobiological and genetic studies. The 9 sections on treatment should be especially valuable to clinicians and parents. Therapies are divided into early interventions for preschool children, school-based approaches, and interventions designed for late adolescence and for adults. The authors (experienced in the practical application of each of the approaches) delineate the goals and methods of the treatments, including pitfalls and possible failure. Numerous schools of behavioral treatment are described and contrasted. Nontraditional treatments are listed, with suitable caveats regarding their use. Time-honored assessment instruments are initially listed and described, and more recent ones are then discussed. Language interventions are discussed in a separate chapter, as are feeding, sleep, and toileting interventions.

Although it has been the custom of some experts to focus primarily on the social communication disorder as the central deficit in autism, the authors correctly remind us that persons with autism have many other neurological, cognitive, language, and behavioral symptoms, which must be identified and treated.

I was pleased to see that the recommendations regarding psychopharmacology are consistent with current expert opinion: medications can reduce aggression, impulsivity, and disruptive repetitive behaviors, but they offer little to improve the “theory of mind” deficits seen in persons with autism. Anyone who evaluates children for possible autism can recall all too many children who come to the clinic on treatment with 4 or 5 medications (many from the same class of drug), some of which have been administered for extended periods. The book is correct in specifically warning against such desperate therapeutic ploys.

Each chapter begins with a short summary of its contents, followed by presentation of the material under well-chosen paragraph headings. Chapters conclude with a list of additional readings and a series of questions and answers on the salient points of the chapter.

The authors have produced a succinct but comprehensive review of autism spectrum disorder.

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