



Overcoming Autism: Finding the Answers, Strategies, and Hope That Can Transform a Child's Life

Lynn Kern Koegel, Claire LaZebnik

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There have been huge advances in our ability to diagnose autism and in the development of effective interventions that can change children's lives. In this extraordinary book, Lynn Kern Koegel, a leading clinician, researcher, and cofounder of the renowned Autism Research Center at the University of California at Santa Barbara, combines her cutting-edge expertise with the everyday perspectives of Claire LaZebnik, a writer whose experience with a son with autism provides a rare window into the disorder. Together, they draw on the highly effective "pivotal response" approach developed at the center to provide concrete ways of improving the symptoms of autism and the emotional struggles that surround it, while reminding readers never to lose sight of the humor that lurks in the disability's quirkiness or the importance of enjoying your child. From the shock of diagnosis to the step-by-step work with verbal communication, social interaction, self-stimulation, meltdowns, fears, and more, the answers are here—in a book that is as warm and nurturing as it is authoritative.

Overcoming Autism: Finding the Answers, Strategies, and Hope That Can Transform a Child's Life Details

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Shirelle says

This book was recommended to us by the psychologist who diagnosed our son with autism. I initially went to the library and picked up a number of other books on autism/asperger's and started working my way through them. I was devastated by how hopeless they all seemed. Many of them implied that my son would never even live independently. A few months later, I found a copy of this at Half-price books. I got it home and couldn't put it down. I used many of the techniques in the book to help my own son's language development. This book really helped me understand that he WAS teachable and that he could overcome many of the symptoms of the disease that would hold him back in life. This book gave me a way to be proactive.

I would recommend this book to any parent who has a child that was recently diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.

Kathleen says

This was a very easy to follow book on how to help your child who has ASD. The author has some very common sense strategies and it was helpful that you included real life examples of how these strategies were implemented. I also liked that the end of the chapters were written by a mother with ASD and showed what her experiences were with the strategies in the book. The book definitely is a hopeful look for parent's with children with this disorder.

Ellyn says

I really liked this book and would definitely recommend it to the parents that I work with. The chapters are organized based on "symptoms" or behaviors commonly seen in kids with autism. Each chapter starts out with clinical advice and discussion from Lynn Koegel and ends with reflections written by Claire LaZebnik about her own son with autism. I really liked how both the professional perspective and the parent perspective are included. The book is realistic and recognizes that children and families have a life outside of autism, and it really focuses on making intervention part of everyday life. It's geared more towards mid to high functioning children and is probably most appropriate for middle class families.

Brielle says

As a librarian and a mother to a son with autism, when I am asked to recommend a book for another parent in our situation, this book comes to mind first. I think the presentation of both the daily living challenges and the treatment possibilities shows how parents/caregivers have options to craft effective solutions for their kids.

Monica says

My son was just diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) a mild form of Autism. I read this book before he got the diagnosis and could relate with many of the examples shared in this book. It also gave me hope that my son will be able to overcome his weaknesses and live a "normal" life!

Beth says

This book speaks to families of children with autism and I am finding it useful as a refresher course. It also provides me ideas on how to talk with parents about different issues they might face at home. The book is broken down into 8 chapters focusing on various aspects of autism including, surviving the diagnosis, communication, meltdowns, aggression, self-injury, social skills, fixations, education, and family life.

Kimi says

A hopeful look at ASD with a very negative view of schools/teachers/administrators that was a bit off-putting. I think it's important to remember how relatively little we know about ASD paired with the overwhelming number of students entering our public school system with ASD largely impacts a school's ability to appropriately accommodate the needs of these amazing children and their families. There is certainly much progress to be made regarding the funding, employment and education of people who work with these children and families and educators must work together to find solutions.

Robert says

This one started out as an accidental find at a local library. I liked it so much I ended up buying it and finishing. I found this to be an easy to understand book on Autism and strategies on how to overcome issues related to those on the spectrum. The approach is pretty much an ABA styled approach in which you study the behavior and figure the best ways to adapt and overcome them. It isn't a radical approach nor does it over promise any miracle cure. It's straight forward and written in an easy understand manner. I intend on hanging onto this one and use as future reference.

Amber says

The title is lame, but the book is really helpful. The author is the founder of some big Autism center in California and provides great solutions to common behaviors parents can help their kids overcome: biting, tantrums, anti-social behavior, repetitive behaviors, stims, etc. I would love to meet her and talk to her. This book is helpful and empowering.

Alexis says

First, I hate the title. You don't "overcome" autism.

Koegel and LaZebnik focus on a behaviorally based approach to dealing with autism. Nothing else gets a look--this isn't a "comprehensive" book (on the other hand, not having to read about pseudoscientific "miracles" is not a drawback). The approach is more or less ABA based, particularly the Pivotal Response Treatment Dr. Koegel co-developed, but also other behaviorally based techniques.

There's a lot of positives in the book. While the approach is behavioral, it's a naturalistic method that emphasizes finding the child's motivators and making use of them. The goal is to analyze the functions of behaviors--positive or negative--and use those motivations to encourage positive behaviors, rather than being punitive. The authors reinforce the idea that behaviors have a purpose and that altering negative behaviors requires that we understand why they are happening so the function can be filled in a more positive way. Parents are encouraged to celebrate their child's strengths and not focus on weaknesses. The basic part of their approach has received much deserved praise--especially if your child does have some verbal skills, there is a lot to work with here on learning new ways to interact with your child and how to understand and manage behaviors.

I've read reviews that criticized the book for only focusing on "high functioning" children. I don't think that's quite accurate. Rather, I would say that Dr. Koegel is overenthusiastic for her method. She believes that almost all kids will respond to it and therefore the sections on older children tend to focus on higher level issues (social skills/pragmatics rather than basic communication). She believes that most kids, if intervention is started early, will become verbal, and that the focus of the program should be verbal communication and that alternate systems should only be added if verbal instruction is unsuccessful rather than as an aid to developing verbal skills. The problem is less that the ideas are wrong and more that the stories and techniques tend to gloss over hard to manage situations.

The sections on social skills and stimming are where I had the biggest issues. The outright stated goal here is that autistic kids need to be like typical kids, and the techniques for promoting that goal are aggressive (though not cruel). For example, social stigma of stims is given really heavy weight, as if the embarrassment factor of the behavior is more important than focusing on those behaviors which are really disruptive or self harming. (I am not saying that social stigma is nothing at all, but the priority it is given seems misplaced.) She also pushes socialization very heavily, including admonitions not to let kids play alone at recess doing their own thing. It's a question of balance and the tone felt like it tipped too much towards one side of the scale.

The methods are heavily parent focused and while many parents will find this empowering, without good external support, a lot of parents will find it overwhelming.

Nicole says

Informative with great insight and practical ideas for dealing with the frustrations involved in struggling to communicate and related behaviors. I've also found it informative for my very shy child and how to be more

helpful to her coping with life. Somewhat helpful in the challenge of understanding the why and how.

Janie says

Seemed like a great idea at the time!

When I read this I was raw from some of the circumstances of our diagnosis. I'm sure that informed my responses to it. I found it informative and comforting. I experienced affirmation - that double-edged sword. I felt compelled and disturbed.

It's organized by symptom. Each symptom has two segments: a clinician-POV segment by Dr K followed by a mom-POV segment by Ms LaZ. Ms LaZ's oldest child, whose booknym is Andrew, is diagnosed as on the spectrum.

I'm grateful to Ms LaZ for the mitzvah of this frank account of her bittersweets. I found so much in her account that was familiar to me. I really wanted that feeling - familiarity - and its tender kin (belonging, being understood).

Where our stories most diverged were points of interest, too, and sometimes also points of pain. I did notice her/Andrew's major advantages relative to us. If there had been many more such, I may not have been in a position to appreciate what else the book had to offer.

So, if you're in a lot of pain, and you want to feel seen, and you wonder if this book could help, you may want to know this about the spotlighted family: Andrew was diagnosed young (by age 3). He received treatments more or less immediately. He was a happy and non-aggressive child. He is verbal. He was precocious wrt several societally-valued academic skills. He is white. He has two parents: able-bodied, living together, highly educated, upper-middle-class. He has three devoted siblings.

The clinical segments include anecdotes of many other families and situations.

Overall, I found the clinical discussion and the specifics of the clinical interventions compelling. We went to UCSB to experience an individualized PRT program at the Koegel Autism Center. While it's much too early to say whether it's a tool that will serve us long and well, I'm very glad we went.

One of the best things about my experience of this book is that many other people in my life were so willing to read it!

Srosch says

This book had some great suggestions, tricks and tips for a lot of the symptoms my child is showing. It is one I definitely will refer to and share ideas with the teachers who work with some special kids!

Renae says

Nolan has autism and I haven't put him on "the diet". I haven't been able to force myself yet... This book is more geared towards the ABA therapies of which I'm a big proponent of. A good book regardless.

James says

Wonderful. I cannot praise this book highly enough. This is an example of "how it should be done" as a source of clear explanation of autism's symptoms and their effects on people who have the disorder and their families, of solid practical guidance on how to cope with and overcome the problems that go with autism, and of encouragement and inspiration for parents, other family members, and professionals working with people with autism.

As a psychotherapist, I am grateful to the authors for this book - it has expanded my understanding of the disorder and given me more tools to work with clients and families dealing with autism spectrum disorders, both to help change specific behaviors and help clients learn to do things that they need to do, and to help their families help them and take care of themselves while they do so.

I wish this book had been available for my mother, who taught first grade, and who sometimes worked with autistic children in her classroom - she had good instincts and figured out some strategies similar to those explained in this book on her own, but she would have loved having this guide to help her do more to help those children. I also wish this book had been around and had been required reading when I was in grad school learning to be a marriage, family, and child counselor. It would have been a very worthy addition to the library with which our faculty equipped us. I have been recommending this book to colleagues since I got a little way into reading it, and will go on doing so, and I am eager to see the next book the authors are writing, which they've said will focus on working with adolescents and possibly young adults with autism spectrum disorders.

To the authors: For your hard work and your generosity in sharing both your expertise and your inner thoughts and feelings, thank you. You've given the world a real gift in this book.
