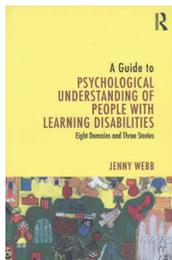


Book reviews



A Guide to Psychological Understanding of People with Learning Disabilities

Jenny Webb

Routledge

£22.99 | 244pp

ISBN: 9780415601153

INTENDED FOR clinical psychology trainees, this book offers a comprehensive study of individuals with learning disabilities who exhibit behavioural problems and psychological disorders.

In arguing that a more clinically based definition of learning disability is needed, the author links the history of humanistic psychology with relevant psychological theories that have gained acceptance over the past few decades.

The author opens with an interesting and detailed summary of the treatment of people with learning disabilities in different periods of history. She discusses how the evolution of intelligence testing led to the medical model of learning disability. She then explores issues such as quality of life, inclusion and person-centred planning, and stresses the need to include legal aspects of capacity and consent in psychological definitions of learning disability.

In the second part of the book the author discusses a holistic method of gathering information about people, which she divides into eight domains: behavioural, social, physical, neurological, cognitive, attachment, ecological and inner world.

Her insistence on the importance of knowing service users on more than a superficial level is a crucial part of the definition of learning disability she presents. The final section of the book presents glimpses of several individuals with learning disabilities and proposes techniques for clinical assessment.

Although the book is not intended for nurses, it would be appropriate for purchase by a library.

Jean Sherman is a nursing director and director of adult programs at the University of Miami, Florida



How People with Autism Grieve, and How to Help

Deborah Lipsky

Jessica Kingsley

£12.99 | 128pp

ISBN: 971849059541

THE AUTHOR of this book is a consultant and public speaker on managing challenging behaviour in people on the autistic spectrum.

She herself has high functioning autism and decided to write this book after the death of her closest friend, which involved a devastating change of established routines.

Her experience of bereavement highlighted fundamental differences between how autistic and non-autistic people grieve, including the tendency of people with autism who have had distressing news to isolate themselves and focus on their special interests rather than seek the support of others, participating in remembrance rituals, looking at photographs of deceased people or creating memory books.

People with autism tend to conclude that looking back is illogical, she suggests, adding that the loss of established routines can be frustrating.

She advocates honesty in the face of death and her descriptions of her own bereavement experiences enable the reader to view loss and grief from an 'autistic perspective'. She also offers many helpful tips on how to support people with autism through loss and how to communicate bad news.

Although the book is somewhat repetitive in places, this serves to emphasise important points and to strengthen the feeling of seeing autism 'from the inside'. It promotes a real understanding of the fact that people with autism have emotions but process and express them differently.

I did not expect to learn so much from this short and easy-to-read book and anyone working with people on the autistic spectrum who face personal loss should buy or borrow it. *Irene Tuffrey-Wijne is a senior research fellow in nursing at St George's University and Kingston University, London*

Planet Rachael



Welcome to my world

'MRS JOHNSON how do you feel?' I blink, hardly seeing the head teacher and psychologist sitting in front of me.

It is 1994 and we are meeting to hear the results of my daughter Rachael's assessments. I hear phrases such as 'mild learning disability', 'autism' 'Asperger syndrome' and 'oppositional defiance disorder', and I try to reconcile them with the impish child I cuddled last night as I tried to summon up the enthusiasm to read Charlotte's Web for what seemed like the thousandth time.

How do I feel? Relieved that I am not the bookies' favourite for 'worst parent of the year' award? Fearful for the future? Grieving that the story book of both our lives has been altered forever? Nothing has changed, everything has changed.

The psychologist touches my arm and I re-focus. He is fidgeting and looking at his watch, and I wonder whether in my role as a nurse I ever display such impatience or lack of compassion when delivering important news.

I hear more unfamiliar phrases: 'statement of educational needs', 'support workers', 'institutional care'. 'Sorry?' I say, 'institutional care?' I actually laugh. This is absurd. Nothing has changed, everything has changed.

After the meeting I go to Rachael's school to pick her up and find her in unfamiliar clothes. I am told that at lunchtime she had been found in the library, naked, reading Charlotte's Web. 'Rachael, what on earth are you doing?' the teacher had said. 'Reading a book. What does it look like?' she had replied. Rachael's clothes never materialised.

Then I hear her other misdemeanours: hit child on head with hymnbook, told teacher she was fat ('but she is Mum'), sat under desk for most of a geography lesson, refused to read for the teacher ('it wasn't 'Charlotte's Web' Mum').

Welcome to Planet Rachael. Fasten your seatbelt, you are in for a bumpy ride.

Wendy Johnson is the mother of Rachael and a matron in a general hospital

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