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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ HEALTH & FITNESS

How Everyone on the Autism Spectrum, Young and Old, can... become Resilient, be more Optimistic, enjoy Humor, be Kind, and increase Self-Efficacy - A Positive Psychology Approach

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Imagine a science that strives to promote flourishing and fulfillment for individuals and groups at all social levels, a science that studies what makes life worth living: the science of positive psychology.

Traits such as optimism, resilience, and kindness are all central topics in the growing field, defined as “an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions.” This book encourages supporting persons with autism and developmental disabilities by building on character strengths and incorporating their whole life experiences, rather than working with a pathology- or deficit-based model.

An Assessment Scale for Positive Character Traits (ASPeCT), developed by Woodard at the Groden Center in Providence, Rhode Island, is used as a pre-test for professionals who observe children or adults with autistic or developmental disabilities to assess the strength of a wide range of areas. Using this tool among others for the person observed, a plan can be developed for intervening in areas showing deficits and for teaching positive traits.

Traits such as kindness, courage, self-esteem, optimism, and resilience are thought to be the positive values to assist in the development of a person’s quality of life, and allow that person to be able to enjoy what school, community, and family life have to offer.

The book is divided into two parts. The first contains a description of each of these five character traits, along with a review of the literature and the rationale for building this trait. The second part contains activities to foster each.

In Chapter 1 optimism is described as “a tendency to expect the best possible outcome or to dwell on the most hopeful aspects of a situation.” The position taken is that optimistic people enjoy better psychological and physiological health, use a wider range of effective coping strategies, feel that they have fewer barriers in fulfilling their goals, and benefit more from social support in times of stress. In Chapter 6, activities are suggested to increase positive outlooks and expectations.

Special sections are devoted to the ASPeCT Scale, the Groden Center Photography Program, and descriptions of some of the terms and methods used throughout the book. A four-page list of references is also included. This is a very thorough and uplifting aid for professionals working with persons with autistic and developmental disabilities.

PENNY HASTINGS (July 28, 2011)

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