

Learning About Friendship: Stories to Support Social Skills Training in Children with Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism

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Haitham Al-Ghani, Illustrator

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Imagine living on a planet where everyone communicates not just through spoken language, but by a secret telepathy. And you lack that special power. A whole conversation happens all around you, a discussion essential to success in that world, and you don't even know about it. You would need someone to tell you what others were saying and what you should be doing. You would need a champion.

Many children with high-functioning autism (HFA) and Asperger syndrome (AS) find life a bit like living on that planet. They often cannot "hear" the social cues and subtle clues that help them relate to others. So their parents must serve as guides. *Learning About Friendship*, by K. I. Al-Ghani, offers these parents tools to help their children understand social situations and achieve greater success in relationships.

This little book provides parents with an overview of the basic social situations children with HFA and AS find difficult. Chapters address issues such as hygiene, sharing toys, tattling on others, heightened focus on a single subject, personal space, and much more. Concise chapter introductions explain to adults why children struggle in each area, and short stories for the kids help them fill in the gaps in understanding. For example, a story explores a boy's blunt and unintentionally hurtful comment: "Billy just did not know why, but he often got into trouble for saying something that seemed perfectly okay to him. Why, just the other day ... he was sent to his room for mentioning that [Mrs. Bleasdale] had a long hair growing from her chin."

Al-Ghani's experience as a special educational needs teacher and mother of a child with AS gives her a special sensitivity to the viewpoint of children with AS and HFA. The stories provide practical suggestions that help children succeed, yet they avoid being preachy or condescending. Line-art illustrations by Haitham Al-Ghani add to the child-friendly nature of the stories. However they intentionally look like children's drawings, which slightly diminishes the professional appearance of the book.

Overall, this book serves as an excellent resource for parents, teachers, and assistants of children with AS and HFA. It provides a door through the wall that prevents children from grasping key social concepts. And, for children, it provides warm, compassionate, and clear social guidance, and helps to set them up for a lifetime of success in a world they struggle to understand.

DIANE GARDNER (January 10, 2011)

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