

Children with High Functioning Autism: A Parent's Guide by Claire E, Hugh-Lynch Ph.D.

The author of this book, Claire Hughes-Lynch is a Ph.D. in Special Education and Giftedness and the parent of a child on the autism spectrum, which makes this book both personal and educational. It's laid out as a travel guide book where instead of details on hotels, sites of interest, etc. in an actual country, it is a guide for parents to make their way around the land of autism. The introduction to the book, "How Did I Get Here" begins with the famous essay, "Welcome To Holland", in which having a child with a disability is compared to going to Holland when you were all packed and ready for Italy (If you're not familiar with the essay, Google it. It's worth a look.). She discusses where high functioning autism fits, or doesn't fit, on the Holland/Italy maps and talks about some ideas that have been presented regarding causes of autism.

Chapter 2, "The Landscape and Its Signage", offers a kind of glossary of terms for parents, including terms such as: ASD, high functioning vs. low functioning, dyspraxia, flat affect, theory of mind, stimming, sensory integration, etc. She includes brief discussions of matters such as language problems and lack of imagination, that you likely wouldn't have given much thought to unless you find yourself in this landscape, but very helpful to know about if you do have a child with autism.

Chapter three discusses receiving the diagnosis, relating to it, and "travelling" with it. How do you explain your child's diagnosis to others? What do you tell them? In addressing these matters, Hughes-Lynch is all the while describing how it was for her in her life. Her husband, for example, didn't grow up in the US and didn't have any preconceived ideas about autism. He associated autism with the Greek "aut" which means "relates to self". He didn't have the same fear that others had and was very practical. Others reacted as if her child had cancer, which made her angry. Autism presents challenges, she notes, but her child is not dying! "We just have to DEAL with it, not FIX her!" (p.98)

Also covered are: treatment approaches, education, coping strategies, and siblings and spouses. She tells the reader what has worked for her, but doesn't judge anyone on approaches they decide to take. She herself tried things that worked for her child that the professional side of her may not have tried. She discusses a variety of education options and does a great job of looking at things from both the parent and teacher perspectives.

I should tell you that in chapter 4, Hughes-Lynch tells us that her daughter is "cured" (her quotes) of autism, meaning she no longer qualifies for services. Hughes-Lynch says that her daughter still has autism, but is doing very well. She does not then go on to advocate any approach in particular, but just carries on with her guide through the autism landscape.

This book is not an in depth look at a particular issue or approach, but a broad stroke of one perspective that is well informed and will prove useful to others. It is also a pretty positive and hopeful perspective from a parent who is able to see and appreciate some of the gifts that autism may bring.

