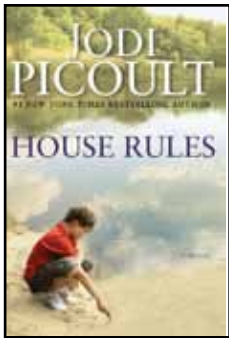


House Rules

Jodi Picoult. *Washington Square Press: New York, NY, 2010. 532 pages. \$19.99, softcover.*



Jodi Picoult's book "House Rules" is a fictional account of Jacob Hunt, a teenager with Asperger's syndrome. He has a penchant for forensic science, including attending actual crime scenes and giving advice to the detectives. However, when later accused of a crime, the characteristic traits of Asperger's syndrome, such as poor eye contact and inappropriate affect, make him appear guilty. The story unfolds as a murder-mystery, and reads quite well for that genre. The plot unfolds from the various perspectives and viewpoints of the main characters. This is an interesting choice in story formulation as Jacob himself has difficulty seeing things from others' perspectives. Ms. Picoult has done a significant amount of research into Asperger's, and also has a cousin diagnosed on the autism spectrum. Although it is somewhat unusual to be reviewing a fictional book in a child psychiatry journal, it may prove to be a useful tool for educating clinicians, patients, and their families on various aspects of the autism spectrum disorders. An interesting story allows one to be immersed and understand the content phenomenologically, to really "get into the heads" of the characters. This book has achieved that goal.

A certain amount of dramatic license is expected within a fictional piece. For a resource to be useful, however, it needs to be grounded in reality. To that end, there are a number of areas that Ms. Picoult's book covers very well. First and foremost, for a book discussing Asperger's syndrome to be useful, it needs to be able to accurately define what Asperger's syndrome is. The author tackles this from a number of standpoints. Early in the novel, she talks of the family's initial contact with psychiatrists and their early interactions. As an example, Jacob's mother illustrates "Asperger's [as] a label to describe not the traits Jacob has, but rather the ones he lost" (page 5). Later, when Jacob is on trial, the author uses the various psychiatrists called to the stand to

effectively describe, from a clinical perspective, what Asperger's is. Finally, a number of characters' experiences with Jacob's behaviour ultimately leads to greater insight into the syndrome. As described in this book and echoed by O'Brien and Bell (2004), the mechanisms of social naiveté, disruption of routines, misperception of social cues, and obsession, fuel many of Jacob's unruly behaviours.

The author excels at relaying the interpersonal dynamics and personal experiences of the characters in regards to Asperger's. Jacob talks of his mind as being like a video camera recording everything all at once, and he has had to develop behaviours to "narrow the world" (page 455). His self-stimulating and bouncing "helps [him] jog the rest of [his] brain and body into sync" (page 372). Jacob also remarks that his lack of empathy is not a lack of understanding when someone is in pain, but that he cannot take away the sadness, "so why should [he] acknowledge it" (page 350). In a similar fashion, Ms. Picoult relays the perspectives of Jacob's mother and brother, as well as those of other characters, to effectively weave a rich tapestry of stories that highlights the challenges and achievements of those involved.

In contrast to the preceding praise, there are some difficulties with this book. The author often substitutes autism with Asperger's. This is done frequently in the clinical setting, reflects many clinicians' attitudes, and will likely be represented in the DSM5 by having Asperger's subsumed within the new classification of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Despite the interpretation of Asperger's as part of the autism spectrum, the extent of Jacob's disability seems excessive at times. The author admits to taking a compilation of stories from her interviews and attributing them to Jacob, at times leading to a collection of behaviours that would individually be considered eccentric, but totalled together become quite pathological. This is a frequently employed device in fictional accounts of mental illness, described by Oyeboode (2004) as "amplification of deviance". Finally, the question of vaccinations in the pathogenesis of this disorder is brought out. It is reasonable to think that the characters would hear arguments for and against vaccination, but there appears to be a significant weight given to vaccines as causative agents. Thankfully the overall mindset in the book is more along the lines of spreading out the vaccines rather than complete abolishment.

We do recommend this book as a useful resource for practitioners, patients, and families. The author has done an excellent job of describing the individual dynamics, and a reasonable job of describing the autism spectrum. It does take some dramatic license, but this is in part done to increase the overall readability of the story, and to make it a more

immersive experience. It would be helpful to give families some caveats before recommending this book. Important points to get across would include that Jacob is portraying a fictional compilation of behaviours, and that certain behaviours have been exaggerated for the sake of story-telling.

References

O'Brien, G., & Bell, G. (2004). Learning disability, autism, and offending behavior. In S. Bailey & M. Dolan (Eds.), *Adolescent Forensic Psychiatry* (144-150). UK: Arnold.

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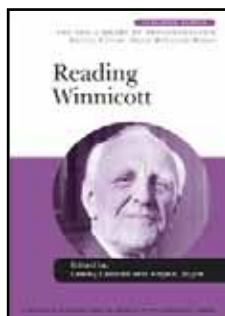
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Reading Winnicott

Lesley Caldwell and Angela Joyce, eds. Routledge: East Sussex, UK, 2011. 308 pages. \$99, softcover.



This book is comprised of a selection of fourteen papers/chapters by Donald Winnicott. It is part of a teaching series published in association with the London Institute of Psychoanalysis. Providing contextual information on the main areas covered by the book is a general introduction linking Winnicott to other psychoanalytic theorists including Freud, Klein, Jung, Ferenczi, Balin, Fairbairn, and Lacan. The editors also offer an introduction to each paper whereby theoretical influences from predecessors as well as current relevance are discussed.

The first chapter is Winnicott's original paper titled "Observations of Infants in a Set Situation", initially published in 1941. This paper has great historical value; it sets the stage for the establishment of standardized methods for the collection of behavioural observations preceding what is now current practice in the evaluation of attachment, autism, and other developmental psychopathologies. The focus of the fifth paper in this collection is transitional objects and phenomena, possibly the area of work for which Winnicott is best known. In this paper Winnicott tries to reconcile his

first hand observations of children, informed by their cognitive development, and psychoanalytic theoretical concepts that were the object of interest (no pun intended) of the movement at the time. Additional conceptual areas represented in this collection include primitive emotional development and sexuality, aggression in countertransference, moral development, as well as other aspects of psychoanalytic practice with children and adults.

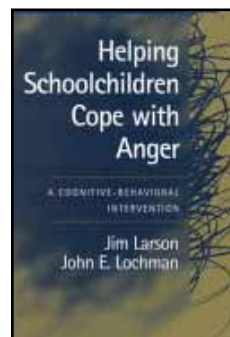
Winnicott is highly readable, and clearly many of the theoretical notions he developed were at the vanguard of the analytic movement. Throughout the different papers compiled in this book, his search for observable evidence is patient and as I have (re)read them my deep appreciation for his contributions is rekindled. Clearly the best audience for this book is psychoanalytic and psychodynamic trainees. It may also be of interest for dynamically oriented practitioners.

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Helping Schoolchildren Cope with Anger: A Cognitive-Behavioural Intervention, Second Edition

Jim Larson and John E. Lochman. The Guilford Press: New York, NY, 2011. 222 pages. \$30 (US), softcover.



Jim Larson's and John Lochman's expertise on aggressive children is evidenced in the first half of their book *Helping Schoolchildren Cope with Anger: Second Edition*. These first seven chapters would serve as a solid learning base for a post-secondary course about aggressive children. The history of the understanding and development of aggression, described in the first chapter, serves as a building block for subsequent chapters. A multimodal understanding of the aggressive child is described using social learning theory, social information processing, and coercive family process as core concepts. The concepts and models influencing the Anger Coping Program, designed and developed by Larson and Lochman and their colleagues, are well described. Larson and Lochman extend their dissemination of knowledge

to the school locale, providing a detailed description of a “three-tiered model of academic and behavioural prevention in schools” (page 29). Code of conduct, suitable group leaders, student selection, and behaviour management strategies are a few of the many subjects in these first chapters. An invaluable part of the book is the research evidence supporting the Anger Coping Program, described in chapter seven. While the book describes the Anger Coping Program, an improved version of the program, the *Coping Power Program*, is emphasized as “a lengthier multi-component version of the Anger Coping Program designed to enhance outcome effects and to provide for stronger maintenance gains over time.” (page 84). The reader is left wanting more information about the Coping Power Program and its implementation.

The remainder of the book provides individual session guidance for the 18-session Anger Coping Program. Reading these sessions leads to more questions than answers. The downloadable video of the sessions (approximately 45 minutes), available by contacting the author via a recommended email in the “Frequently Asked Questions” chapter of the book, provides slightly more clarity to the session descriptions. The descriptions of the individual sessions are not detailed enough to serve as a manual. The chronological order of the sessions is not intuitive. Session three provides a script whereby the child states to himself “I can tell I’m starting to get mad”, though the lesson about the physiological description of anger does not occur until session 7. The video description of session 3 however, demonstrates the student using learned calming statements, as outlined in the book.

Helping Schoolchildren Cope with Anger: Second Edition provides useful and reproducible appendices and forms.

Larson and Lochman’s book closes with more useful recommendations about individual instruction, working with girls, and working with diverse backgrounds, as well as a case example. While the goal of this book is to “intervene effectively with angry, aggressive children” (page ix), those professionals who hope to implement the program after reading this book will be disappointed. While sample scripts for certain ideas are presented in the written sessions, an itemized lesson plan for each session is not clearly described. The book is designed for “school psychologists, counselors and other helping professionals” (page ix). Larson and Lochman recommend the program be led by a “trained co-leader team” (page 45) with a “strong working foundation of the theoretical underpinnings of the program prior to its implementation” (page 46). Further recommendations before implementing the program are to read the recommended readings and to seek a post-secondary “continuing education option related to work with angry aggressive children” (page 46). A caveat in the downloaded video states the video “is not intended to replace in-service training in the program.” This caveat and the qualification recommendations should be made explicit, early in the book.

The book *Helping Schoolchildren Cope with Anger: Second Edition*, is rich in knowledge and research supporting a cognitive behavioural approach to the management of anger and aggression in children. Unless the recommended in-service was attended, this book should not serve as a manual for group therapy with aggressive children.

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