

Autism and understanding

By **Walter Solomon with Chris Holland and Mary Jo Middleton**
Published by Sage Publications **£23.99**

Author Walter Solomon is a father inspired to write about his son and the educational programme which the author feels was crucial to his son overturning the experts' expectations to become an employed, happily married man.

He puts his case convincingly, leading you into an understanding of the method, rather than trying to define it up front. The programme, whether you call it the 'Waldon Approach' or 'Functional Learning', seems to be effective for any problems with learning. These include autism, learning disabilities, short attention spans, or, to use a deliberately old-fashioned term, 'bad behaviour'. I don't just mean challenging behaviour

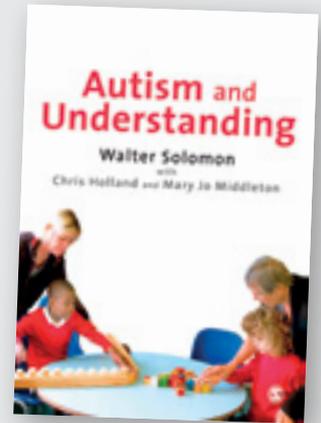
— even the disadvantaged living in childrens' homes can benefit. The text even mentions successful use with stressed grammar school pupils.

The method is founded on the idea of teaching people lessons that are appropriate to their developmental age. This could be ten years younger than their physical age for hammering pegs into holes and ten years older than their physical age for sorting random pictures into multi-dimensional sets. That is a crucial thing about autism: what the professionals call "an uneven developmental profile". The method also attempts to show people activities that they have never tried, and to make all learning intrinsically rewarding, avoiding praise and other extrinsic rewards. Inevitably, it is open to the criticism that a person's development is not predictable and those who

'benefited' from it would have improved anyway. However, the concept seems sound and the research is progressing.

Solomon's style is quite turgid, but the content is so important that you should persevere. Fortunately, after the first fifty pages of biography, much of the book is in the form of interviews and Solomon's easy conversational style comes across in these long, easily read sections. This is a book I am going to treasure.

The Goth, editor of *Asperger United* magazine



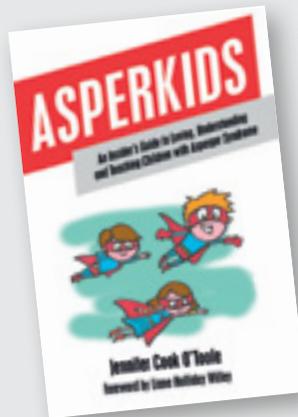
Asperkids

By **Jennifer O'Toole**
Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers **£13.99**

In my role as Autism Resource Centre Manager for the NAS, I meet many families and am constantly looking for good books and resources to recommend.

I was very keen to read *Asperkids*, having heard about Jennifer O'Toole following her recent talk in the UK. As a parent and as a woman who received a late diagnosis, she provides a unique and insightful look into life with Asperger syndrome from many perspectives.

This book is a must read for parents and professionals alike as it provides hands-on tips about how to engage your child or young person in learning using their special interests as



a motivator. O'Toole describes an Aspie's special interest as "that crack in the world, a route by which she can slip away anywhere but here and now" and suggests many techniques to help with school work and life skills.

The style of writing is warm and funny but also describes some difficult challenges, from bullying in the playground to the misunderstandings of people who come into contact with the family. After a phone call from the school following a meltdown, a teacher asks the family "if they ever discipline this child?" The dad's response is priceless and sums up the thoughts of many parents who are presented with this same question.

O'Toole offers the reader a greater understanding of what it's really like to live with Asperger syndrome and, most importantly, how we can take that imaginary leap into the mind of an Aspie. She describes her aim as "unlocking the precious, precocious potential of kids with Asperger syndrome" and this book does just that.

Deborah Garland, NAS Autism Resource Centre Manager, Newcastle

 **Asperger United**  To request a sample copy of **Asperger United**, write to:
The Membership Team,
The National Autistic Society,
393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG
or telephone 020 7903 3563
or email membership@nas.org.uk

Did you know that there's a free quarterly magazine produced by and for adults for adults on the autism spectrum? The magazine is called **Asperger United and is published four times a year (in January, April, July and October).**