



Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism

Barry M. Prizant , Tom Fields-Meyer (With)

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Winner of the Autism Society of America's Dr. Temple Grandin Award for the Outstanding Literary Work in Autism

A groundbreaking book on autism, by one of the world's leading experts, who portrays autism as a unique way of being human—this is “required reading....Breathtakingly simple and profoundly positive” (*Chicago Tribune*).

Autism therapy typically focuses on ridding individuals of “autistic” symptoms such as difficulties interacting socially, problems in communicating, sensory challenges, and repetitive behavior patterns. Now Dr. Barry M. Prizant offers a new and compelling paradigm: the most successful approaches to autism don't aim at fixing a person by eliminating symptoms, but rather seeking to understand the individual's experience and what underlies the behavior.

“A must-read for anyone touched by autism... Dr. Prizant's *Uniquely Human* is a crucial step in promoting better understanding and a more humane approach” (Associated Press). Instead of classifying “autistic” behaviors as signs of pathology, Dr. Prizant sees them as part of a range of strategies to cope with a world that feels chaotic and overwhelming. Rather than curb these behaviors, it's better to enhance abilities, build on strengths, and offer supports that will lead to more desirable behavior and a better quality of life.

“A remarkable approach to autism....A truly impactful, necessary book” (*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review), *Uniquely Human* offers inspiration and practical advice drawn from Dr. Prizant's four-decade career. It conveys a deep respect for people with autism and their own unique qualities. Filled with humanity and wisdom, *Uniquely Human* “should reassure parents and caregivers of kids with autism and any other disability that their kids are not broken, but, indeed, special” (*Booklist*, starred review).

Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism Details

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Petra X says

This book had One Good Idea and exploited it from every angle. Maybe that works for a text book and maybe it reads well as positive enforcement for someone dealing with a child with autism but it didn't work for me.

The One Good Idea was that obsessions should be viewed as Enthusiasms. Encouraging these enthusiasms, such as being obsessive about train timetables can be used as behaviour modifiers both by bribery, 'if you don't talk to anyone about trains but go along with them for the next hour we will look up timetables for the Great Northern after that' etc. Also, the timetables could be used to foster an interest or at least an ability with reading, maths, communications etc. It was a very good idea. The child who was train-obsessed later got a job advising customers on train travel and did very well.

All the children mentioned in the book who had obsessions that were treated as enthusiasms did very well in life, and I feel that's unrealistic but I can see why parents with children with autism would love this book. It is at least positive. But I wonder how many children with autism and enthusiasms and are unable to fit into school will ever really achieve even a semi-independent life and career? I wonder how many of these children are really one's with fairly extreme Asperger's Syndrome?

From everything I've read and seen from children who come into the shop there are three 'classes' of diagnoses. Those with autism who really do have their own worlds and don't have any desire to communicate anything outside of what they want. All education is towards developing their communication and interpersonal skills.

The second group are those with Asperger's syndrome who really do want to communicate but only what they want to and have no idea that other people are turned off by their endless communication of their enthusiasms. They are quite educable but need a lot of behavioural modification and they do come across as odd. (These are the majority of these sort of kids who come to the shop because they like books on their enthusiasms). As adults they are a bit odd but so what?

The third group (of which I was supposedly part) have no enthusiasms, aren't weird but don't get along with other kids in ways that are expected. They don't seem to quite get other people or put their foot in it a lot and they will quite happily shut up about their enthusiasms if requested. I don't think these people are Aspergers at all, it's just a different personality type. Silicon Valley is supposedly populated with people with this personality type. They should just stop diagnosing this as a disorder and accept we are all different and many of us need help in some area or another (dyslexia, unco-ordinated, can't do maths etc).

As it turned out, I don't have Asperger's in any form, I have Prosopagnosia. The majority of people don't know about it, including those who happily diagnose Aspergers. (When my son was in school it was ADHD, now it's Aspergers). Lots of people with it have no idea at all until they grow up, me and Heather Sellers, the author of *You Don't Look Like Anyone I Know*.

Was the book worth reading? Yes, for the one good idea. But if you dnf'd it after a couple of chapters, you wouldn't miss anything.

Brenda Brown says

In addition to giving fantastic information on Autism, this author gives first hand knowledge of how to handle different situations that might occur with a child. He has gone into homes, schools, institutions and after studying different children in their environment, has discovered some unique ways to empower the child and enlighten the teachers. Teachers who have studied these behaviors need to listen to the child and then be able to access the situation based on the child's needs/experiences/language and other communicable techniques. The author is brilliant in this book to give examples of his own observations and how issues might best be handled. Loved the book....recommend to every teacher/parent who might suspect that they have an autistic child. It is certainly a book that a parent of an autistic child needs to read.

Val says

MUST-READ! Absolutely a must read for every parent, family member, educator, provider of care, and even those who want to educate themselves with Autism. Finally a book with such deep understanding of Autism Spectrum for what it is: ..."Autism isn't an illness. It's a different way of being human..." Indeed! Truer words have never been written. Highly recommend reading this wonderful, compassionate book.

Jennifer says

If I could give this book six stars, I would. Every parent of a newly diagnosed child should be given this book to read. This book is wonderful and I wish I had it to read nine years ago, when my son was diagnosed as autistic.

I love how the author delves into the reasons why people with autism do some of the things that they do- echolalia, "stims", having a "fidget" object they carry around with them, or needing to stick to a routine, and having what to us NT's seem like unusual or illogical fears (as I write this, my son is walking around expressing deep worry that a tornado will hit the spray park where he is going to swim- tornadoes are a fear of his. We will show him, several times, the forecast that says it will only rain, no tornadoes). He gives the reader advice and insights from adults on the spectrum, which is a real treat, and he treats parents with respect instead of talking to us like we are stupid. The best thing for a child with autism (or a teenager, or an adult) is to have a team of individuals- parents, extended family, faith community, schools, employers, therapists- he or she can trust- trust is a huge theme of the book, and an insight that blew me away because it made so much sense- and who are all committed to his or her success in self-determination and in living as independently as possible.

I quit reading "autism" books a long time ago, with the exception of Temple Grandin's books. I got so incredibly frustrated at how much contradictory or flat out bad advice was out there, and how so many "therapies" claim to cure or dramatically reduce "symptoms" of autism, if only you are willing to cough up the big bucks and huge amounts of time in the hope that your child might be "cured". As a parent of an adolescent with autism, I have probably heard it all at this point. The author gets it- I don't want my son "cured"; I want him to acquire the skills he needs to live a fulfilling life in the community. Instead of the wild and controversial claims of Jenny McCarthy et al, the author of this book offers real insight into the way

my child views the world, which helps me find real ways to advocate for him, guide him and teach him how to navigate through his life.

Finally, I love how the author encourages families to get out into the world and give their child new experiences. I have met so many families who never leave the house because they are afraid of what other people will think and/or how their child will respond. This is advice families need to hear.

Amanda says

As an autistic individual, this book cannot be more amazing! Every parent, teacher, relative, and professional must read this book! Dr. Barry Prizant finally puts into words what I and many others as autistic individuals already knew but could not say.

Whitney Holley says

Absolutely wonderful book about being a positive influence in an autistic child's life. I found myself marking and highlighting so many passages. The stories shared cover all age ranges- Into adulthood- and I found that particularly helpful. Mostly this book is an affirmation that as a parent I have a say in my child's life and I can trust my instincts. Prizant must be a deeply empathetic human being and his philosophy on autism can be applied and used to better parent and teach all human beings!

Lisa Ahn says

Definitely one of the best books I've read on Autism and Asperger's. Prizant takes a very inclusive, whole-child approach. He emphasizes observation and listening in order to understand individuals with autism. I love his focus on asking "why" in the face of puzzling behaviors. He looks for underlying stressors and is always searching for ways to communicate and help. A very positive approach.

Eshaneh says

Finally, we have a truly humanistic perspective on autism. If everyone read this book, there would be a lot more tolerance and understanding of neurodiversity in the world. Prizant provides readers with a deep understanding of the strengths, challenges, and coping efforts of individuals with autism. He carefully balances an understanding of autism as a difference in neurological wiring with an understanding that the word autism does not limit or wholly define an individual. All autistic behaviors are human behaviors, first and foremost, and Prizant points out how the behaviorists have been focusing on "deficits" a bit too much. He emphasises the importance of emotional regulation and the importance of parents and therapists who have an intuitive sense of how to connect with a child with autism. The only thing missing from this book is a reference to nonviolent communication (NVC), which would be a natural complement to Prizant's SCERTS model. Otherwise, I applaud Prizant for going against the behaviorist stream, and helping society embrace neurodiversity.

Xtie Vosseller says

Quick, brilliant read for ANYONE... everyone.... all of you. :-)

Erin says

There were a lot of good thoughts and good advice in this book but I was put off by some of the language and Prizant's surprising lack of familiarity with autistic culture - specifically that he is either not aware or doesn't respect that autistic people have reclaimed words like "autistic" and "stimming." I think it is still an excellent read for professionals, parents, teachers, and anyone else who needs to have explained to them that autistic people have thoughts and feelings just like any other human being.

Janis Hill says

I would like to thank Simon & Schuster for providing me with a free ARC of this book via Netgalley in exchange for an open and honest review.

If you haven't guessed from my rating – this is a fantastic book! Everyone – and I do mean EVERYONE – who interacts with children and teens on the spectrum should have a copy of (and read) this book.

How wonderful to see such an excellent mind set about how to approach and interact with those on the spectrum. As a mum to a newly diagnosed HFASD son I have approached reading books on the subject with trepidation. Mostly due to feedback from adult friends on the spectrum as to how WRONG books on ASD can be. Some of that trepidation is due to me reading books that treat ASD as a traumatic loss to you, the parent, and other stupid mindsets that go against my grain and concepts of how I want to help raise my son.

‘Uniquely Human’, on the other hand, is brilliant. The author Mr Prizant shares very similar outlooks on how to interact with those on the spectrum and I have gained a lot of positive information and insight from his book.

It allows the reader to learn more about ‘the spectrum’ without pigeonholing our children to specifics. Not all ON the spectrum will act in a text book fashion, and ‘Uniquely Human’ explains this, embraces this and tries to help you realise that it's perfectly fine. Who needs text book children? Either on the spectrum or off! I just want happy and healthy children who I can help learn to grow, function and achieve their own goals in life. And I really do feel this book will help me find some of the best methods to use to help aide my son on his journey.

A really insightful and helpful book.

Would I recommend this book to others? Yes I would. In fact, as I've been reading it I've already been talking about it with my son's teachers and other ‘helpers’. As I've said already, anyone who interacts regularly with children on the spectrum should read this book. It's not a manual to ‘Autistic children’ – it's a guide to help you be a better person when working with those on the spectrum. The book is there to help you,

the reader, understand the spectrum better, rather than try and manipulate a child on the spectrum away from their natural behaviour to something you would prefer.

Would I buy this book for myself? Yes I would. And by the time you read this review it will probably be on my book buying wish list! I want to own a copy I can turn to when needed to help me remember there might be a better way to approach certain situations. I want my husband to read it so that when I send him a text saying 'dysregulation moment' he knows what I mean and is as prepared to help as I am! I want my whole family and friends to read it to realise I'm not teaching my son weird and quirky habits... I'm simply working along and encouraging his own growth and self-worth through his own naturally quirky habits. Weird is good in our house. We embrace weird and are proud of it.

In summary: Not a manual on how to raise a child or teen on the spectrum. 'Uniquely Human' is more a helpful guide for you (the non-spectrum person) to get a glimpse onto the spectrum and to learn to adapt to and respect your child's outlook on life. I cannot sing praises high enough for this book!

Susan says

If you could only read one book about Autism this is the one.

Ashley C. Nemec says

Everyone that lives or works with a person with ASD has to read this book.

As a professional working in various educational programs for students with ASD, I often felt as if there was something more we can be doing to benefit these kids. Dr. Prizant has given a voice to the various strategies, thoughts and responses I've used in my career I just viewed as gut reactions while working in the field. There are times I have felt criticized by colleagues in the field for not following a popularly accepted approach as closely as I should, it is nice to know there is a niche for me out there and my thoughts are validated by research in child development and in the field of autism. Thank you for sharing your approach Dr. Prizant, this is a resource I will refer to a hundred times over.

Audra says

One of my favorite books for helping families and staff to understand and truly support children and adults on the spectrum. Very respectful, full of appreciation for the beauty of diversity, and a fairly easy read. Recommend for anyone new to autism, especially, but really anyone who has someone with autism in their life.

Mike Freeman says

Necessary book offering alternative philosophies to ABA and other rigid ASD therapies. Stresses the

importance of imprinting positive emotional memories and fostering general happiness in kids to both enrich their lives and - incidentally - promote learning growth. Well-written and structured by someone with over forty years of field work. Recommended for parents, therapists, and teachers.
