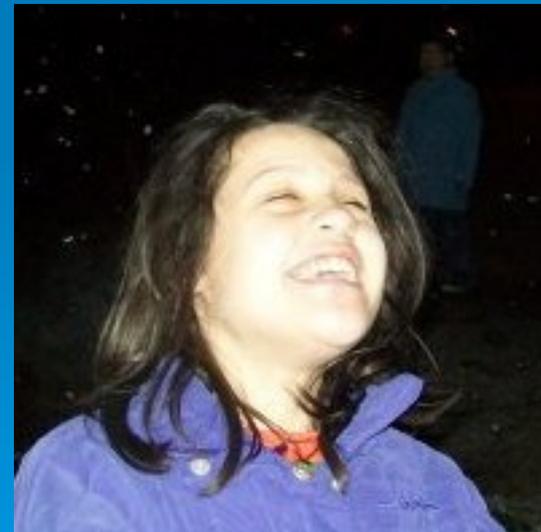


# From Social Skills to Therapy: A Counselor's Role in Autism

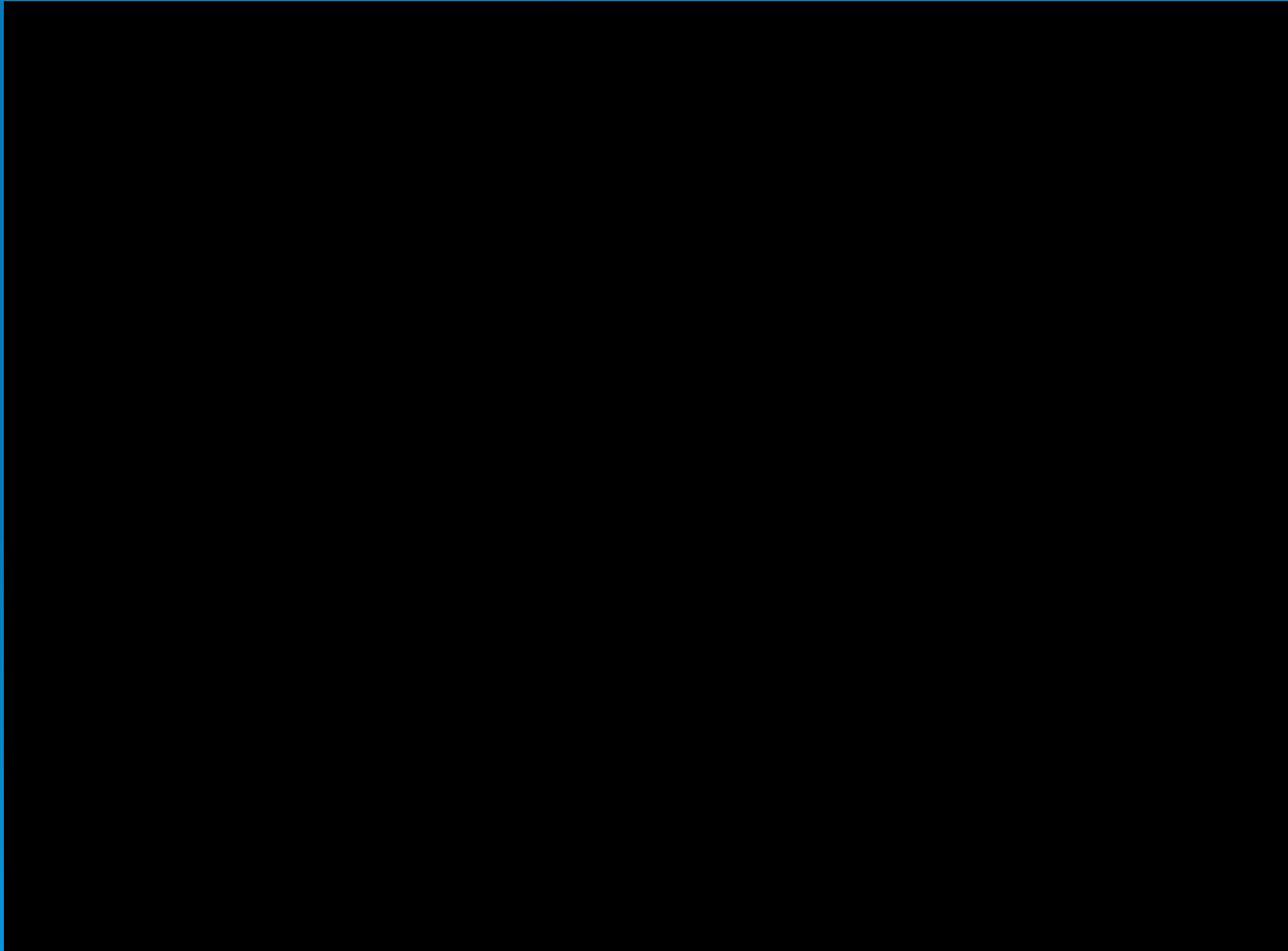
Jennifer McGee, MA  
Doctoral Candidate  
Counseling Psychology  
Argosy University

# Jennifer McGee



# Savannah Morning News

## May 2009



# Myths and Misunderstandings about Autism

- Progress means that the child doesn't have autism.
- Children with autism do not smile at you.
- Children with autism do not show physical affection.
- People with autism do not notice others and don't pick up cues from peers/adults.
- People with autism do not want friends.
- People with autism could talk if they wanted to.

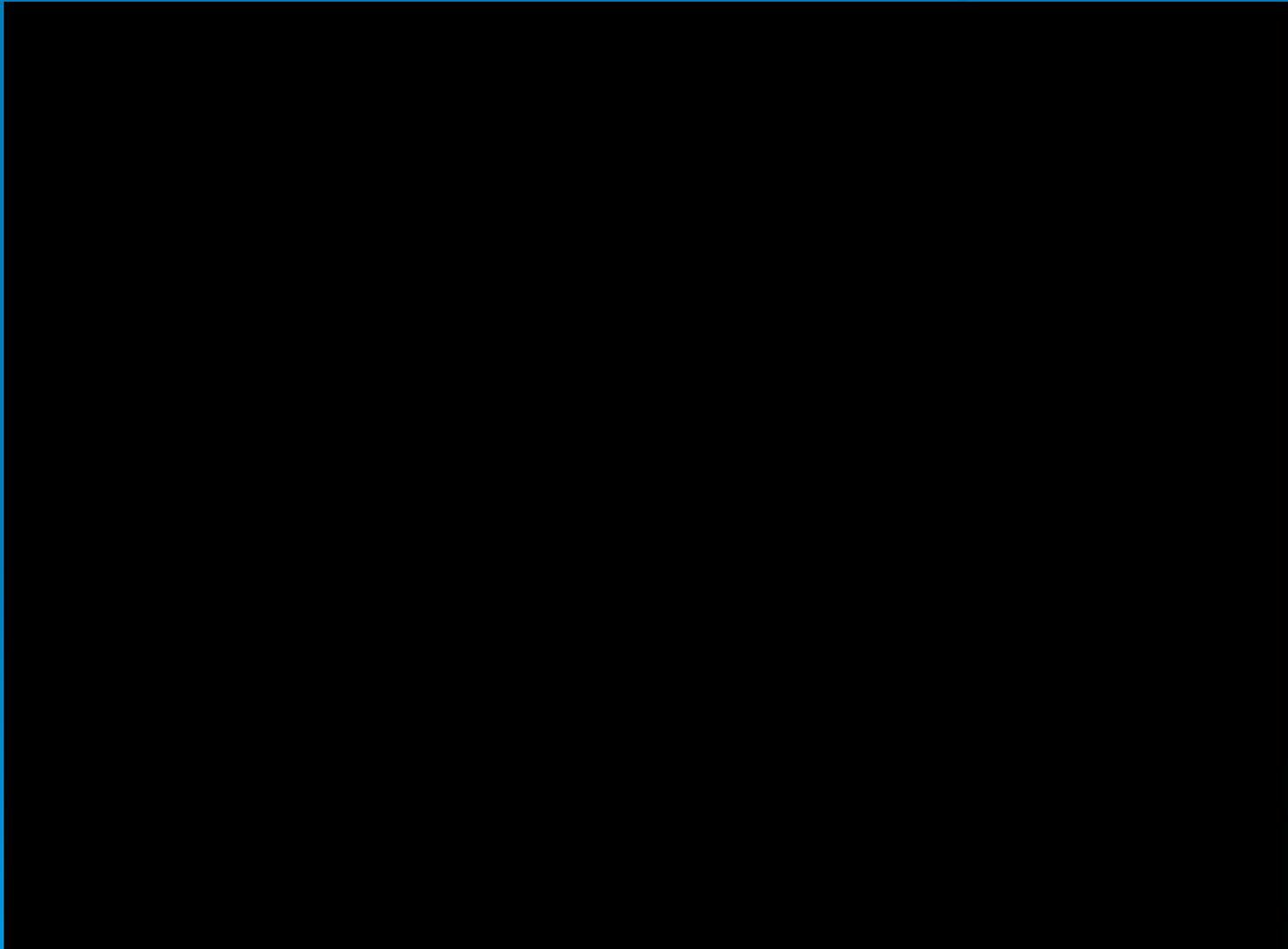
# Myths and Misunderstandings about Autism

- When a child with autism does not respond to a question/direction to which he has previously shown a correct response, he is being stubborn/non-compliant/obnoxious.
- Autism can be outgrown.
- Autism is an emotional disability.
- Children with autism cannot learn.
- Bad parenting causes autism.
- Autism is rare.

# Counseling Issues

- Common themes of families who seek services for themselves
  - Common themes of families who seek services for their child or adult with ASD
  - Comorbid conditions
  - Modifying interventions
- 

# NAA Never Give Up PSA



# The needs of the family

- Stress
  - Need a different set of parenting skills
  - Marriage challenges
  - Sibling challenges
  - Depression
  - Grief
- 

# The view of a Sibling



# The needs of the person with ASD

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Violence
- Isolation and difficulty forming relationships
- Communication skills
- Social Skills and Theory of Mind or Executive Functioning

# Research

- Many teens with autism rely on school-based mental health services, a new study finds.
- Researchers analyzed data from a 10-year study of more than 920 adolescents with an autism spectrum disorder who were enrolled in special education. The participants were aged 13 to 17 when the study began in 2000.
- More than 46 percent of the teens with autism used a mental health service in the past year for behavioral issues and other conditions, such as anxiety and depression. Of those, 49 percent used mental health services at their school.

# Research

- Several studies have indicated that the most common psychiatric diagnosis among those with Autism and Asperger Syndrome is depression (Ghaziuddin, Ghaziuddin, Greden, 2002). Although major depression is the most common condition, anxiety disorder, ADHD, bipolar disorder, and other types of mood disorders have also been reported, however, the true prevalence of these disorders in the Autism population is not known (Ghaziuddin, 2002).

# Research

- The reason for referral is often presence of what is thought of as a behavior unrelated to the diagnosis of Autism. Ghaziuddin states:
- A major source of concern to parents and teachers is the presence of additional behaviors and psychiatric problems in this condition. **It is seldom that persons with AS are referred solely for an evaluation of their social or communication deficits.** Quite often the main reason for referral is the presence of other disabling symptoms, such as hyperactivity, aggression, depression, or onset of bizarre behavior (2002).

# Research

- While the initial referral is for the additional behaviors, studies suggest that these behaviors may compound the social difficulties of individuals with ASD (White, Albano, Johnson, Kasari, Ollendick, Kiln, Oswald, & Scahill, 2010).

# Research

- Diagnosing these additional behaviors is sometimes difficult because currently there are no standardized instruments for the Autism population for the diagnosis of depression or anxiety (Ghaziuddin & Greden, 1998). Despite this, it is still important to identify these comorbid conditions because it may affect the long-term outcome of autism (Ghaziuddin, Ghaziuddin, & Greden, 2002).

# The right support

- People with Autism are unique. They think differently, process information differently, respond differently and see the world differently. Understanding who they are makes all the difference in working with them effectively.
- Counseling addresses the emotional health of the family.

# What is it like to have Asperger's?

- “Imagine playing a computer game where around every corner is something you have to decipher before you can move on to the next level. Now imagine living that computer game day in and day out. Take a moment to feel how exhausting that would be. Picture how stressful it would be to never know what was next, what was going to jump out at you or what test might stump you and keep you in that spot for a long time. If you can envision this, then perhaps you can relate to what it must be like to have AS. To have a life that is a constant game of strategy and endurance.”

People with Asperger Syndrome

-Gail Hawkins, How to Find Work That Works for

# Depression/Anxiety

- Difficulties with social skills, language and obsessive behaviors become more problematic and may leave them vulnerable to teasing
- If the adolescent is aware of their diagnosis, they may have difficulty dealing with it or understanding it
- If the adolescent is not aware of their diagnosis, they may just have the sense that they know they are different and that forming relationships is something that is really difficult for them
- Individual and Family counseling is very important and necessary in dealing with these issues.
- Very high incidence of depression in this population

# Stress Management

- Obstacles, among other things, are causing stress...
- Can the individual recognize when they are feeling stressed (physical/emotional)?
- Can the individual recognize situations that may cause them stress?
- Does the individual have ways of dealing with stress?
- Do these skills need to be taught?

# Common Stress Triggers

- Being misunderstood
- Crowds
- Noise
- Confusion/chaos
- Unstructured time
- Social Situations
- Change
- Distractions such as a busy environment

# Obstacles of Asperger's: Theory of Mind

- Individuals with AS have difficulty understanding how others feel and think. Problems with perspective taking or with viewing a situation from “someone else’s standpoint” is called a theory-of-mind problem.

# Theory of Mind Problems:

- Difficulty explaining own behaviors
- Difficulty understanding emotions
- Difficulty predicting how others feel or think
- Problems understanding the perspective of others
- Failure to understand that behavior impacts how others think and/or feel
- Problems with social conventions such as turn-taking, politeness, and social space
- (Gagnon, Elisa, 2001: Powercards)

# Example:

- My teacher says I'm rude, I think I am honest, I don't understand why I can't tell someone that they have bad breath, ugly hair, or to go away because I am busy.
- Joshua example- am I interrupting you?

# Obstacles of Asperger's: Problem Solving

- Individuals with AS have difficulty with problem solving skills as demonstrated by either:
  - Lacking problem-solving skills
  - Selecting the wrong problem –solving approach in a given situation
  - Not knowing when to change from one problem-solving approach to another

# Example

- KC has difficulty opening his locker. When the combination doesn't work, he just keeps trying over and over again. He doesn't know that after two or three unsuccessful attempts, he should try a different strategy such as asking a teacher or peer for help.

# Obstacles of Asperger's: Incidental Social Learning

- Individuals with AS are poor incidental social learners, they do not pick up clues from the environment for appropriate behavior and if they learn social skills at all, they often do so without fully understanding their meaning and context.
- They have difficulty generalizing knowledge and skills
- Example: sit down restaurant, forest gump

# Translate to difficulties in the workplace

- Difficulty beginning projects- unsure where to start
- Difficulty empathizing with others' thoughts and feelings
- Difficulty relating to and interacting with the authority figures
- Difficulty interacting in a team environment
- Difficulty multi-tasking
- Reluctance to ask for help
- Abrupt manner in expressing thoughts and ideas

- Difficulty seeing the full scope of a project
- Difficulty with unstructured time
- Difficulty with writing reports
- Overly sensitive reactions to feedback
- Low motivation to perform tasks of no immediate personal interest
- Perfectionism
- Poor manners
- Stress, frustration, and anger reaction to change or interruption
- Higher anxiety levels particularly when meeting new people or when encountering change or new situations

# Positive Attributes of AS

- Excellent rote memory
  - Easy absorption of facts
  - Generally good performance in math and science
  - Honesty
  - Rules-oriented, good work ethic
  - Detail-oriented
  - Hard working
  - Intelligent
- 
- The background of the slide is a solid blue color. In the lower right quadrant, there are several decorative elements consisting of concentric circles, resembling ripples in water. These circles are rendered in a lighter shade of blue and are arranged in a way that suggests movement or depth.

# Strengths=Interventions

## Communication and Language

- Individuals who receive social and communication skills training are better able to express themselves, understand language and become more skillful at communicating with others, increasing their likelihood of successful social interactions.

[www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)

# Intervention in General

- Be direct in your communication
- Make expectations clear
- Make consequences clear
- Be consistent

# What to do if I need help or have a question at work:

- 1. Sometimes I need help or have a question at work
- 2. Go to a safe person at work
- 3. Say “Excuse me, could you please help me?” and then tell the person what I need help with OR say “Excuse me, I have a question” and ask my question

# A Safe Person at Work

- 1. A safe person at work could be a co-worker
- 2. A safe person could be my boss
- 3. A safe person at work could help me with questions about work
- 4. A safe person at work can help me when I don't feel safe at work
- 5. I talk to my safe person at work about things that happen at work

# Ideas for Work Checklists

- 1. I want to keep my job and keep getting paid
- 2. Sometimes it helps to have a work checklist so I get everything done
- 3. I can ask a support person for help making my checklist
- 4. I can keep it on a clipboard at work or make copies for my wallet

# Intervention Strategies

- Scripting: pre-determined dialogues
- Role-play: Practice a “real event”
- Video-modeling
- Follow the rules, a work “rulebook”
- Flow chart or If/Then chart
- Anchor: a non-verbal cue for a particular response

# Research

- White et al., (2010) developed a manual based treatment plan that uses Cognitive-Behavioral techniques that not only focuses on anxiety but on social skill deficits in adolescents with ASD. MASSI: Multimodal Anxiety and Social Skills Intervention was developed recognizing that psychiatric symptoms such as anxiety may further impact the social functioning difficulty already experienced by those with ASD. This is the first program to target both social skill deficits and anxiety.

# Social Skills

- Why are social skills for individuals with autism so important? According to Murray, Ruble, Willis, & Malloy one of the major causes for unemployment for adults with autism was “a lack of social skills and inappropriate social behaviors” (2009, p. 109). According to Epp, children with autism are more likely to suffer from **depression** and have an increased risk of attempting suicide due to the chronic **anxiety** caused by the **stress** of social interaction they cannot manage (2008).

# Social Skills

- Webb, Miller, Pierce, Strawser, and Jones suggest that the social difficulties and behavioral problems often associated with autism socially isolates these individuals, only making it more difficult to learn new skills and form relationships (2004).
- Makes groups ideal

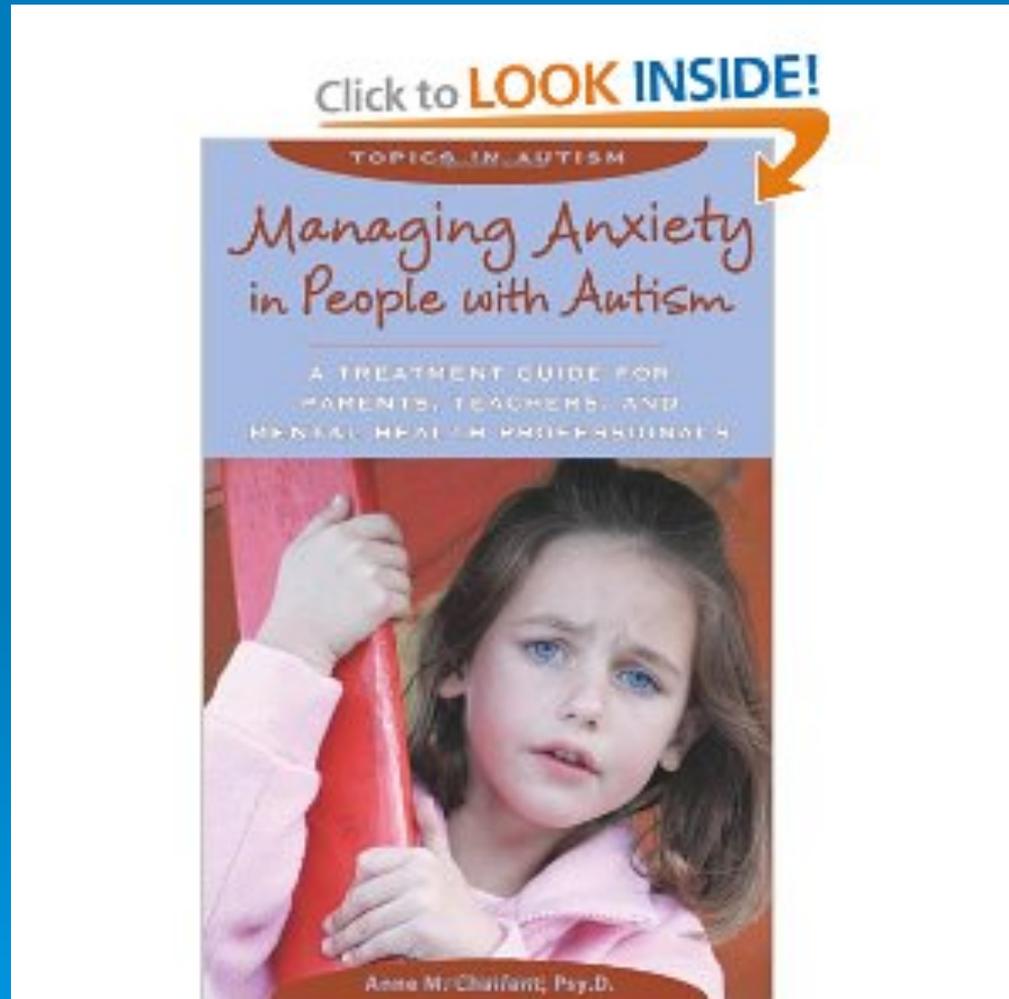
# Research

- Dowell & Ogles (2010) conducted a review of literature regarding the effects of parent participation in child psychotherapy and results indicated that combined treatments, those that include both the child and parent, produced more outcomes versus individual treatment of the child.

# Autism Risk & Safety

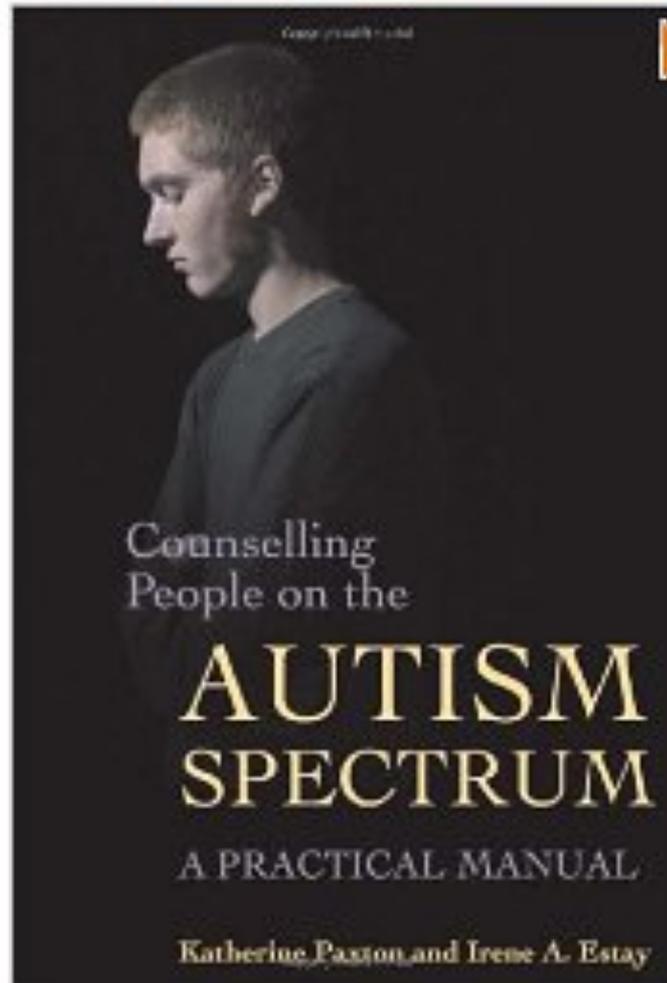
- Individuals on the autism spectrum are 7 times more likely to come in contact with law enforcement professionals than others.
- [www.autismriskmanagement.com](http://www.autismriskmanagement.com)

# Resources



# Resources

Click to **LOOK INSIDE!**



# Resources

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## GIRLS GROWING UP ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

What Parents and Professionals Should Know  
About the Pre-Teen and Teenage Years

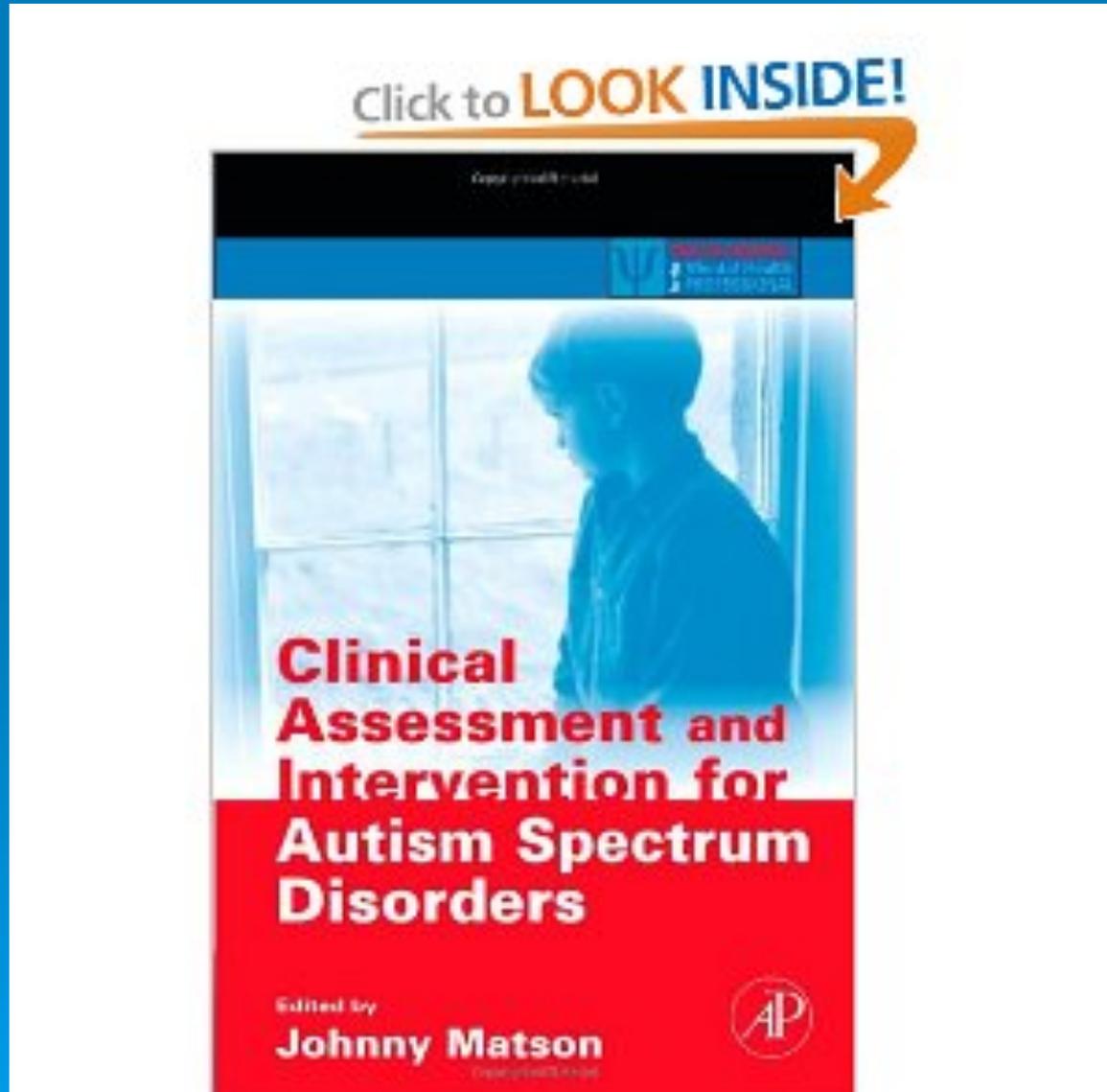


SHANA NICHOLS WITH GINA MARIE MORAWCK  
AND SAMARA PULVER TETENBAUM

Foreword by Liane Holliday Willey

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# Resources



- Jennifer McGee, MA
- The Mindspring Center
- 912.748.MIND
- [JenniferMcGee@mindspringcenter.com](mailto:JenniferMcGee@mindspringcenter.com)