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Shaul's "Your interests, my interests: A visual guide to playing and hanging out for children on the autism spectrum" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Shaul, J. (2020). *Your interests, my interests: A visual guide to playing and hanging out for children on the autism spectrum*. PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 111 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 97817859265001

Learning to play and socialize with peers can be a challenging part of a child's growth, even more for children on the autism spectrum. American author and clinical social worker Joel Shaul tackles many of these issues in his new book, *Your Interests, My Interests*. Shaul works with children and teenagers on the autism spectrum providing mental health services along with valuable resource materials. He holds a master's degree from the University of Louisville and previously worked for the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone developing educational resources. Shaul has written six children's books providing specialized workshops on the development of social skills and mental health methods for children with autism. *Your Interests, My Interests*, is a visual guide that aims to help socially challenged children develop methods and strategies to enable them to navigate social situations, learning how to improve how they play and spend time with other children.

The initial impact of this title is its visually stunning presentation. The author uses a mix of visual formats including photography and imagery, woven together with colorful texts and shapes. The page layout is clearly structured and at times symmetrical, ensuring that the information presented is clearly defined and easy to read. The first section of this book focuses on social interactions which may prove challenging for some children on the spectrum. A different personality is highlighted in each of the first six chapters, all of whom have a particular personal challenge that they are struggling with. For example, in chapter three the reader is introduced to Ana who spends a lot of time playing video games, and often feels more connected to those, than to her family. The reader is presented with tasks and worksheets enabling them to make comparisons between their personal struggle and Ana's, these activities assist them in finding ways to critically think through their personal issue to reach a solution.

The final three chapters develop certain elements of the challenges found earlier in the book, focusing on coping solutions for when children find things socially difficult. On one page, it addresses the negative feelings they may have when placed in an uncomfortable situation, while on the direct opposite page, it provides practical

options and emotional resolutions. This challenge continues with the reader being tasked to suggest solutions from a list of choices, helping the book characters to problem-solve how they can play and hang out with other children. The final chapter features extra activities which include a challenge game, an activity finder, and a “memory file” task, all of which serve to deliver practical resources for the reader to consider.

Your Interests, My Interests is an innovative and beautifully presented book. Ideally suited for a child and parent to work through together, there are plenty of activities and learning sheets which are visually stimulating, colorful, and socially current. Although it is aimed at children with autism, it would benefit any child who may feel anxious in social situations with their peers. Its fresh and unique approach to problem-solving is a welcome addition to an ever-expanding landscape of new resources for children on the autism spectrum.

Reviewer

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