

**How To Understand Autism the Easy Way**  
**By Alex Durig, JKP, 2005**

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Autism is now described in great detail as a result of scientific research. Though we can identify the details of autistic perception and behavior, an understanding of these aspects of autism is critical to create a philosophy of parenting and teaching to avoid frustration and alienation. Social psychologist Alex Durig has found a straightforward way to explain the phenomenon of autism without having to have a background in psychology or science to understand it.

The positive outlook of this book is expressed in a passage in the introduction where Durig states, “We need to reexamine our assumptions of normalcy, because implicit in our assumptions of normalcy lies hidden the idea that the autistic person is an inferior person.” Durig points out that there is a full range of autistic perception - this may “underlie a number of other human conditions that are currently not associated with autism such as Alzheimer’s disease and various types of so-called mental illness.”

The book is based on two fundamental commitments: the ability to think logically is wired into the brain and every human being deserves trust, respect, safety and comfort. Durig suggests we need to become “autism friendly” – our normal world needs to find ways to help autistic people become more comfortable when in need of their services. It is us that need to adapt, not the person with autism.

Durig explores three different ways of thinking: social thinking, computer thinking and creative thinking. The main focus is on the first two ways of thinking. It is the varying levels of this thinking that determine a diagnosis. For example, an autistic savant would have very high levels of computer thinking and be low in social thinking. Someone with severe learning difficulties might be normal in social thinking but very low in computer thinking. The varying levels of social/computer thinking are demonstrated with visual graphs supported by real life examples to aid in understanding.

The second chapter of the book explains the six functions of perception – how social and computer thinking work together. Durig begins with the five functions of social thinking which are the who, what, where, when, and why of social interaction. These functions are defining the situation, locating social identities, seeing the world through the eyes of others, supporting assumptions of normalcy, and gauging time and timing. Each of these functions is explained clearly by using situational examples which make it easy for the reader to envision the concept. The sixth function is computer thinking which is doing the same thing in the same way. Durig uses an example of being in an elevator with people and what we do in that situation like look at our shoes and focus on the panel of numbers. When you read these examples, you see where the breakdown in social and computer thinking occurs for the individual with autism.

There are too many interesting points to list in the social and computer thinking chapters. There are a multitude of “ah-ha” moments such as people with autism see themselves through the eyes of others hence they refer to themselves in the third person. With social thinking being lower, the person will not be able to achieve a full sense of self.

“Exploring the Experience of Autism” takes the reader into the world of autism. There are some powerful realizations in this chapter. Durig states that autistic people are free because they are not defining social situations. Why is autistic behavior mired in rigid patterns? In order to frame meaningful experience, rigid patterns of behavior are developed in relation to the passage of time. Rituals of behavior may be fixated on time – 7 a.m. means get up, 7:15 a.m. means brush your teeth. The “Circle of Light” is the concept that information is coming in immediately and without warning for people with autism. For a normal person the circle, incoming information, is 50 metres away – for people with autism it is 10 metres away.

Durig has three keys to communicating effectively with autistic people – staying calm, reflecting their behavior, and reflecting their perception (referring to them in the third person). These three simple steps can alleviate potential behavior problems as highlighted in the author’s own personal experience with a boy at summer camp.

There is a chapter devoted to how all of us are autistic to some extent. This would be true because all of us have varying degrees of social and computer thinking. We live in a social world that is that is completely based on repetitive behaviors. The social world is based on if-then rules for action - actions that have become rote for us in social situations. We all have routines in our day and a specific way of doing things. Take those away and radically change the schedule and we feel uneasy and upset. By examining the world in which we live and how we live in it, we can get a view into the world of autism because the two are more closely related than we realize.

Durig rounds out the book by ending with how to teach and interact with autistic people. He refers back to the social and computer thinking and how that influences perception. He explores the differences in interaction with severe, high-functioning and slightly autistic people.

*How To Understand Autism the Easy Way* requires a beginning-to-end read because all of the chapters hinge on the first chapter’s explanation of social and computer thinking. The author does a beautiful job of explaining what it is like to autistic through the concept of social and computer thinking. The writing resonates respect and a positive outlook on this disorder. It is clear that Alex Durig feels a sense of awe about these individuals. The reader will feel this awe and develop a new awareness of autistic perception not explored in other books.

*Available for \$25.95 from the Autism Awareness Centre on-line or by calling Maureen Bennie at (403) 640-2710, fax (403) 451-9011, or by e-mailing [maureen.aaci@shaw.ca](mailto:maureen.aaci@shaw.ca).*