



Autism and Understanding



Autism and Understanding represents an unusual collaboration between the parent of an autistic boy, a doctor qualified in medicine, child and family psychiatry and psychoanalysis and a physiotherapist and special needs teacher. All are totally committed to the Waldon approach, promoting its value and using it in practice.

The book details the approach to dealing with autism developed by Dr Geoffrey Waldon based on his philosophy of the development of understanding and focusing on helping children learn how to learn. Included is a highly inspirational, detailed description of Walter Solomon's son, who was diagnosed with autism when two years old and labelled as 'basically sub-normal'. He has now made a success of his life, both in personal and professional terms. It also covers an introduction to Waldon's theory and working methods, and testimony provided by parents and teachers who have encountered autism and a range of learning difficulties.

The authors' fundamental purpose is to provide a critique of the Waldon Approach and its effectiveness in helping children to develop their understanding and their ability to do so. This, from practitioners' viewpoints, is valuable and provides added stimulation.

Autism and Understanding involves a three-part approach. The first four chapters describe the actual case of Walter Solomon's son Robert and his development from what was viewed by some as a seemingly hopeless case of autism and his transformation into a positive, constructive and

contributing adult. The aim of these chapters is to demonstrate that it was the early application of the Waldon Approach, based on the particular analysis of child development, which was the essential ingredient in the success story.

These chapters move chronologically through Robert's life, describing his:

- ▶ First four years: 1968-1972
- ▶ School years: 1972-1987 – nursery school through to high school graduation
- ▶ College years: 1987-1998 – in UK and Israel
- ▶ Work and marriage: 1998-2011

The second part of the book focuses on the detail of the Waldon Theory of Child Development. It starts with a distillation of Waldon's articles and papers and continues with a series of interviews used to illustrate and elucidate the theory. The interviews are primarily with teachers who have integrated the Waldon Approach into their everyday work. From these interviews, it is clear how adapting their methods of teaching special needs children and adults has delivered significant and substantial benefits to the learners.

Moving into the third part of the book, the next two chapters contain a series of case studies of students on the autistic spectrum and then studies of students with a variety of other physical and mental conditions. The second of these chapters demonstrates that the Waldon Approach is applicable to children with a wide range of learning and developmental delays.

These case studies are based on interviews with students, special needs teachers and class teachers, parents with success stories and parents where success has been limited – sometimes severely so. This gives a well-rounded picture of theory transforming into practice.

The final chapter concentrates on the theory and practice of a specialised orientation of the Waldon Approach, called Functional Reading. The Learning-How-to-Learn tools described earlier in the book are critical to the deployment of the Functional Reading methodology.

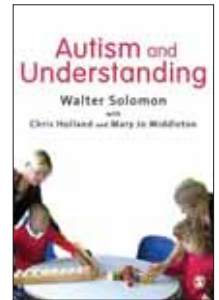
The author is not claiming that there is a 'miracle cure' for autism, but certainly counteracts any view that autism is a lifetime condition. Basically, it is shown that appropriate intervention can assist children with autism and other special learning needs to gain greater understanding of the world and learn how to take a constructive and contributing place in it. The Waldon Approach itself was developed in the 1970s, but appears to have been attributed with greater validation and appreciation in more recent research.

When Waldon died, a book drawing together his articles and papers was in preparation but was never completed. Walter Solomon regards his attempt here to be a simplified form of the theory which still remains true to the original. It is meant to be, and succeeds in being, accessible to parents and teachers.

Apart from this recent publication, short clips of old videos of Geoffrey Waldon illustrating the different learning-how-to-learn-tools and other of his techniques are available. Chapters five and six of *Autism and Understanding* are valuable in bringing out in depth and more clearly what the clips display. Also available are longer films of Waldon working in a school in Oxfordshire and these are very useful for parents and teachers aiming to use the Waldon Approach.

The website (www.autismandunderstanding.com/index.html) helps direct those interested to what is accessible online, along with the teaching aids used in the films (which can be obtained from the online shop).

It is apparent that the understanding of autism and how to treat it has developed considerably since Robert was diagnosed. Even so, this book amply exhibits that the Waldon Approach merits further investigation and application. It is a fascinating and highly readable publication.



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Walter Solomon with
Chris Holland and
Mary Jo Middleton
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Walter Solomon on
the book:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dz1KPoXDKJs

www.sageconnection.wordpress.com/2012/07/23/autism-author-spends-four-weeks-as-classroom-assistant/

Walter Solomon spent four weeks as a volunteer classroom assistant in four different schools within the Autism Resource Base of the Oxfordshire Education Authority. Undertaking one-to-one sessions using the Waldon Approach, Walter found the time to be an invaluable learning experience.

