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Autism Spectrum Disorders Site

Bonnie Sayers

BellaOnline's Autism Spectrum Disorders Editor

A Stranger Among Us

The book club selection for the **Autism Spectrum Disorders** site for August 2006 is A "**Stranger Among Us**" by Lisa Ackerson-Lieberman, MSW, LCSW. Lisa is also the parent of a young adult with autism.

The foreword is by Cathy Pratt, Ph.D. The subtitle is Hiring In-Home Support for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorders or Other Neurological Differences. There are fourteen chapters, a bibliography and a resources section covering 198 pages.

In home support covers a multitude of duties and chores one would do to assist the family who has a child with a disability. This can range from household errands, housecleaning, child care, personal care, cooking, driving, life skills training, therapeutic exercises and other related areas. These change as the child transitions into adulthood and can be on a part-time or full time basis or as live-in care.

I love the variety of checklists within A "**Stranger**" Among Us and will be utilizing several of them this summer. This book can also aid those families that have to staff their own behavior program within their home. It is helpful to those having Floortime therapists entering the home and those who are looking for respite workers.

Chapter 1 - Deciding What Kind of Care is Best for your child and your family - this includes a list of pros and cons for in-home care, along with the advantages of in-home providers. A disadvantage would be not enough room in home for privacy and siblings may resent attention the child gets. The pros include the chance for the child to get close to other people and more people to care about child after you die. I know exactly what that means as the single parent to two boys on the Autism Spectrum.

Chapter 2 - Defining your family culture and needs - there are related questions and an inventory to go over.

Chapter 3 - Clarifying Job Responsibilities - there are sample job

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descriptions for various age groups and questions to ponder in relation to the actual job description. Legal issues are also explored in this chapter.

Chapter 4 - Finding Quality Candidates - this includes sample flyers, advertisements, online job boards and how to do your own hiring. There are sample questions to ask an agency.

Chapter 5 - Determining Who to Interview - includes checklist for screening applicants. Suggestions include describing a typical day in your child's life to the interviewee and obtain relevant documents at the interview, which would be copy of driver's license, criminal background check, resume, car insurance information and certificates for first aid, etc.

Chapter 6 - Getting the most out of a face-to-face interview - covers the planning for the interview, what to observe and note during interview and red flags to watch out for. Note how the person dresses, what time they arrive and if the child is home for the interview their interest in the child.

Years ago I worked as an office manager for an insurance agency and interviewed dozens of people for a receptionist job and ended up with a male that was promoted into another job in less than a year, which meant more applicants again. Many of the young girls arrived dressed for the prom instead of an interview.

Now I have issues with the therapists coming into my home wearing revealing clothing and using cell phones during our therapy time. These are important issues to cover prior to hiring anyone. The impression worksheet in this chapter lists whether the applicant asked pertinent questions, demonstrated attentive listening and personal hygiene/neatness.

I am making copies of these checklists and forms within A "Stranger" Among Us".

Chapter 7 - Including Your Child in the hiring process - this covers promoting self-determination and acknowledge the child's feelings.

Chapter 8 - Choosing Your Final Candidate(s) - how to obtain work and personal references and worksheets to document these. This also discusses criminal background checks.

Chapter 9 - Making the Offer - this covers compensation, benefits, observation period and a written agreement, along with samples and a list of reasons for dismissal.

Chapter 10 - Communication Tools that keep everyone informed - there are sample daily checklists for age groups and a sample agenda for house staff meetings along with a sample of a performance review chart.

Chapter 11 - Training: Get Off on the right foot and keep going -

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medical emergencies, ground rules, hours and training along with resources.

Chapter 12 - Establishing Clear Relationship Boundaries - adjustment for parents, who's in charge, privacy and handling challenging behaviors.

Chapter 13 - When It's Time to say goodbye - terminating the worker and severance pay.

Chapter 14 - Everyone Wins - belonging to a family, growth, professional development and input from workers.

So far I have just skimmed through **A "Stranger" Among Us** as I have a stack of books to get to prior to this one, but I like the ease of locating the checklists I am in need of and learning about the process of hiring in home workers and observing their behavior.

This is a must have book for any family contemplating hiring in home workers for their child on the **Autism Spectrum**. The samples for the job flyers include one with a photograph of the child explaining what he is looking for and a bit about him.

We had a great experience a year ago in seeking someone to assist us at Sea World for a spring break trip. I received several resumes online and chose the candidate who was a perfect match for our mini trip. I joined a yahoo group in the area we were visiting and posted an advertisement in that area on craigslist.



August 2006