

## Book Review

**Title:** *Jumpstarting Communication Skills in Children with Autism: A Parents' Guide to Applied Verbal Behavior*

**Authors:** Mary Jane Weiss, Ph.D., BCBA-D & Valbona Demiri, Ph.D., BCBA-D

**Publisher:** Bethesda, MD, Woodbine House, Inc., 2011

**Cost:** Softcover; \$21.95; ISBN: 978-890627-70-6, 207 pages

**Reviewer:** Landry Fukunaga, M.A.

Individuals with autism experience a range of social and communicative deficits that may make day-to-day interactions with parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and professionals challenging. To address these challenges, many interventions focus on enhancing the functional communication skills of this population. For families of a child diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), navigating the array of services, intervention strategies, and treatment options can be overwhelming. *Jumpstarting Communication Skills in Children with Autism: A Parents' Guide to Applied Verbal Behavior* is intended as an introduction to one intervention strategy for parents of children between the ages of 15 months and 10 years.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) utilizes a scientific approach to collect observable data to support or negate the effectiveness of specific interventions with children with autism. Specifically, this book focuses on applying ABA to increase communication skills and introduces other intervention strategies such as alternative communication systems, video modeling, and social stories. Information is presented in a practical manner and covers sufficient depth to be useful to any individual involved in building the communication skills of a person with autism including but not limited to parents, family members, teachers, and professionals. As many psychological, speech, and linguistic terms and theories are new to parents, the authors are careful to provide clear and accurate descriptions of each. The examples of challenges experienced by particular children and families are especially helpful in illustrating how communication deficits present in individuals with autism. The authors also explain possible functions of repetitive speech, echolalia, and perseverative interests to help parents understand why their children engage in such behaviors, provide interventions to consider, and address common misconceptions regarding alternative communication systems.

I would recommend this book highly as a practical introduction and reference for new professionals, students, teachers, and educated parents. This book helps to demystify interventions for individuals with autism and explain how professionals set treatment goals, collect data, and make adjustments as skills increase. In addition to ABA approaches, the authors introduce several techniques such as video modeling, video self-modeling, and social stories. Using a variety of creative approaches to working with children with autism can help parents and professionals understand the child's preference and what produces the greatest results.

While reasonably priced for professionals and many families, the book might reach a broader range of families with children with autism if it were less than twenty dollars. Families may also have wanted the authors to spend more time discussing how they might begin an

intervention strategy at home, what data they might collect feasibly, and how that data might determine their next steps. This book is accessible to highly educated individuals with good English communication skills as the use of jargon may not be familiar or manageable for all families. The content could also be strengthened through addressing the range of therapies used to address speech and communication difficulties to help parents to be informed consumers who choose specific therapies based on need, fit, and preference.

*Jumpstarting* is useful to disability studies as the authors are careful to focus on functions that both desirable and challenging behaviors serve and the needs they fulfill. In this sense, the focus is on the individual and how that person can continue to get their needs met through an expanded array of communication skills or replacement behaviors for a disruptive perseveration. The authors specifically acknowledge that parents may be juggling a number of tasks and children, which makes it important to ask and receive assistance to allow parents time to implement interventions in a constant and consistent manner.

**Landry L. Fukunaga**, M. A. in Psychology, worked as a behavioral specialist and autism therapist for individuals with autism for five years in the state of Hawai'i and in the field of disability studies for eight years at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. She currently works as an evaluator of educational programs focused on serving diverse student populations and can be contacted at [lfukunag@hawaii.edu](mailto:lfukunag@hawaii.edu).