

## Book Review

**Title:** *Playing By the Rules: A Story About Autism*

**Author:** Dena Fox Luchsinger

**Publisher:** Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House, 2007

**Cloth, ISBN:** 978-1-890627-83-6, 32 pages

**Cost:** \$16.95 USD

**Reviewer:** Landry Fukunaga

A child with autism often takes center stage in the lives of family members trying to cope with the specific needs of their son or daughter. Siblings and family members are important in the lives of children with autism, despite a tendency to focus on the disability, interventions, and coping responses. Dena Fox Luchsinger's book *Playing By the Rules: A Story About Autism* focuses on the perspective of a sister during the course of an evening at home with her brother, mother and visiting aunt. This book is targeted toward children (ages 4-8 years) and is comprised of 32 pages of colorfully illustrated text.

From the viewpoint of a sibling, the amount of attention given to a child with autism can be irritating and often necessitates mediation through explanations for unusual behavior. Three major themes addressed by this book include social behavior, rigid rules, and the lack of verbal communication experienced by individuals with autism. This book adequately addresses these issues through interactions between Josh, a boy with autism, his visiting aunt, and his sister Jody.

Josh exhibits atypical social behaviors such as a lack of eye contact, walking away when someone is talking to him, and unfriendliness to unfamiliar people. His sister Jody explains to their aunt reasons why Josh might walk away (he only likes animal games) and the story also explains to the reader why Josh might be unfriendly (new people rub him the wrong way) however the lack of eye contact is never directly explained to the reader. Jody also addresses Josh's rigid play routines in this story and this explanation of Josh's rules is appropriate for young children. Jody acts as the facilitator in this story when explaining the use of communication tools to her visiting aunt who is unfamiliar with Josh's special way of interacting with new people. Adequate examples that demonstrate a lack of verbal communication skills in concrete ways appropriate for children include the use of *PECS* (Picture Exchange Communication System) and Josh's use of physical prompting for desired items.

*Playing By the Rules* demonstrates how a sibling can help facilitate interactions through communication tools and an increased understanding of the need for sameness and routines experienced by many individuals with autism. Interestingly, this book also illustrates how a sibling can use the attention directed towards a brother with autism to her own benefit which may not be the message intended by the author, such as when Jody gets a lollipop because her aunt took too long with her brother. Additionally, this book uses several examples that require the reader to interpret the mental states of others, which may not be appropriate for a child with autism. Overall, this book's merits

outweigh the weaknesses as it addresses issues important for a sibling of a child with autism to understand. *Playing By the Rules* uses an interesting perspective to teach siblings how important they are in helping others understand their brother or sister with autism. Ideally, this book is most worthwhile if an adult explains the situations that may be difficult to understand and helps the sibling come to conclusions about which of Jody's behaviors were morally right or wrong. Additionally, the colorful illustrations should make the book appealing to young children and worthwhile for parents.

**Landry Fukunaga, M.A.**, Evaluation Specialist, Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa worked as a direct support worker and therapist for individuals with autism for five years in the state of Hawai'i. Research interests include program evaluation, disability studies, non-verbal communication, and social interactions for people with autism. She can be contacted at [lfukunag@hawaii.edu](mailto:lfukunag@hawaii.edu).