



AsperTools: The Practical Guide for Understanding and Embracing Asperger's, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and Neurodiversity

By Harold Reitman

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If you ask Dr. Harold Reitman, labels are a lousy way to describe a unique human being, whether it's Asperger's, high functioning autism, ADHD, dyslexia, Tourette's or even the so-called neurotypical brain itself. One size does not fit all. Everyone's brain is different.

Helping others 'get it' when it comes to dealing with those with so-called learning disabilities is why Reitman has written this book. It's also why he wrote and produced *The Square Root of 2*, a movie about a college student who encounters?and fights?her school's unjust system. The film was inspired by the real events faced by his daughter and contributing author, Rebecca, when she went to college; her seizure disorder and?at the time?undiagnosed Asperger syndrome posed unique challenges not faced by most students.

After reviewing the scientific community's research, conducted over the last nearly 40 years, Dr. Reitman believes that it's time to not just accept neurodiversity, but to embrace it, and this book will help people do just that. It is the first book to offer simple tools, action plans and resources to help understand and deal with anyone whose brain is a bit different. The astonishing rate of autism births alone (1 in 68) means that society will have to adapt to neurodiversity, just as it has had to adapt to other cultural and racial differences. Our educational system, our workplaces, and society at large will no longer be one size fits all?each individual will have the opportunity to maximize their potential?and we will be the better for it.

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- Sales Rank: #605614 in Books
- Published on: 2015-04-07
- Released on: 2015-04-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.31" h x .47" w x 6.42" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 240 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"I strongly recommend Dr. Reitman's book *Aspertools* to people who are interested in understanding that each child is entitled to learn and develop in a way that enables that child to succeed. . . ."

?Abraham Fischler

President Emeritus, Nova Southeastern University

"I believe that *Aspertools* by Dr. Hackie Reitman is at the vanguard of changing peoples' perceptions about what's going on with our brains."

?Brian Udell, M.D.

Medical Director, The Child Development Center of America

"*Aspertools* is a big help. I think too many people don't know enough about Asperger's, the autism spectrum, and different brains in general. . . . I think Dr. Hackie Reitman himself wishes he would've known these tools when his daughter was growing up."

?Dr. Susan J. Mendelsohn

clinical psychologist and life coach

"As a professor of philosophy, I have taken some instruction from *Aspertools*. Dr. Reitman has given me a more profound grasp of the fact that one size does not fit all when it comes to learning, and that what one student can handle with aplomb might cause another to grind his teeth with anxiety."

?Gordon Marino

Professor of Philosophy at St. Olaf College,
editor of *The Quotable Kierkegaard*, and
writer, *The New York Times* and *The Wall St. Journal*

"When I read *Aspertools*, I thought, 'My gosh, Dr. Reitman is writing about my two teenagers!' This book has opened my eyes."

?Dawn D.

mother, medical technician

"*AsperTools* will help in so many ways. Without realizing it, Dr. Hackie Reitman has written a great book about *all* relationships and parenting."

?Dr. Lori J. Butts, J.D., Ph.D.

President, Florida Psychological Association, 2015, Director of the Clinical and Forensic Institute

"*AsperTools* brings hope and optimism to Aspies and their families! After so many books filled with diagnostic tools and statistical data, *finally*, here is a book about Asperger's syndrome that actually offers something helpful: how to cope with the various symptoms and overcome the challenges. The insight and practical advice from the multiple points of view—the Aspie, the parent, and the educator—provide a comprehensive yet easily readable work. Thank you, Dr. Reitman, for reaffirming that Aspies *can* and *do* lead productive, fulfilling lives!"

?Delfina B.

Aspie mom

"What an awesome story of impact and vision! On behalf of the 'KID' in all of us, thanks."

?Mark D. Dhooge

President/CEO, Kids In Distress, Inc.

About the Author

Dr. Harold "Hackie" Reitman is an orthopedic surgeon, a former professional and Golden Gloves champion heavyweight boxer, philanthropist, and a movie producer. His recent release, *The Square Root of 2*, is a fictionalized adaptation of his daughter Rebecca's challenges at college (TheSquareRootOf2.com).

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Introduction:

*Who Am I Calling an Aspie?
It ain't what they call you,*

it's what you answer to.

?W.C. Fields

Organizing this book was difficult for me. While I say and believe that every brain and every individual are different and unique, in the same breath I try to give chapters and characteristics names. My goal in writing this book is to give you real tools you can use in your real situation. To do that, I discovered I had to sacrifice complete uniformity, because one size does not fit all. So much of the knowledge I gained in my journey I learned from my daughter, who has Asperger's, among other issues. But the 'stuff' I learned applies to all brains to varying degrees. So I call these helpful items *AsperTools*, real tools to help. And those people I am calling 'Aspies' are not just those with Asperger's but all those with 'different' brains. You'll notice that while most chapters have similar construction, I did not make the structure of each chapter 100 percent uniform across the board, because, again, one size does not fit all, and readers will use each chapter differently and to varying degrees based upon their particular situations. Generally, I organized the book this way:

Chapter Topic: the main topic of concern

Helpful Hint: a quick take on the issue, with a doable fix

Imagine You're an Aspie (where applicable): the issue from an Aspie's point of view

Action Plan: the approach to take for the situation

Tip from ESE Teacher Pati Fizzano: a special insight from an expert teacher who works with 'different brained' kids every day and who 'gets' it

Thought from Rebecca Reitman: insight from the Aspie herself, with her discrete math degree, with her brilliance, with her other issues, and with her Asperger's syndrome

Putting all these things together, I think I found the winning combination. I know you don't want long-winded explanations; you need tools you can use right now that will make a difference in your life by understanding your Aspie and helping her to live a full and maximally independent life without you.

A funny thing happened on my way to finishing this book. In May 2014, I flew to Boston for the fortieth reunion of the Boston University School of Medicine Class of 1974 (although some other years were represented). You know how at a reunion it seems like everyone asks, 'So what are you up to?' It seemed even more so with me, because my career went in many different directions. In 1971, my first year of med school, I won the New England Golden Gloves heavyweight boxing championship. Then seventeen years later, as a full-time orthopedic surgeon, I turned professional heavyweight boxer and had my fifteen minutes of fame in the national media.⁷

Because of my short-lived fame, some of my classmates knew a bit about what I'd been up to. I filled them in by saying I was now involved in producing movies, documentaries, and reality TV shows, as well as writing books. When they asked what I was writing about, I'd tell them that I was finishing a book on Asperger's syndrome and different types of brains.

Invariably, the person I was talking with would launch into a story of her own and tell me about a family member who was 'a bit different' but who?she'd hasten to add?is definitely not Asperger's.' I'd ask a few questions. It would quickly turn into a game of figuring out which of the book's chapters applied to her 'bit different' someone.

For example, at one point a former classmate and his wife started to tell me about their daughter. The

exchange went something like this:

Me: 'How does your daughter do socially?'

Father: 'Well, she's not really a people person. What she really loves are animals.'

Me: 'Where did she go to school? What did she study?'

Father: 'She ended up in an agricultural school, where she studied animal husbandry.'

Me: 'Where is she now?'

Mother: 'She lives on a ten-acre farm with a menagerie of animals. She married a man ten years older than her. She's very happy.'

The word Asperger's didn't come up in the conversation, but it was like the proverbial elephant in the room, because people, especially parents, often run away from the stigma of a label such as Asperger's. It's a combination platter: part denial, part ignorance, part 'my kid is normal,' part struggle and admitting, 'I don't know what to do.' They feel shame/guilt/sadness. It's often easier to deny, call it something else, but there are many reasons, not the least of which is that the Aspie you care about will make it in the real world, and many do make it in the mainstream.

Later that evening I was introduced to an elderly couple from New Hampshire. When I told them I was a former orthopedic surgeon and had flown up from Florida, they asked how I liked retirement. I laughed and said, 'Although I'm not performing surgery anymore, I'm not retired and am writing a book on Asperger's.'

The man chuckled. 'I'm eighty years old and not retired either. I am still practicing pediatrics.'

I figured that a pediatrician with more than a half century of experience with children and teenagers might know a little about Asperger's and autism. So I asked if he had any interesting thoughts on the subject.

He said, 'Back in the fifties and sixties, people didn't know what autism was. The general feeling was that whatever it was, it was caused by emotionally frigid mothers.'

This led to a discussion of the PBS documentary *Refrigerator Mothers*, which chronicled the horrible ignorance of that day.⁸ The elderly pediatrician's theory was that autism has always been around, but, for whatever the reason, it is much more prevalent now.

As he said this, he was gazing at the floor rather than looking me in the eye. I thought it might have something to do with his being hunched over (the orthopedist in me suspected some kind of kyphosis of his spine). But as we were ending our conversation, he said something that suggested another reason for averting my gaze. 'I was always a bit different myself. Oh, they never put a label on me. But I think that today they'd probably label me as Asperger's.'

There's that L word again: LABELS. Let's return to the question 'Who am I calling an Aspie?' In the pages that follow, whenever I say 'your Aspie,' I'm referring to 'that person you care about, whose different brain might be helped by some of these chapters.' If the shoe fits, wear it. But forget the labels?focus on the characteristics of the individual and the tools to help her. In other words, don't view the *AsperTools* in this book as designed to help someone who has Asperger's; view them as designed to help an individual who has many special qualities and who also happens to have a few Asperger's traits, or even the whole enchilada we call Asperger's syndrome.

Don't forget: these are human beings with many endearing qualities. These 'bit different' individuals might have an additional characteristic that could be 'labeled' as Asperger's syndrome. But are you or am I defined in totality by a label or any one aspect of our being? No? Well, neither should Aspies.

7 Most people asked me how I could resolve the ethical dilemma of being a surgeon?whose mission in life is to follow the Hippocratic oath and heal people?and a boxer, who is put in the position of having to try to hurt his opponent. I started boxing when I was a kid. I won the New England Lowell Heavyweight Golden Gloves title when I was in medical school, but I turned down a \$100,000 pro signing bonus that would have required that I quit school. Then seventeen years later, when Rebecca was only four years old and undergoing a risky and, at the time, experimental procedure at the Mayo Clinic, stereotactic brain surgery, I made a promise to God that if she did okay then, I'd fight the toughest guys on earth so my brain could get beat up and not hers. I finished with a pro record of thirteen wins, seven losses, and six draws. I was once ranked number twelve for about ten minutes then got killed twice on national TV. I donated all purses to children's charities, raised awareness on many children's issues, met with the president of the United States to discuss children's issues, and failed in my delusional quest to become heavyweight champion of the world.

8 From the 1950s through the 1970s, the medical establishment believed that poor mothering was the root cause of autism. Doctors presumed that the obsessive behaviors of autistic children?rigid rituals, speech difficulty, self-isolation?stemmed from their mothers' emotional frigidity. The 2002 documentary explores the legacy of blame, guilt, and self-doubt suffered by a generation of women who were branded 'refrigerator mothers.'

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From reader reviews:

Dorothy Pearce:

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Johnny Sutton:

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