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Book By UCSB Researcher and Parent of Autistic Child Offers Strategies for 'Overcoming Autism'

Most of the symptoms of the baffling disability autism can be overcome with early intervention, professional treatment, parental involvement, and plenty of patience, say Lynn Koegel and Claire LaZebnik, authors of a new book that offers help and hope to the parents of children with autism.

Koegel, a researcher and clinical director of the Autism Research Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and LaZebnik, a writer and mother of a child with autism, present concrete ways to immediately begin improving the symptoms of autism and the emotional lives of those coping with the disorder in "Overcoming Autism:

Finding the Answers, Strategies and Hope that Can Transform a Child's Life" (Viking-Penguin Press 2004).

It is the first book on the market that explains in lay language how to help a child overcome the symptoms of autism.

Usually appearing in the first three years of life, autism causes difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities.

If left untreated, most children with the disability "will never be able to communicate or live a normal life," says Koegel, a highly respected expert in the treatment of autism.

"Autism was once considered a rare disability, but now affects as many as one in every 150 children," she says.

"It is now considered to be an epidemic."

Although the exact cause of the behavioral disability is still unknown, autism is the result of a neurological disorder that affects the function of the brain in the areas of social interaction and communication skills.

"Fortunately, socialization can be taught," says Koegel, whose treatment methods are personalized to each individual child with autism, and are "actually an approach to learning that would help all children."

Using positive behavioral support, Koegel's approach appropriately rewards any effort at speech or social interaction.

"When children with autism are motivated learners, their disruptive behaviors decrease, their overall responsiveness increases, they stop avoiding difficult social and academic situations, and are much happier and enthusiastic," Koegel says.

Koegel and her husband, Robert Koegel, a professor of education at UCSB, conduct research together on autism focusing on methods to successfully integrate children with such disabilities into the community.

"An accumulating number of scientific studies are showing that children with disabilities make greater gains both academically and socially when they participate in typical settings, such as regular classrooms, when compared to children participating in special education classes," Koegel says.

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Autism Research and Training Center

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