

Lisa Lieberman brings real-life experience to bear

Son helps mother write autism book

By [Deborah Moon Seldner](#)
Jewish Review



MOTHER AND SON — Lisa Lieberman and her son Jordan Ackerson share a moment over Lieberman's just-published book "A Stranger Among Us." Jordan, who has autism, provided much of the hands-on experience and many insights into the book on hiring in-home caregivers.

DEBORAH MOON SELDNER/*Jewish Review*

Lisa Ackerson Lieberman has shared her hard-won expertise on living with disability in the family through regional and national conferences, Jewish Family and Child Service's TASK program and now in a book on hiring in-home support.

Lieberman's disability awareness is stimulated in both her home life—which she shares with her husband Craig, who has multiple sclerosis, and her 16-year-old son Jordan, who has autism—and her private psychotherapy practice, where she specializes in helping her clients deal with disability in the family. She has years of experience in hiring caregivers for her family and in helping others find caregivers who support their families.

Lieberman has been involved in the local Jewish community as a member of P'nai Or and through JFCS's disability awareness program TASK. Lieberman said she was on the organizing committee headed by Gaye Schaefer and Eve Stern that created TASK in 1996 and has remained part of the advisory committee.

In her new book, "A Stranger Among Us: Hiring In-Home Support for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorders or Other Neurological Differences," Lieberman takes a systematic approach to evaluating a families' needs and values to create a specialized job description. Questions and checklists help readers develop a coherent plan for hiring a caregiver.

While the book was published by Autism Asperger Publishing Co., Lieberman said it is really applicable to anyone hiring an in-home caregiver.

"This book could be helpful to any parent trying to hire an in-home caregiver because any parent would want to take the care outlined in this book," she said. "I even shared it with a client hiring a caregiver for a spouse with a progressive disease who said it was very helpful. And that had nothing to do with children or autism."

The book begins with a series of questions to help a family define their own family culture. Articulating their own issues and values can help a family define qualities that will help a caregiver integrate into the household, she said. Lieberman includes sample answers from both her own family and other families from different backgrounds facing different issues.

For instance, answering a question about religious rituals, Lisa writes:

"We are Jewish and, therefore, practice Jewish rituals and traditions. Anyone supporting our son would need to be respectful of this and be sensitive to the fact that we are a religious minority within the context of a larger Christian culture. We have zero tolerance for anyone who tries to impose religious views and traditions on our son or our family. At the same time, we do not expect care providers to adopt our traditions or rituals."

Other questions to help families define their culture focus on the level of privacy, activity, structure and formality a family enjoys. Answers to the questions form the basis of a checklist to use when screening applicants.

Other chapters on hiring a caregiver include clarifying job responsibilities, finding high quality candidates, determining whom to interview, getting the most out of a face-to-face interview, including your child in the hiring process, choosing final candidates and making the offer.

Lieberman said the chapter on including the child in the hiring process is really just good parenting.

"It speaks to self advocacy and self determination," she said. "It will help any child become a better advocate regardless of if they have any diagnostic challenge."

That chapter also includes a section of Jordan's reflections on growing up with in-home caregivers, whom he said as he grew older became companions to help him navigate the world and learn the life skills he needed.

Asked how he felt about working with his mom on the book, Jordan said, "I thought it was very intriguing, very interesting because it's always good to talk about your own kinds of feelings and to hear your own point of view. . . . It also made me feel a little bit stuck sometimes because I had to really think about it (my experience with caregivers). It does take a lot of effort."

The book was officially released at the Autism Society of America National Conference held in Nashville, Tenn., July 13-16. Lieberman signed books at the conference and both she and Jordan were among the featured speakers. Jordan's topic was self-advocacy and how he communicates with non-autistic people about his autism. Lieberman offered a full-day workshop on tools for navigating the emotional journey when a family member is diagnosed with autism.

"A Stranger Among Us" is available from the publisher at www.asperger.net or 800-277-8254, or from Amazon.com for \$21.95. Autographed copies are available directly from Lieberman. Call her at 503-697-5956.