

# Book review

## *Making sense of interventions for children with developmental disorders: A guide for parents and professionals*

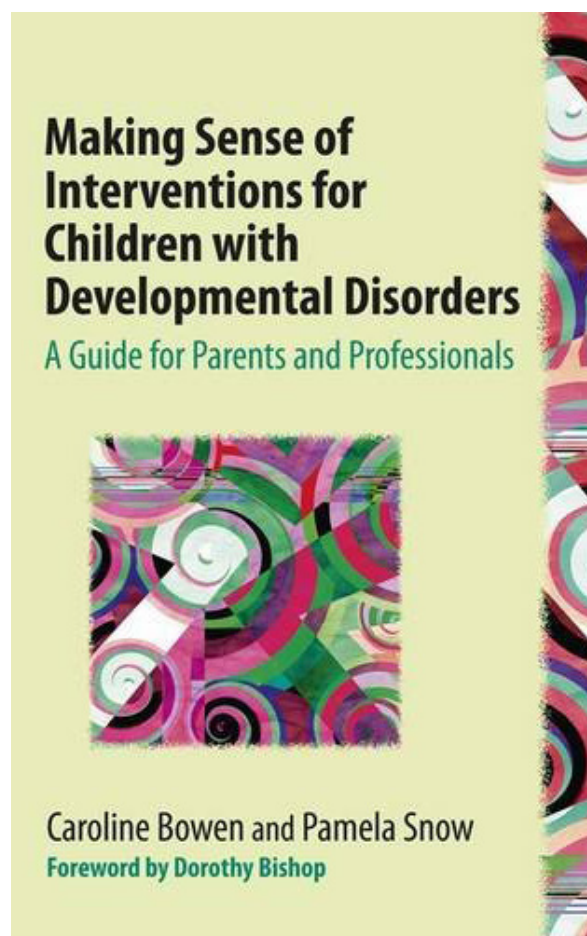
By Caroline Bowen and  
Pamela Snow  
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This book provides a guide through the maze of evidence-based interventions, unproven practices, fads, and downright quackery for parents and people who work with children with developmental disabilities. Given the expertise of the authors there is more focus on issues to do with communication, speech, language and literacy but other areas are well covered. I found the book easy to read with information presented in digestible chunks with clear headings. As one would expect with a book dedicated to promoting evidence-based interventions, the conclusions are drawn from quality research, and the reference list is a resource in itself. Overall it provides

a guide to becoming a critical consumer of the information presented to support interventions, of research, and of services delivering interventions.

The first chapter orients the reader to the aims of the book and provides a quick course in how to tell if an intervention does have scientific evidence behind it and the tactics used by practitioners who rely more on marketing than research. The second chapter address interventions aimed at making your baby smarter (just enjoy interacting with your child). The third chapter addresses executive control, attention, and working memory and explains these processes clearly before moving on to interventions for children with ADHD. This chapter covers old favourites, long shown to be ineffective, but that never seem to die such as learning styles and BrainGym through to new money spinners such as CogMed and its imitators that do not yet have a sufficient evidence base. Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset, becoming popular in schools, also gets a thumbs down at this point.

Interventions for autism spectrum disorders (and there are reasons why autism is called a fad-magnet) are addressed in Chapter 4. The authors recommend a collaborative approach and provide a broad overview of



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intervention approaches and the evidence available to support them (or lack of evidence for approaches such as dolphin therapy). Chapter 5 has a broad remit, covering behaving, feeling, and getting along with others, centred around how best to support children to develop self-regulation through interventions for behaviour problems and mental health issues. The authors point out the serious disadvantages of punitive and reactive solutions such as suspension in schools, boot camps, smacking, and restraint. They also offer some very sensible general principles for dealing with problem behaviour and an overview of parenting support programs that may be helpful.

A more specialist area, that of alternative and augmentative communication, (AAC) is addressed in Chapter 6. A useful overview of AAC is provided along with emerging AAC interventions. This chapter contains a thorough treatment of facilitated communication, its debunking through science, and how the science has been resisted by the true believers. Chapter 7 is about problems with voice, language speech and fluency. A little oddly I thought, homeopathy is addressed in this chapter. Bowen and Snow contrast those dubious interventions that few speech pathologists “would consider touching with a barge pole” (p.187) with those that many adopt. This discussion provides a generic warning that professionals cannot always be depended on to use evidence-based interventions, and this issue is picked up again later in regards to pharmacists and CAM treatments. The chapter also contains a section on children with Down syndrome.

Auditory processing and learning is discussed in Chapter 8. There is an interesting discussion around the issue of murky diagnosis and terminology and how this can encourage the use of unproven interventions such as auditory integration training. This

issue is picked up again in Chapter 9 on reading where there is a discussion of the usefulness of dyslexia as a diagnostic label. This chapter clearly describes what is involved in learning to read and contrasts interventions that lack scientific support such as the Arrowsmith program and Fast ForWord with those that do such as MultiLit. The chapter also discusses whole language approaches and Reading Recovery.

Dietary interventions, eating, and food are covered in Chapter 10 where food gurus come in for a serve and the issue of what impressive-sounding qualifications might actually mean comes under consideration. Popular, but unproven, diets such as gluten-

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and casein-free, the use of various supplements and chelation are covered. Again, rather oddly, intelligence and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences appear in this chapter.

Chapter 11 moves to providing advice to parents who are making decisions about which interventions to use and includes a seven-point safety check to use to evaluate claims about an intervention. There is also a section on what to do when a school adopts an unproven practice. Chapter 12 addresses similar issues in discussing how professionals make intervention choices, and the ethical issues around this decision making. Some of the cognitive biases that can affect evaluation of scientific evidence are presented. The difficulties of advocating for evidence-based practices in the context of professional associations and in client-professional relationships are included.

The epilogue provides two quick-to-use summary lists of interventions. One is for interventions that should be used cautiously because in the authors’ view, more evidence is needed to support them. The other list is those interventions that have no convincing evidence. The index to the book is practical and useable as it lists all the interventions mentioned in the text.

Along the way important issues are considered such as the opportunity cost of the “it won’t do any harm to try it” attitude, recognition of warning signs of quackery on websites, the dangers of interventions claimed to cure multiple disorders, one-size-fits all approaches, neurobabble, and the importance of careful and detailed assessment. Scattered through the text are boxes addressing pseudoscience alerts that give quotes from promotional materials containing content (red flags) that the intervention involved is likely to be dodgy. Overall, this is a very informative and easy to use manual for those seeking to use effective interventions.