

New book explores drinking, drug abuse, and addiction in the autism community

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DRINKING, DRUG USE AND, ADDICTION IN THE AUTISM COMMUNITY

Elizabeth Kunreuther and Ann Palmer

Foreword by Tony Attwood

What is the connection between autism and addiction? Why are individuals with autism more likely to develop a substance use disorder than the general population?

Until recently, [substance use disorder](#) (SUD) was considered rare among those with [autism spectrum disorder](#) (ASD), but recent research on this topic suggests that [individuals](#) with autism are nearly twice as likely to develop SUD. A new book by Elizabeth Kunreuther, clinical instructor at the University of North Carolina's Addiction Detox Unit at WakeBrook in Raleigh, and Ann Palmer, a faculty member at the Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities at UNC, brings together current research and personal accounts from individuals with autism and their support networks to start a conversation about the relationship between ASD and SUD.

The book, titled "Drinking, Drug Use and Addiction in the Autism Community," explores why [addiction](#) is more common among individuals with ASD than it is within the general population and investigates how addiction and autism affect one another. The authors also provide strategies for supporting people with both ASD and SUD. It is being published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers and will be available for purchase Oct. 19. It is now available for [preorder at amazon.com](#).

"With the advent of early interventions and mainstreaming, more adults with ASD not only have to navigate the same stresses most adults face – school, financial concerns, relationship issues, work stressors," Kunreuther said. "But they have to contend with higher rates of co-occurring depression and anxiety, not to mention coping with the sensory and social issues that also accompany an [autism diagnosis](#). It's no surprise that individuals with ASD might turn to alcohol and drugs for relief. Yet, we found little evidence that the autism community saw substance abuse as relevant or as an issue at all."

Now that recent studies have confirmed that individuals with autism are about twice as likely as the [general population](#) to develop a substance use disorder, the authors hope more time, education, treatment, and research will be devoted to this topic.

Palmer added, "Our goal for this book is to inspire more people to engage in this topic. If we can help raise awareness of the risks of a person with autism developing a substance use disorder, then we will have accomplished a great deal. We hope to encourage discussions within families, and within the autism and addiction communities. We are calling for more research and for the ASD community to offer more SUD education and prevention, SUD screenings for family, clients and students, and the development of targeted addiction treatment interventions that focus on the strengths and challenges of [autism](#)."

Tony Attwood, the author of "The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome," said, "This book is an important review of the issues associated with addiction and ASD. It will provide encouragement for parents to take action, and for professionals working the area of ASD to screen for addiction, and then to modify their treatment for addiction to accommodate the characteristics of ASD."

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine

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