

Picture Books for Readers on the Spectrum

Several teachers and parents have told me that *Just So Willow* has helped young, autistic readers – for these kiddos, coping with change is challenging, but Willow keeps the topic light.

Their feedback made me interested in other picture books that touch on topics of special interest to autistic readers. The list below contains titles I've read and enjoyed. Hope you enjoy them as well! (I'm just getting started, so check back for updates.)

A Friend for Henry, by Jenn Bailey (ill. Mika Song) – When searching for a friend, it's not always easy to find someone who understands you. From *Publishers Weekly*: "With sensitivity and thoughtfulness, Bailey explores Henry's literal-minded, analytical personality. Her portrayal of what autism might feel like from the inside rings true." And from *Kirkus Reviews*: "Whether on the spectrum or not, friends don't have to share everything, just enough, and this book sweetly provides."

All Cats are on the Autism Spectrum, by Kathy Hoopman – A gentle description of many of the aspects of autism. The text puts the reader in the shoes of an autistic child, highlighting both the challenges and joys.

Benji, the Bad Day, and Me, by Sally J. Pla (ill. Ken Min) – Sweet tale of brothers supporting each other, one of whom is on the spectrum. From *Publishers Weekly*: "With a light touch, Pla offers a thoughtful reminder that all siblings need extra love and attention sometimes." From *Kirkus Reviews*: "Pla selects a common theme, the power of familial love to overcome adversity, and deftly moves the challenges of autism to a supporting detail rather than a distracting focus in this simple picture book. That Min depicts this family as people of color further broadens this story's inclusive reach."

Don't Hug Doug, by Carrie Finison (ill. Daniel Wiseman) – Not everyone loves hugs, and that's okay! From the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*: "Simple and effective in showing young viewers how to establish bodily autonomy . . . A great starting point for a conversation about boundaries and how to set them."

Enough is Enough, by Barney Saltzberg – Great for readers who need time alone and for those who need to give others space. From *Kirkus Reviews*: "This sweet story will help young readers recognize their own needs – for space, time, and a good book."

Rissy No Kissies, by Katey Howes (ill. Jess Engle) – There's no one way to show affection. From *Kirkus Reviews*: "This is an artistic gem for consent discussions, sensory-processing contexts, and anyone who champions children's agency and bodily autonomy. Radiant."

Too Sticky, by Jen Malia (ill. Joanne Lew-Vriethoff) – It's hard to make slime in science class when you're worried about how it might feel. From *Kirkus Reviews*: "Charming,

inclusive, and grounded in real-life experiences.” And from *Booklist*: “Malia, writing from an #OwnVoices perspective, illustrates how an autistic child can coexist with neurotypical children, address her personal difficulties, and—thanks to a supportive environment—thrive.”

The Little Senses series, by Samantha Cotterill – From Samantha Cotterill’s website: “Little Senses books are created with love for any kid who sometimes feels anxious or overwhelmed, but especially for kids who are on the autism spectrum and/or have sensory issues.”

- **Can I Play Too?**
- **This Beach is Loud!**
- **Nope. Never. Not for Me!**
- **It Was Supposed to Be Sunny**

Why Johnny Doesn’t Flap, by Clay and Gail Morton (ill Alex Merry) – Empowering for kids on the spectrum and eye-opening for those who are not. From *Kirkus Reviews*: “A young narrator explains that his neurotypical friend is OK, even though he sometimes plays games out of order and doesn't flap his hands to express emotions. It's a neat bit of role reversal.”