This textbook is designed to provide information for those interested in improving their understanding of childhood health and mental health problems. The goal of each chapter is to address a childhood medical or mental health issue and share knowledge about diagnosing the problem, understanding psychosocial issues faced by children coping with the problem, and developing a framework of ways to improve child functioning. The overall goal of this book is to discuss and learn about evidence-based treatments and review ideas for interventions. Opening chapters review several medical conditions, including asthma, diabetes, and cancer. Because coping with pain is a common issue for children with these medical conditions, a chapter is devoted to discussing ways to assist children in coping with pain related to medical conditions (e.g., medical procedures). In addition, this chapter also addresses coping with medical fears. Medical fears are an important issue to highlight, because treatment may become a difficult experience for children. In this textbook, I also address mental health problems for children, including autism spectrum disorders, anxiety, depression, conduct disorders, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. At the close of this book, my hope is that you will be well versed in evidence-based interventions for children with the aforementioned problems and have an understanding of how to identify health and mental health problems and intervene to assist children in moving forward in a positive developmental trajectory.

Chapters in this textbook are organized into two parts. The first part of each chapter presents new information about diagnosing the problem and treating the child to maximize positive development. Subsequent sections present an in-depth view of psychosocial issues, review key information in the evidence base, discuss practical ideas for treatment, and present a case study. Cases depicted in this book are not “real,” but were developed based on a recollection of my real-world cases from 20 years in the field. The final sections are a summary, which present key concepts and contain exercises to review fundamental information in the chapter.

My perspective is developmental in nature. It is important to recognize the breadth of change and growth for children from birth through adulthood. A developmental perspective assesses child functioning and adjustment throughout the child’s development from birth through the early adult years. In other words, this
perspective encourages assessment and study of the individual throughout his or her life course—from infancy to old age. Coming from a developmental perspective, we are concerned with age and how it might impact an individual’s adjustment. To address all the literature at all the key developmental phases—toddlerhood, preschool age, elementary school, middle school, and high school—is beyond the scope of this book. Thus, discussion in chapters will primarily focus on elementary school years. The elementary school years are a key period for prevention and intervention efforts that may lead to lasting change for the child that will influence his or her development in a positive manner.

In addition to a developmental perspective, I was heavily influenced by the idea that “context is important.” To that end, I agree with the “systems perspective,” perhaps, most by that espoused by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1989) in his Ecological Systems Theory. The child is “set,” if you will, in contexts and the critical contexts for the elementary school-age child are family and school. I will discuss these contexts in depth in chapters of this book. Further research is needed to address child functioning in other contexts such as neighborhood, after-school, and extracurricular settings. Hopefully, you will be encouraged to conduct new research in these key areas.

I was also strongly influenced by my professors in graduate school. They encouraged their students to understand the science and facts presented in literature focusing on children and then to try to make the knowledge we had gained “work” to help a child. I began to believe in the contribution of research when one of my mentors stated that one can help more children with good research, because they can be a bit more confident when they have current knowledge of what works for whom. One of the best recommendations for reading the literature is to use it to find ideas to support one’s treatment efforts to make a positive difference in the lives of children and families. Taking a deep dive into the literature to understand how to improve child self-esteem, quality of life, and functioning is invaluable. The literature will also illuminate ways to reduce the impact of negative factors shaping the child’s developmental trajectory.

Another influence on my view of treatment of children came from what I have learned from my parents. Both are clinicians who are interested in improving the well-being of their patients. They focus on the positive and how to move their patients forward. A functional analysis of behavior will help us understand what factors trigger (or cause) positive behaviors, maintain them, and improve them. A functional analysis of behavior considers the triggering factors for a behavior, what rewards or reinforces a behavior, and what could possibly maintain or change a behavior. The next step is observing the child—in a case study approach—to see what works. When interventions are successful, we can then maximize “best treatment” for the patient. Therefore, in the sections within chapters that discuss intervening with children, I will reflect on ideas from the literature and from case studies to explain what is going on with a child. Interventions to help children cope with particular problems will also be illustrated.
Being positive brings more benefits to clients and strengthens their self-esteem. This orientation is reflected in the chapters by emphasizing understanding psychosocial factors and environmental factors that will promote resilience for the child and his or her family. It is my belief that the promotion of child strengths and use of interventions to decrease stressors for the child and family will improve quality of life and, ultimately, health outcomes for children with medical and mental health conditions. Applied studies, or studies in the field, can provide many ideas for promoting the growth of children and families. Moreover, monitoring the progress of each client or patient, to determine if assets are being maximized and positive functioning is being increased, may be associated with best practices in clinical care.

In closing, I want to thank you for reading this book and I hope you enjoy learning about ways to help children.

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Reference

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