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- A close-up photograph of a teal-colored coat with black buttons. A hand is visible at the top, holding the collar of the coat. The coat's texture is visible, and the buttons are arranged vertically down the front.
1. THE
 2. SEVEN
 3. RULES
 4. of ELVIRA
 5. CARR
 6. a novel
 7. FRANCES MAYNARD

"A big-hearted and charming tale."

— James Hannah, author of *The A to Z of You and Me*

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Discuss Elvira's relationship with her mother. Do you think Elvira's mother cared for Elvira in the best possible way? What are the differences between the two characters?
2. Why do you think Elvira likes to stick to a routine? Describe your own daily routine. What are the benefits of having it? What are the drawbacks?
3. How does Sylvia help Elvira cope after Agnes's stroke? Discuss Sylvia and Elvira's relationship. Have you ever had a mentor in life? How did they help you?
4. Why does Elvira call Social Services? How do Sylvia and Elvira move on after the incident? What do you make of Sylvia's reaction? Of Josh's?
5. Elvira grew up believing that her father was a businessman who traveled "Away" often. However, she soon finds that that is not the case. Have you ever discovered something about a family member or friend that took you by surprise? How did that make you feel?

6. What are some of the challenges Elvira faces throughout the story? How does she overcome them? What skills does she use?
7. If you had to live life by seven rules, what would they be?
8. Imagine seeing the world from Elvira's perspective. What differences would you find? What would be the challenges? The strengths?
9. Elvira discovers some independence when she begins to learn how to access and use computers at the local library. When did you discover your own independence? What event triggered this?
10. How does Elvira's life change after volunteering at Animal Arcadia? Think back to your first job. What was it? What did you learn there?
11. How are Paul and Elvira similar? How are they different? What do you think of their friendship?
12. Describe how the different characters relate to Elvira and her "condition." How do they treat her? Who do you think understands Elvira the best? The worst?
13. Have you ever misread or misinterpreted a social situation before? How did it make you feel? How did you overcome this?

14. Why do you think Elvira decided to contact Charlie? If you were in Elvira's situation, would you do the same? Why or why not? Do you think having family around is beneficial to Elvira?
15. What is the significance of Rule Eight at the end of the book? What does this say about Elvira?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

What inspired you to write *The Seven Rules of Elvira Carr*?

It's hard to pin these things down! I work with adults with learning difficulties, my husband used to work in a monkey sanctuary, and my mother had a stroke. I think experiences mingle in your subconscious mind and emerge in a new form. And I wanted to give a voice to a marginalized character.

What do you think is Elvira's most admirable quality?

Her acceptance of others without criticizing or judging them (very much). Especially as she has often not been accepted herself.

If you had to choose seven rules to live by what would they be?

Be kind.

Don't blame—find the reason for the error/conflict and work to stop it happening again.

Don't let the past or the future color the present.

Don't let other people's expectations of you define your life. (Elvira has to learn this.)

Don't let your life be defined by your job. Life outside work is just as important.

Have the courage to tell people how much they mean to you before it's too late.

Don't look like prey—meaning, if you appear vulnerable, unfortunately, you may be taken advantage of.

Were there any challenges to writing from Elvira's unique perspective?

Yes, I had to keep reminding myself that Elvira wouldn't pick up on that comment or facial expression or body language. I had to remember that she wouldn't understand the nuances of a joke and would be likely to take things literally.

What would you like readers to take away from your novel?

I'd like to have shown that adults with learning difficulties face the same human trials as those without them. And that people with Asperger's are not cold and unfeeling but, often, eager to help and upset by the pain of others. They just need guidance and explanation of how best to express it and to show support. I hope that readers might be prompted to think that people with Asperger's have a lot to offer—a lack of guile, a childlike trustfulness, a creatively different attitude to solving problems—to those who don't have their difficulties.

What advice would you give to someone who doesn't feel like they fit in?

Your time will come. You haven't found the right place or the right social circle yet. And remember, outsiders are best placed for illuminating the inside of everything.