The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care

The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, written by Benjamin Spock, is a manual on infant and child care first published in 1946. The book, along with Dr. Spock, attained fame almost instantly, selling 500,000 copies in its first six months. By 1998, over 50 million copies of the book had been sold, making it the best-selling book of the twentieth century in America, aside from the Bible. As of 2011, the book had been translated into 39 languages.

Spock and his manual helped revolutionize child-rearing methods for the post-World War II generation. Mothers heavily relied on Spock’s advice and appreciated his friendly, reassuring tone. Spock emphasizes in his book that, above all, parents should have confidence in their abilities and trust their instincts. The famous first line of the book reads, “Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do.”

HISTORY

CHILD CARE BEFORE SPOCK

Spock’s book helped revolutionize child care in the 1940s and 1950s. Prior to this, rigid schedules permeated pediatric care. Influential authors like behavioral psychiatrist John B. Watson, who wrote Psychological Care of Infant and Child in 1928, and pediatrician Emmett Holt, who wrote The Care and Feeding of Children: A Catechism for the Use of Mothers and Children’s Nurses in 1894, told parents to feed babies on strict schedules and start toilet training at an early, specific age. These experts were obsessed over rigidity because they believed that irregularities in feeding and bowel movements were causing the widespread diarrheal diseases seen among babies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

INTENT

As a practicing pediatrician in the 1930s, Spock noticed that prevailing methods in pediatric care seemed cruel and ignored the emotional needs of the child. He wanted to explore the psychological reasons behind common problems seen during practices like

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Title
Article
Author
World Heritage Encyclopedia

Subject
Benjamin Spock, Steven Parker, Corporal punishment in the home, Limbic resonance, 1946 books

Collection
1946 Books, Duell, Sloan and Pearce Books, Handbooks and Manuals, Parenting Books

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Furthermore, these experts, whose ideas were embodied in Infant Care pamphlets distributed by the U.S. government, warned against “excessive” affection by parents for their children. To maintain sterility and to prevent children from becoming spoiled experts recommended kissing children only on the forehead and limiting hugs or other displays of affection.

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SYNOPSIS
The Common-Sense Book of Baby and Child Care is arranged by topics corresponding to the child's age, ranging from infancy to teenagers. Drawn from his career as a pediatrician, Spock's advice is comprehensive, dealing with topics such as potty training, school, illnesses, and "special problems" like "separated parents" and "the fatherless child." Unlike leading child care experts prior to the 1940s, Spock supports flexibility in child-rearing, advising parents to treat each child as an individual. Drawing on his psychoanalytic training, he explains the behaviors and motivations of children at each stage or parent to make their own decisions about how to raise their children. For example, Spock has an entire chapter devoted to "The One-Year-Old," in which he explains that babies at this age like to explore the world around them. He then suggests ways to: and prevent accidents with a "wandering baby."[21]
Spock emphasizes that ultimately, the parents' "natural loving care" for their children is most important.[21] He reminds parents to have confidence in their abilities and to trust their common sense; his practice as a pediatrician had proven to him that parents usually best cared for their children.

REVISED EDITIONS
During Spock's lifetime, seven editions of his book were published. Several co-authors have helped revise the book since the fifth edition. Since Spock's death in 1998, two more editions have been published.


Each subsequent edition of the book brings medical information up-to-date. Other revisions have emerged to deal with contemporary social issues, such as daycare and gay parenting.[21]

In the second edition, Spock emphasizes in several new chapters the importance of "firm but gentle" control of children.[22] He warns against self-demand feeding, a type of feeding that had become popular in the 1940s. Because parents were letting their baby or she should be fed, some parents began indulging all of their child's desires, resulting in unregulated sleep schedules and a loss of control for the parents. Spock clarifies in his manual that while parents should respect their children, they also must ask for respect in return.[21]

By the fourth edition, Spock adapts to society's shifting ideas of gender equality, especially after the rise of the [22] He warns against praising girls only on their appearance and notes the sexism present in a household where girls learn to do household work outside. Spock also continues to expand on the role of fathers and acknowledges that parents should have an equal share in child-rearing responsibilities, while also both having the right to work.[21]

In the seventh edition, Spock adopts a low-fat, plant-based diet for children due to rising trends in obesity and Spock's own switch to a macrobiotic diet after facing serious health issues.[24]

REACTION
Within a year of being published, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care had already sold 750,000 copies, mostly by word-of-mouth advertising. [22] Mothers appreciated that Spock was not condescending in his writing and instead very empathetic towards mothers, acknowledging how fierce love can be.[22] Although he believed that much of a child's personality and behavior rested in the parents' hands, he did not scathe parents with this large responsibility of raising a "good" child, like earlier child care experts. He was lauded for writing with a friendly, reassuring tone and using conversational, easy-to-read language.[22]

Spock was popularized by mentions in household magazines and famous television shows, such as [25] Spock quickly became a household name in the 1950s and is frequently credited for helping to raise a generation of "Spock babies" in the post-war period to have a heavy reliance on his advice; by 1956, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care was already selling a million copies each year.[22]

By the mid-1960s, however, book sales quickly slowed due to Spock's tarnished reputation after his publicized involvement in protests of the Vietnam War. Skepticism of his work increased, especially among colleagues, who criticized Spock for being too radical in his approach.[22] Spock, however, continued to defend himself, saying he had always been firm in his beliefs to parents.[22]

In the 1970s, with the rise of the women's liberation movement, feminists began to publicly criticize Spock for the sexist philosophy apparent in his book. Spock was thus forced to confront his own ideas about gender roles and gender stereotyping.[22] Near the end of his life, Spock's changing ideas on nutrition were reflected in the public's criticism of vegan diets. Spock's views, however, were criticized by some experts as being too extreme; critics were concerned that a vegan diet was likely to result in nutritional deficiencies for children unless carefully planned.[22]

LEGACY
Baby and Child Care popularized new ideas about child care in the years following World War II, encouraging flexibility, common sense, affection, and Freudian philosophy. Spock's reassuring advice gave parents the confidence to use their best judgment to raise their children. Spock also masked Freudian explanations of children's behavior in plainspoken language to avoid offending his readers, making his advice accessible to mainstream American parents.[22] In 1969, Look magazine praised Spock, noting that "perhaps no other person has made so [35] Spock quickly became a household name in the 1950s and is frequently credited for helping to raise a generation of "Spock babies" in the post-war period to have a heavy reliance on his advice; by 1956, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care was already selling a million copies each year.[22]

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Nuclear family
Orphaned
Shared
Single parent
Blended family
Surrogacy
In loco parentis

Theories - Areas

Attachment theory
Applied behavior analysis
Behaviorism
Child development
Cognitive development
Developmental psychology
Human development
Love
Maternal bond
Nature versus nurture
Parental investment
Paternal bond
Pediatrics
Social psychology

Styles

Attachment parenting
Concerted cultivation
Gatekeeper parent
Helicopter parent
Nurturant parenting
Slow parenting
Soccer mom
Strict father model
Taking Children Seriously
Work at home parent

Techniques

After-school activity
Allowance
Bedtime
Child care
Co-sleeping
Homeschooling
Latchkey kid
Parent Management Training
Play date
Role model
Spoiled child
Television
Toy (educational)

Discipline

Blanket training
Corporal punishment in the home
Curfew
Grounding
Tactile ignoring
Time-out

Abuse

Child abandonment
Child abuse
Child labour
Child neglect
Childhood effect
Incest
Narcissistic parent
Parental abuse by children
Parental alienation

Legal and social aspects

Child support
Cost of raising a child
Marriage
Parental responsibility
Deadbeat parent
Paternity
Disenrollment
The book was at times controversial; Spock was accused of advocating permissiveness. Others criticized the book's status as a bible for parents, bemoaning its influence on generations of children. On the other hand, many parents believe that the book increased their confidence; especially for women, Spock’s assertion that it was acceptable to be irritated or impatient on occasion debunked myths about the “perfect parent.” He also urged parents to be active in politics and their communities, to make their children’s world better.