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 the United States, 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. Watson and Holt, and other child care experts 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...
SYNOPSIS

The Common-Sense Book of Baby and Child Care is arranged by topic 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 behavior and motivations of children at each stage or parents 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 prevent accidents with a “wanderling baby.”

Spock emphasizes that ultimately, the parent's “natural loving care” for their child is most important. 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 this was usually best.

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.


Spock, Benjamin; Rotherenberg, Michael B. (1992). Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care (7th ed.). New York City: Dutton.

Spock, Benjamin; Parker, Steven (1990). Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care (8th ed.). New York City: Pocket Books.


Spock, Benjamin; Needelman (2012). Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care (9th ed.). New York: Gallery Books.

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.

In the second edition, Spock emphasizes in several new chapters the importance of “firm but gentle” control of children. He warns against self-demand feeding, a type of feeding that had become popular in the 1940s. Because parents were letting their children decide whether or not to eat, some parents began indulging all of their child's desires, resulting in unregulated sleep schedules and a loss of control for the parents.

By the fourth edition, Spock adapts to society's shifting ideas of gender equality, especially after the rise of the women's liberation movement and the birth of the modern women's movement. Spock clarifies in his manual that while parents should respect their children, they also must return to work.

By the fifth edition, Spock emphasizes more on his nutrition expertise. Spock's views, however, were criticized by some experts as being too extreme; critics were concerned that a vegan diet could be unhealthy for children.

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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 not being researcher and relying too heavily on anecdotal evidence in his book.

In 1998, upon his death, Spock's reputation changed once again. Spock continued to be an influential authority on child care until his death. In 1996, Time magazine named Spock one of the 100 most important people of the twentieth century.

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Spock's optimistic book reflects the hopelessness of the post-war period and society's focus on children. Because post-war affluence helped parents give children more opportunities, parents became more concerned with providing the best for their children and the widespread move to the suburbs broke up families, increasing parents reliance on experts advice on gender roles.

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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
Tactical ignoring
Time-out

Abuse
Child abandonment
Child abuse
Child labour
Child neglect
Choredeva 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
Disownment
Dr. Spock's book of baby care completely changed the way parents raise their children and is one of the best-selling non-fiction books of all time. With the aid of his wife, Jane, Spock spent several years writing his first and most famous book, The Common Book of Baby and Child Care. The fact that Spock wrote in a congenial manner and included humor made his revolutionary changes to child care easier to accept. Spock advocated that fathers should play an active role in raising their children and that parents will not spoil their baby if they pick him up when he cries.