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. Watson, Holt, and other child care experts obsessed over rigidity because they believed that irregularities in feeding and bowel movements were causing the widespread diarrhea 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

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 he 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 set limits.

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 housework while their brothers are left to their own devices. Spock also continues to expand on the role of fathers and acknowledges that parents should have an equal share in child-rearing responsibilities, while still both having to work to raise their children.[22]

In the seventh edition, Spock endorses 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]

REVISIONS TO THE BOOK
Within a year of being published, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care had already sold 750,000 copies, mostly word-of-mouth advertising.[25] Mothers appreciated that Spock was not condescending in his writing and instead very empathetic towards the concerns of parents. Spock's views, however, were criticized by some experts as being too extreme; critics were concerned that a vegan diet could cause nutrition deficiencies in children.[26]

Spock emphasizes that ultimately, the parents' "natural loving care" for their children is most important.[27] He reminds parents to have confidence in their abilities and to trust their common sense; his practice as a pediatrician had taught him that parents usually know best.[21]

REACTION
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Although Spock's reputation has changed over time, Spock continued to be a leading authority on child care until his death. In 1990, Spock's optimistic book reflects the hopefulness of the post-war period and society's focus on children. Because post-war parents were letting their children "do their own thing," 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's practice as a pediatrician had proven to him that parents' instincts were usually correct. He was taught for writing with a friendly, reassuring tone and using conversational, easy-to-read language.[21]

Spock on Spock: A Memoir of Growing Up with the Century
(2nd ed.). New York: Pocket Books.

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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
- Cinderella 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
- Divorce
Benjamin Spock was born on May 2, 1903. He was an American pediatrician whose book Baby and Child Care, published in 1946, is one of the biggest best-sellers of all time. Throughout its first 52 years, Baby and Child Care was the second-best-selling book, next to the Bible. Its message to mothers is that “you know more than you think you do.” He died on March 15, 1998. 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.