



Parenting By The Book

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 1 August, 2003 - 09:47

This article, by **Francine Lucidon**, was first published in *Taking Children Seriously*, the paper journal, in TCS **28**. (N.B. The books linked are absolutely *not* recommended, and only readers with strong stomachs should click on the links.)

Taking Children Seriously

Our family spends a great deal of time in bookstores and so, over the years, I've been able to make a study of the mushrooming growth of new parenting books. Where there once was a single shelf

allotted perhaps to **Spock** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0671537628/takingchildrseri>), **Brazleton** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0738207934/takingchildrseri>) and **Leach** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0375700005/takingchildrseri>), now stand aisles of books devoted to providing parents with answers from the prenatal to the postgraduate lives of their offspring.

The greatest growth seems to be in what I call the Pathology Section. Here are the books about how to recognize the myriad things that are wrong with your child as well as a dazzling array of "fixes." Ever since **Hallowell** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0684801280/takingchildrseri>) Drove us to Distraction, this market has been the fast lane to major shelf space. Pick three or four letters of the alphabet, mix them up, link them to a few behaviors and you too may have a book-worthy Syndrome! The good news is that some of these books, while still bent on demonstrating how to squeeze your square peg into a round hole, are at least moving away from a medical model and towards respecting individual differences.

Another growing market is Niche Parenting. I've seen books for raising your **only child** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0767906292/takingchildrseri>), being a **single parent** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/076451766X/takingchildrseri>), being a **gay or lesbian** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1572242264/takingchildrseri>) parent, being an **older** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1558748288/takingchildrseri>) parent, being a **grandparent** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0879462027/takingchildrseri>), being a **Black** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0767901967/takingchildrseri>) parent, raising your Asian child, raising your **adopted child** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0060957174/takingchildrseri>), raising a **boy** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0890878536/takingchildrseri>), raising a **girl** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/078686768X/takingchildrseri>), raising a **teen** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1893732053/takingchildrseri>). I can imagine that a Black, single, lesbian parent, raising an Asian adopted boy teen could really rack up a bill at Barnes & Noble. Then again, the books all give mostly the same coercive parenting advice.

Those sisters have done wonderfully well it seems ... the ones who write about all the things you should **expect** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0761117881/takingchildrseri>) to go wrong from conception onward. Most amusing is the fact that their best-selling paperback has recently emerged as a hardcover. One can envision a day when it may attain the status of a medical school textbook. Their book on what to expect of **toddlers**

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0894809946/takingchildrseri>) is perhaps the worst of the lot ... makes me want to throw a tantrum right there in the aisle!

Then there are rows and rows of Lite Discipline books ... or how to get your children to do what you want while convincing them it's what they want. Unnatural cruelty disguised as natural consequences, forced choices masquerading as autonomy ... Do you want Faber? Or Mazlish? Unfortunately you get both in their **book** <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0380570009/takingchildrseri>) about how to speak patronizingly so kids will obey. Make sure you bend down and make eye contact when you buy this one; maybe even touch the sales clerk gently on the shoulder.

Lest your parenting gets too warm and fuzzy, keep in mind there are still many of the good old fashioned John Wayne style parenting books to **Dare you to Discipline** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0842305068/takingchildrseri>). There are **Setting Limits** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0761521364/takingchildrseri>), and Being the Boss **Because You Said So** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0836204999/takingchildrseri>). You can **Tame Your Toddlers** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0449901556/takingchildrseri>) and learn **How Not to Raise a Spoiled Child** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0809295512/takingchildrseri>). You can Head 'em Up and Move 'em **Out** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0553267833/takingchildrseri>)... whoa doggies! Masters of this genre include the no-nonsense **Sylvia Rimm** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0517700638/takingchildrseri>) and the firm but fun (you can tell he's fun by his cute titles) **John Rosemund** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0740714155/takingchildrseri>). I'd like to send both of them to their rooms for a few years. With no supper.

The experts are even now coming out with books denouncing relying on experts. Title of the Year goes to **Parents Who Think Too Much** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0440508126/takingchildrseri>).

A more hopeful aspect are the recent Zen-ish books such as **The Tao of Motherhood** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1577310144/takingchildrseri>) and **Everyday Blessings** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0786883146/takingchildrseri>), that at least seem to acknowledge that children are sentient beings worthy of respect. The Eliums' **latest** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0890878188/takingchildrseri>) is hopeful in that it asks a good question ("What does this family need right now, including me?") though I might have known better than to trust a book with Venn diagrams. In **The Explosive Child** (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0060931027/takingchildrseri>), the author actually suggests we try to (gasp) give our children what they want. Again, however, it falls short in that it ultimately says pick your battles. Children are, it seems, still the enemy.

So I think things are getting a bit worse ... and a bit better. Maybe someone will write the TCS book yet. And I'm thinking I might try the Mystery or Sci-fi section next time.

to post comments

Comments

Parenting By The Book

Submitted by Ingrid Seger-Wo... on 31 August, 2003 - 04:06

The advantage of living in the Information Age is that I can *choose* to evolve, grow how I want to. The disadvantage is that sometimes, especially when I first became a mother, I felt so overwhelmed with information and it often contradicted itself that my whole head would spin. Even the simple advise "listen to your instincts" (Dr Sears) was earth shattering, because after having read so many baby books, I didnt know what my instincts were and worse still, even if I knew them, I was not sure that they were correct. The reality is, that no amount of reading, and no book can *teach* me to be respectful to my child - THAT must come from the heart. I have

noticed even when I do not practise NVC (non violent communication , ie, the five steps) or P.E.T or any similar 'by the book' techniques, it somehow sorts itself out if I am speaking to my child from a position of respect and love. I have at times caught myself using NVC, but inside, where my heart speaks, in silent whispers, as one hears in galleries, I am saying "Just get over it" and my child picks up on my whispers, my vibes...no book, no technique, no words will communicate anything to my child unless my heart is in a central position of respect for my child...

to post comments

...

Submitted by Kyle (not verified) on 28 December, 2004 - 05:17

Parenting by the book means a standardized way of parenting. It doesn't assure that the child will have the best future: It assures the parents that they will become a part of the vast majority. If parents want their children to become the best they can, they need to parent outside the box.

-Kyle

to post comments

Faber & Mazlish

Submitted by mammal_mama on 30 January, 2007 - 15:27

Faber & Mazlish have been a great help to me: I think it has something to do with the fact that some of us are learning a whole new language and we need the little exercises. But I agree with Ingrid Seger-Woznicki that, without an inner attitude of respect, those words are pretty meaningless.

Susan

to post comments

Not a book...

Submitted by Robin (not verified) on 10 February, 2008 - 03:10

but I like parenting websites. They're usually free, and change more often. A book is always the same. My current favorite "parenting expert" is the "mean mom," but she's not mean in a bad way...she says what she means, and means what she says! The URL is <http://www.askmeanmom.com> (<http://www.askmeanmom.com>)

She's funny and has good advice.

to post comments

good advice?

Submitted by canyonstar on 10 February, 2008 - 15:07

from the bit i scanned at the 'mean mom' blog, it sounds quite mainstream, the typical authoritarian force 'em into behaving kinda stuff.

say what you mean, mean what you say, but think carefully about it, hold ideas tentatively and remember fallibility

to post comments

You know, I must say, you act

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 17 July, 2010 - 00:49

You know, I must say, you act like parents are the enemy! I have tried every known method to man, aside from corporal punishment, to parent my child.. and always have been and totally do default to love and loving kindness.. but I have an angry child.. angry and mean to other children.. he's become a bully. If you know so many better ways to parent (and I certainly hope it's not with the level of SARCASM with which you just blessed US), then you can pick my child up for babysitting nightly beginning tomorrow. let's put your money where your MOUTH is.

to post comments

More articles

- [TCS Theory and Practice](#)
- [What TCS Is, And What It Is Not](#)
- [Choosing Creativity](#)
- [But if we don't make her do maths...](#)
- [Don't Wait Until You're Perfect](#)
- [Do the Kids Rule?](#)
- [Taking A Wrong Turn](#)
- [Video Games: A Unique Educational Environment](#)