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Book Reviews

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Pregnancy and Childbirth Secrets by Gail J. Dahl

Innovative Publishing (Canada) 2007
ISBN-10: 189693708X
ISBN-13: 978-1896937083
£29.99

image of Pregnancy and Childbirth Secrets
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Reviewed by
Gill Boden

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This book is described as a treasure trove of wisdom. It is a compilation of tips from mothers and has a huge emphasis on positive aspects of the process of birth and the journey to motherhood. I'm sure that every pregnant woman would find many useful pieces of advice in here and much to interest her and if you're the kind of woman who reads voraciously everything about childbirth you will certainly learn something. But when I asked myself if I would buy a copy for my nieces and young friends expecting babies, I had to answer no.

First of all the book is written from a Canadian perspective so not everything is applicable in the UK, but that is not the main problem. There is simply too much advice: it is not clearly organised, it is repetitive. The style varies from hectoring to vague conjecture, so for example, there are lots of suggestions that you should rest, eat properly and so on but then suddenly you're told to reduce your caffeine intake to 300 milligrams a day. Apart from the question of how does that translate into ordinary cups of coffee, there is nothing to suggest why we should take this proscription seriously. That is a general problem with the book: it contains loads and loads of sometimes fascinating suggestions but no way to evaluate which have any evidence for them at all. Shopping tips crop up in different places and give lists of baby clothes that look to me like a 19th century royal layette.

There are some lovely sections, for example 'Optimising the Ecstacy' followed by a brilliant quote from Dutch Professor of Obstetrics G Kloosterman

Spontaneous labour in a normal woman is an event marked buy a number of processes so complicated and so perfectly attuned to each other that interference will only detract from the optimal character. The only thing required from the bystander is that they show respect for this aweinspiring process by complying with the first rule of medicine - nil nocere (Do no harm).

I couldn't resist reproducing this quote and although there were many useful tips and inspiring passages, I found the book overall rather overwhelming, and so unfortunately less useful than it might be.

Teach yourself Green Parenting by Lynoa Cattenach in association with BabyGROE, Hodder

Education, London, 2007
ISBN-10: 0071496890 ISBN-13: 978-0071496896
£8.99

Image of Teach yourself Green Parenting

Reviewed by
Gill Boden

Find this book on Amazon

A wealth of tips on every aspect of parenting and indeed life; this book would provide a good start to anyone who hasn't managed to notice green issues before having to think about the next generation or a useful resource for those who have.

In the foreword Lynoa Cattenach points out that the book isn't just for people with money who can afford premium priced organic alternatives: she points out that just by breastfeeding a baby and using cloth nappies alone you could save yourself £1500 over the first two years of a baby's life.

If you are seriously green and go for second-hand clothes with a few new organic cotton treats you will save a great deal more. And if you beg, borrow or buy much of your baby equipment 'pre-loved' you will

save a small for tune! You might save quite a bit on cleaning products too after you've read about the chemical overload in our homes.

The book covers pregnancy, birth, food, health, the green house, holidays and travel money matters: just about everything, and it is inevitably a bit superficial. I don't think that matters when we are talking about relatively minor consumer decisions but it also skates over rather more important matters like antenatal screening options, choice of place of birth and postnatal depression. The book is not equipped to give enough information about the important decisions.

I was slightly alarmed by the section on home birth, for example; it is very brief and a little dismissive; it lists as one of the cons that you will have to clear up afterwards. This suggests to me that it was written by someone who has no experience of home birth and that is the problem with trying to cover all aspects of parenting within one book. It would be better to stick to practical decisions about nappies, cleaning products and holidays and give evidence for its suggestions.

I would have liked more critical discussion of some of the options rather than just being presented with an array of them. There's a mention, for example of a large selection of alternative health strategies which I find a bit overwhelming, as it's difficult to assess them. What the book does is provide, in a fairly accessible form, lots of information and advice on where to look next. There's a good appendix with useful addresses and websites: I'd say it might be wor th giving to any new expectant parents just for that alone.