AIMS For a better birth...

Book Reviews; Men, Love and Birth, The Ultimate Guide to Green Parenting & A Doula's Journey

Complete list of book reviews on the AIMS website

AIMS Journal, 2016, Vol 28 No 2

- Men, Love and Birth by Mark Harris; reviewed by Gill Boden
- The Ultimate Guide to Green Parenting by Zion Lights; reviewed by Jules Cotton
- A Doula's Journey - a novel by Hazel Tree; reviewed by Gill Boden

Men, Love and Birth

Pinter and Martin 2015
978-1-78066-225-1



Reviewed by
Gill Boden

There is much to celebrate in Mark Harris's book, Men, Love and Birth. His encouragement to fathers-to-be to develop a 'deep connectedness' with their lovers by listening attentively, giving massages and noticing when housework needs to be done and doing it without needing to be asked, or thanked, or considered as a prelude to sex, will strike a very welcome chord with many women. This section is written so well from long experience that it is very moving, and is exactly the kind of experience that is so valuable in exploring a man's role in fatherhood, starting with his relationship to the mother during pregnancy.

What causes me unease is when the birth itself is discussed. Mark Harris describes in his own very individual style how the hormones of birth orchestrate so well in the dance between mother and baby. He points out that the birth attendants, including, of course, the father if he is there, are also affected by and in their turn affect the birth process: this is invaluable information for fathers and all birth attendants. He explores the fact that human birth has really only included the presence of fathers for the past 50 years or so and that there are good reasons why any man's presence at birth can have a negative impact. He also discusses the fact that giving birth in hospital has potentially negative effects, and there are several mentions of the advantages of home birth.

The central paradox is that when the birth process is managed in an institution with the presence of many strangers, including men, then the father's role holding a place of safety for the mother changes and often becomes crucial. Difficulties arise when men move from being protectors of a safe place in which their women can give birth safely and happily, to becoming 'birth coaches', that is taking an intrusive and even controlling role. I don't feel that the contradictions here are explored sufficiently. The premise of a hospital birth in the presence of strangers and with multiple interventions is implicitly the norm so, despite the caveats, the book does not explore a very radical approach.

The style of the book is also very 'blokey'. While I like the fact that sex is talked about (maybe in a way that patronizes men a bit), it does not explore the issue that when a birth has been taken out of women's control the repercussions for a sexual relationship can be devastating for both men and women. Finally, while the needs of men, midwives, all the other health staff, the institution and the wider family may well impact, and must be fully explored, it's possible to lose sight of the main thing: the needs of mother and baby, which must be firmly in the centre.

The Ultimate Guide to Green Parenting

New Internationalist 2015
978-1-78026-248-2



Reviewed by
Jules Cotton

This is the best book I have come across to introduce green parenting. It's a science-based account of the ways 'we parents might be more green and raise healthier children in the process' written by an environmental activist. It is well researched, detailed and very helpful.

Zion Lights explores all the material elements that you would expect, including more detail about nappies than many would imagine possible, but suggests that the transition to being a green parent can be made with comparative ease. However, she also explores the more contentious question, 'Is there a green parenting style?' She argues that sensitive and responsive parenting is not ideological but evidence based. Attachment parenting, often associated with bonding, breastfeeding and baby wearing, is fundamentally sensitive/responsive parenting for which there is not just much historical weight of evidence; recent neurological studies demonstrate that parental responsiveness leads to better-developed brains. The author gives the evidence on bed-sharing and cosleeping well, and her section on birth is also informative, balanced, thoughtful and progressive and includes a plea for more midwives.

Weaning is discussed in terms of encouraging healthy eating habits and is one of the best short summaries I have read. All in all, this is a book to use as a resource or give to any parents.

A Doula's Journey - a novel

Arts Council Funded 2013
978-1-78299-121-2

Reviewed by Gill Boden

I enjoyed this story of a woman contemplating her own background, family and future while deciding to train as a doula. The different stories of the women she helps are interwoven with hers as she discovers the mysteries of birth for herself; they are told with delicacy and sensitivity. Horticulture also features, as the heroine has an allotment, so the whole book is redolent with creation, discovery and nurturing in all its forms. This would make a lovely present for an intending doula or for an intending mother.