

## MEDIA REVIEWS

### **The Official Lamaze Guide: Giving Birth With Confidence**

*Judith Lothian and Charlotte DeVries of Lamaze International*

*Meadowbrook Press, New York, 2005*

*Bulk order discount from Lamaze International,*

*www.lamaze.org or 877-952-6293*

*290 pp, \$12.00, pb*

*The Official Lamaze Guide: Giving Birth With Confidence* is one the rare books today containing an unapologetically woman-centered philosophy of birth. Lamaze is no longer just a method of breathing. Instead, it offers a foundation and direction for childbearing women. Lothian and DeVries, spokeswomen for the broadened Lamaze philosophy, seek to replace women's continuing ignorance and fear about childbirth. They offer realistic ways of approaching pregnancy, labor, and birth. The text blends physiological facts, practical information, and wise advice, covering a wide range of topics. Reading it creates a calm, clear atmosphere, as if a knowledgeable, sympathetic friend is at one's side.

The authors strongly advocate "natural" birth, reclaiming a word that has been much abused. They state at the outset that some births do require medical intervention. Then throughout the book, within the context of each chapter, they emphasize that women's bodies are beautifully designed to grow, birth, and nurture babies. Childbirth is an "elegant" physiological process. Labor, when left to proceed at its own pace, promotes the confidence of mothers and health of newborns, and easily, simply enhances the mother-baby connections. Women are encouraged to have faith in themselves. If labor is often hard work, why not view it as a task, not a trial, and respond to its demands with the strengths already acquired in meeting life's many challenges?

The book begins with a brief history of birth, including the historical move from home to hospital, the development of the prepared childbirth movement and of *The Cochrane Library*, the role of technology in diverting mothers from natural birth, midwifery support for natural birth, a list of advocacy groups, and a final section about birth stories. The chapter about choice of caregiver and birthplace offers useful advice about collecting and analyzing available information so as to make good choices possible. It focuses on the caregivers and locales most amenable to normal births. In the chapters about pregnancy, the authors stress ways in which women can listen to their bodies and discover for

themselves what makes them feel most comfortable, happy, and serene.

The two chapters on labor and birth concentrate on keeping birth normal by not disturbing early labor; enjoying freedom of movement with continuous emotional and physical support and no routine interventions; and pushing in nonsupine positions. They sketch out ways to be comfortable during labor, including conscious breathing, water, touch, releasing tension, and finding a comfortable personal rhythm. In the next chapter, about creating a birth plan, the authors describe and list the most common medical interventions, detailing *when* they are useful, when they are *not* useful, and *why*.

A chapter on greeting one's newborn describes joys and benefits of skin-to-skin contact as the baby "nests" on the mother's deflated belly, touching and smelling her, seeking her breast, all the while enhancing love between the two, regulating the baby's breathing patterns, and keeping oxytocin levels high. Useful chapters on breastfeeding and early parenting follow. Readers are also offered advice about communication and negotiation by means of personal stories illustrating different ways of dealing with the health care system.

One of the book's strong points is its insistence on the power of woman-to-woman conversations. It addresses the fact that during the past few decades, medicalized childbirth has dried up the flow of empowering stories. Instead of the many-faceted tales of personal challenge and success, too many women today recall how their hopes turned into insecurity and fear, requiring a succession of medical interventions. To counter this trend, Lothian and DeVries offer a wealth of experiences, some simple, some complex. They gently advise readers to pay careful attention to these accounts, and to question exactly how other women's experiences have unfolded to enhance or thwart their choices.

Side boxes adjoin the text, containing useful supplementary information. Underlying and validating both text and stories are references to the Maternity Center Association's "Listening to Mothers" survey, and to a 14-page synopsis of *A Guide to Effective Care in Pregnancy and Childbirth*, located in the Appendix. Additional resources include several Lamaze International position papers, a section on the contribution of doulas to modern maternity care, and a listing of midwifery organizations and birth advocacy groups. In addition, all of the photographs show women, alone and with loved ones or practitioners, looking calm and happy.

Although such a book can't do everything, I wish that it had delved into the reasons—economic, political, and social—that medical interventions predominate

and prevail in these current times. Going behind the scenes would broaden our understanding of the usually invisible forces that determine what actually happens to mothers. It always seems to me a great shame to have to fight, decade after decade, for autonomy and control.

Such a constant struggle makes books like this one absolutely necessary. In its advocacy for the simplicity and joy of motherhood, all the while acknowledging the accompanying difficulties and challenges, *The Official Lamaze Guide: Giving Birth With Confidence* should be in everyone's hands.

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### **The Simple Guide To Having A Baby: What You Need To Know**

Janet Whalley, Penny Simkin, and Ann Keppler  
Meadowbrook Press, New York, 2005  
266 pp, \$12.00, pb

Hurray! Whalley, Simkin, and Keppler have produced another great addition to educational literature for expectant parents. These authors have long been respected for their empowering and informative books about pregnancy, birth, parenting, and labor support. Now they've written a supportive and easily readable guide to tell parents-to-be about expectations for health care, staying healthy in pregnancy, making choices in contemplating the birth, and care of the mother, baby, and father in the postpartum period.

*The Simple Guide To Having A Baby* is shorter than their previous books, and will be accessible to more readers due to its lower literacy level. Drawings are included where needed to promote better learning, and boxed lists make crucial information easy to find.

Although this book is "simple," it is a comprehensive guide through pregnancy, birth, and postpartum for both parents. In the first three chapters, they learn about due dates, physical changes, what it's like to be a single mother or expecting twins or triplets, what to expect if the baby will be adopted by another family, choices for health caregivers, and where the baby will be born. Important information about abuse before or during pregnancy is presented in a caring but upfront manner, and resources for help are available in a special section at the end of the book. "A Special Note for Fathers" confirms many of the feelings and fears expectant fathers have. Jenny, Maria, Cami, and Tanya tell us, in short boxed comments sections, about finding out they were pregnant. Their experiences in pregnancy,

birth, and postpartum continue throughout the book to personalize the information for readers.

Chapters 4 through 7 advise parents of their options in preparing for birth, the labor and birth experience, and dealing with the pain of labor and those challenging birth situations. It is to be expected, from past history with these authors, that the information would be balanced, affirming of normal birth, and empowering. And our expectations are certainly met. For example, in early labor information we find:

You'll probably spend most of early labor at home doing normal activities. You'll rest if it's nighttime and keep busy if it's daytime. Try not to do too much since you'll need plenty of energy for labor (p. 87).

And in the discussion about pain we find these comments:

Fear makes your pain worse. If you know labor pain is normal, you'll probably feel less pain because you're not so afraid of it. Pain during labor does not mean that something is wrong (like the pain caused by an injury or illness). Pain is a normal part of the birth process. It usually means that the baby is closer to being born (p.108).

The final three chapters cover the postpartum experiences of physical and emotional changes, warning signs, healthy lifestyles, breastfeeding and formula feeding, and caring for the newborn. I especially liked the information that introduces parents to their newborn's abilities and how to comfort a crying baby.

In future editions (and I hope there will be many), I would like to suggest several changes. In "Medical Methods to Start Labor (p. 142)," the forms prostaglandin comes in are listed as a "gel, a tampon-like device, or a capsule or pill." It would be helpful to include more information on the pill, which I assume is Cytotec, since it is controversial at this time. When discussing forceps and vacuum extraction, the book states, "These methods are generally safe for the baby but they may cause bruises or sore spots on your baby's head" (p. 152). Questions to discuss with the caregiver would be good additions here. In the discussion on common infant cues it states, "When she's about 5 or 6 weeks old, she'll begin smiling at you" (p. 223). Here is an opportunity to let parents know about the amazing talents of their newborn immediately after birth.

Childbearing families are fortunate that once again these inspiring authors and experienced educators have added an important resource on normal birth that is accessible to a larger population of mothers and fathers. *The Simple Guide To Having A Baby* fills an overwhelming need for this type of information. It is priced reasonably, easy to read, explains medical jargon, and includes illustrations, adding to an understanding of the body's wonderful abilities to give birth.

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