

the seemingly minor (such as “Why Every Parent Should Take a Power Nap” and “Picky Eaters”) to the relatively significant (including “Should You Work or Stay at Home?” and “The Pain of Divorce”). While the initial entries are specific to bringing home a new baby, the remaining entries are indiscriminately organized.

Though the book jacket claims “*Survival Notes* does not preach,” the author also never admits to facing a situation for which the appropriate solution was not easy to come by, institute, or enforce. In this way, the book seems to present an idealized notion of parenthood to a population—new parents—that could stand to be reassured that there is no single best way to parent.

The author’s writing style is conversational and the book reads like a compilation of friendly advice. In one section, readers are told that newborns “usually resemble cone heads”; on another page, readers are encouraged to “discipline the best you know how.” The author, a father of two, seems to be positioning himself as a sympathetic resource on parenting rather than an expert practitioner in child development.

The book’s incorporation of biblical verses and the author’s background as a pastor contribute to the work’s overtly Christian focus. Many of the suggested courses of action seem to promote a particular moral perspective.

Stress-Free Pregnancy Guide: A Doctor Tells You What to Really Expect

Carol Livoti and Elizabeth Topp.
New York: Amacom, 2009.

Reviewed by Roshanda D. Cade

In *Stress-Free Pregnancy Guide*, mother-daughter team Carol Livoti and Elizabeth Topp strive to lessen the anxiety associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Although Livoti and Topp collaborate on the book, Livoti’s is the authorial voice. With over 30 years experience in obstetrics, Livoti’s medical opinions permeate the pages of the book. For women who regard pregnancy and childbirth as medical experiences, this book may lessen stress. Women who do not believe in medical intervention, however, may find this book increases stress.

During pregnancy, particularly a first pregnancy, so many things seem abnormal. By presenting a range of normal occurrences, Livoti and Topp put readers at ease. They divide each trimester into a “normal” and “abnormal” chapter. While these terms may be unsettling, the division proves an effective strategy. Once women read a “normal” chapter and see themselves reflected in the examples provided, they may opt to bypass an “abnormal”

chapter. Or they may read the “abnormal” chapter with less anxiety because they have already recognized their symptoms in the “normal” chapter. Livoti and Topp present the information in the “abnormal” chapters in a way that neither frightens nor condemns. They urge women to think of the rules of pregnancy (i.e., avoiding alcohol and specific foods) as “goals rather than threats” and insist that “it’s more important to be calm than vigilant” (15). So even if mothers locate their concerns in “abnormal” chapters, they can maintain low stress levels.

The authors also use a supportive tone. Livoti and Topp consistently reiterate that most women have healthy pregnancies and healthy babies, which is reassuring for all mothers. While they divide the stages of pregnancy into normal and abnormal, they do not focus on age. Instead, within both the normal and abnormal ranges, Livoti and Topp include issues that women of differing ages may face. Not singling out young mothers or women of advanced maternal age forwards the authors’ efforts of lowering anxiety.

While Livoti and Topp do not criticize mothers based on age or adherence to pregnancy protocols, the text suffers from its medical bias and its retelling of Livoti’s office visits. Livoti and Topp denigrate a large population of women by negating approaches to pregnancy and childbirth that do not centre on medical interventions. At one point the authors glibly state, “All I’m saying is have your baby at the hospital” (268). Livoti and Topp do not give fair treatment to alternate childbirth options. Additionally, the book features sidebars that include Livoti’s recollections from her years in private practice. Largely anecdotal, these sidebars are not relevant to the topics under discussion and interrupt one’s reading of the text.

For women who desire a strictly medical perspective on pregnancy and childbirth, *Stress-Free Pregnancy Guide* offers detailed explanations that do not belittle readers. Disappointingly, however, it denigrates mothers who do not prescribe to the authors’ medical approach. Overall, Carol Livoti and Elizabeth Topp offer accessible insight into pregnancy and childbirth that

Fit to Bust: A Comic Treasure Chest

Alison Blenkinsop.

Brighton: Great Britain: Pen Press Publishers, 2008.

Reviewed by Jessica Nathanson

Fit to Bust is a collection of Allison Blenkinsop’s breastfeeding-themed songs, additional comic writings, and information about breastfeeding. While the book contains some useful information, it lacks critical awareness. This might be expected in a book of humour. However, Blenkinsop has attempted to