DR SPOCK talks with Mothers

A complementary volume to his BABY AND CHILD CARE

New Statesman
DR SPOCK
TALKS WITH MOTHERS
By the same author in PAN Books

PROBLEMS OF PARENTS
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What the Talks are About

There are certain important topics in child rearing that need some explaining if parents are to understand the deeper meaning of their children’s behaviour and misbehaviour.

Adolescence, for instance. This is a stage of development that presents lots of bewildering problems. But it’s not possible to solve them with simple suggestions. If a mother is to cope wisely with a teenager who’s being difficult she really needs, I think, to have an idea about what’s going on in his deeper feelings – of which even he is not aware. So I’ve tried hard to clarify these complex matters, and I’ve illustrated with examples ranging from the commonplace to the morbid.

Likewise, in the three-to-six-year-old period there are a number of topics – nightmares, phobias, sleep problems, sex play, questions about the facts of life – all of which have something to do with the strivings and anxieties in the young child’s unconscious mind – and I’ve discussed these frankly.

Discipline – including the father’s part in it – is always a highly controversial subject and no one person can really tell another how to carry it out. I’ve done my best to analyse some of the vital factors in it, so that parents will be in a better position to get the results that they themselves want.

But not all the chapters in this book are about psychological matters. I’ve taken up such questions as ‘How important is fresh air?’ and ‘Why do mothers want to give their children sweets?’ I’ve expressed my personal opinions about these, hoping that this would help mothers to come to their own sensible conclusions.

The basic material in these chapters has been drawn from some of the articles I have written for the Ladies’ Home Journal at various times and I am indebted to the editors
WHAT THE TALKS ARE ABOUT

for permission to re-use it. However, in preparing this book the material has been expanded, brought up to date, re-arranged and rewritten, so that each major theme can be presented as a meaningful whole.

I thank Houghton Mifflin for assigning Joyce Hartman to the editing of this book. Her skilful, tactful job made my work easy. I also thank Mary Bergen and Elizabeth Daunton for their wise advice when I was writing some of the original articles, and Dr Marvin Shapiro who collaborated in the research and writing of the pieces on a child’s position in the family.

BENJAMIN SPOCK, MD
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Your Child’s Health
When Should You Call the Doctor?

*Parents aren’t meant to be diagnosticians*

'I hope you will find it possible to give young women advice on when to call the doctor,' a mother wrote to me. 'Due to the doctor shortage, an attitude has grown up that I think is penalizing the children of this country. Mothers feel guilty about calling the doctor. In spite of the fact that you and others have repeatedly warned that a sniffle and a sore throat and a slight temperature can mean almost anything from a cold to scarlet fever, too often mothers do hesitate because they are afraid of seeming foolish and over-anxious. I nearly fell into the same error a few weeks ago when my seven-year-old had those same symptoms, which were accompanied by a severe headache. It was the headache that made me resolve to get the doctor, and the result was what he called "aborted meningitis". Thanks to quick action on my doctor's part, my youngster was not very ill.'

I agree vigorously that a mother who is worried about her child's condition should telephone the doctor and not stop to wonder whether he will think it unnecessary or whether she will feel embarrassed. But if we agree on this, it only shifts the question, for many mothers, to 'When should I be worried?'

The first problem - and it bothered me all the time I was writing *Baby and Child Care* - is that no two mothers are alike, naturally, and that even if a doctor could lay down a fairly safe set of rules for one parent, they wouldn't work safely for another. To take a couple of extreme examples: if I were writing only for very worrisome over-conscientious mothers, I'd want to keep reassuring them that a lot of