

# BOOK REVIEWS

**The complete guide for Australian parents: Marina Petropulos, Viking O'Neil Penguin Books, Australia, 1987. 316pp. PB: \$12.95**

Marina Petropulos aims to provide information to parents in a form whereby specific topics can be easily located and read, without necessarily having to read through an entire chapter of the book!

In the first chapter on preparations prior to the birth, Petropulos gives some useful advice to parents on how to familiarise themselves with practices of the hospital they intend using for the birth, together with advice and information regarding breast-feeding and preparation of the breasts.

She provides useful information on equipment and clothing needed by mother and baby and a good practical buying guide with detailed attention to safety features concerning cots and prams etc., as well as information on how to minimise expenses.

In the second chapter on birth and the newborn, Petropulos unfortunately mentions very little about the actual birth, and nothing of the parents' actual and anticipated experiences.

There is a useful explanation of the APGAR score given to newborns which other such books including Leach (1981) and Jolly (1977) omit. The useful and clear illustrations are included together with descriptions of the initial examination of the newborn and of the reflexes which are present at birth.

Information and advice is included on what can be expected during the stay in hospital, on the parents' emotional fluctuations after the birth and on adjusting to the stresses of life at home with the new baby. There is some useful practical advice on the physical care of the baby and a fairly detailed description of the young baby and its needs. Information and advice is given on coping with distress and difficulties.

Petropulos then moves to breast-feeding and weaning and associated difficulties, with practical information and advice on special situations such as breast-feeding twins, triplets and babies with birth defects. There is useful and encouraging information on breast-feeding for adoptive mothers and mothers who have had breast surgery. More useful information could have been included on the various methods of expressing and storing breastmilk for mothers returning to employment.

Information is given on bottle-feeding and

weaning, with a lot of useful detail and a good guide to problems and how to deal with them. There are useful suggestions on how to make the baby's early solid meals varied and interesting.

There is a chapter dealing with the mother and child in the first year, covering such areas as contraception, coping with fatigue and stress in the mother, encouraging the infant's physical and cognitive development and advice on safety.

Petropulos looks at the toddler and includes useful information on providing inexpensive toys and play activities, together with advice on how to handle conflicts. She deals with toilet training in a very useful way, looking at the emotional issues for both parents and child together with some helpful hints on how to make the process positive and non-problematic. She gives useful information on home-based teaching of the child.

Petropulos looks at the second year and development toward independence. She gives some useful advice on bedtime and sleeping difficulties and various other behaviours which may be of concern. There is a sensible section on discipline.

Petropulos advises on how to set up playgroups, and on social development. She describes learning disabilities and their detection, but does not give enough information on assistance and remediation.

Petropulos looks at planning subsequent children and the mother's return to employment outside the home, giving very useful information on timing and on arrangements for child care.

The chapter on illnesses also provides information on immunization and a useful index of medical problems with advice on action to be taken, as well as a section on dealing with emergencies.

The book concludes with an information directory and a detailed index.

I was pleased to be reading a book directed toward Australian parents, but found the focus to be very uneven on basic issues which this type of book needs to cover. Petropulos claims to be addressing *both* parents, however much of the material is addressed to the mother with little reference to the father's role during labour, and only much later in Chapter 10, is the father's role briefly mentioned and then only in terms of the pressures placed on him by women to not be involved with his baby. More information on helping parents cope with a premature baby and its emotional needs could be included.

References to child abuse are made here and there throughout the book but this important topic is not dealt with adequately under its own section. Petropulos gives good practical advice in a number of areas, but overall, she fails to include sufficient information on the psychological and emotional aspects of the parent-child relationship.

She fails to include a description of the newborn's experience of the world and the all important symbiosis between mother and infant is neither mentioned nor described. In fact, Petropulos tends to dwell mainly on the negative and tiring aspects of parenting the newborn, mentioning very little of the joy and rewards which also exist for parents in this phase. Perhaps as part of this omission, Petropulos fails to mention in her otherwise comprehensive and useful list of playthings, one of the most and enjoyable toys for the child – the mother. She also presents a rather task-orientated practice approach for parents to adopt in encouraging language, cognitive and motor development.

There is insufficient attention given to sex education and very little written about developing sexual curiosity. Masturbation is not referred to directly and it is most puzzling that the boy's penis is referred to, but no mention is made of the little girl having a vagina!

In her coverage of problems and difficulties, Petropulos' focus is very uneven, for example, she gives a fairly detailed list of learning problems but includes very amateur and incomplete explanations of approaches available for dealing with such difficulties. She devotes very little space to emotional and psychological difficulties. Nor does she provide a very comprehensive list of normal developmental difficulties, and suggestions on how to deal with tantrums and bed-wetting etc., are absent. Comforting habitual behavior which may be of concern to parents is given very poor coverage and parents are simply advised not to worry.

One would expect a book aiming to provide a complete guide to infancy and childhood for parents, would in addition to having separate chapters on the first year, the toddler, and the second year, devote a subsequent chapter to the pre-school child. However, this book fails to do so.

Petropulos comments briefly on the single-parent family and its associated pressures. Perhaps more space could be devoted to this increasingly common phenomenon in Australian society. It would have been useful also, for the topic

of access visits to have been given more than three lines.

Petropulos seems to presume at times, that parents reading her book have a strong predisposition to critical, pejorative and condemnatory behavior toward their child. She unfortunately falls into the position of telling parents what is right and wrong on a number of issues. She tends to state her opinions very strongly in certain areas and does not necessarily attempt to remain impartial. She is very evangelical about breast-feeding, and fails to give sufficient acknowledgement to mothers who may feel more comfortable bottle-feeding and who, on this basis, may be best able to provide a satisfying experience for themselves and their baby. In presenting her bias so strongly, Petropulos offers little assistance and reassurance to mothers who may fail in their attempts to breast-feed.

Frequent references are made throughout the book to various drugs used to treat medical conditions, with generally little or no attempt to explain the workings of these drugs in either lay or medical language. Petropulos would do better to provide a more comprehensive description of problems with recommendations and encouragement to parents to explore treatment options with their General Practitioner, rather than include very incomplete and explained suggestions regarding treatment with medication.

The lay-out of this book leaves a lot to be desired. The frequent variation in print type is confusing for the reader, and the organisation of subject matter under relevant headings is poor and lacking in appropriate sequence.

This book was originally published in Australia in 1983 and again in 1987. However, Petropulos appears to have made little or no attempt to update her original information. She fails to mention car safety capsules for young infants which have been in production for at least a couple of years. The use of aspirin for infants and children has been strongly recommended against in recent years, due to a serious possible side effect. The use of a contraceptive injection (Depo-Provera) has also been recommended against in recent years. Ample press coverage has been given regarding this information, yet Petropulos has failed to update information in this area. There has been a failure also to update certain parts of the organisations and addresses section, for example, Children's Protection Society, Victoria, was dissolved well before 1987. In the information and referral guide, no mention is made of reputable private organisations and professional bodies specialising in certain aspects and difficulties of childhood and parenthood.

My general impression of this book is that although it contains some useful practical

suggestions to parents, it has too many gaps to be regarded as a sufficiently comprehensive guide for parents. The author appears to lack sufficient depth of knowledge of child and parent development to enable her to present a book with at least as much, if not more to offer than existing well known books written for contemporary parents.

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#### **Bibliography**

Leach, P., *Baby and Child – From Birth to Age Five*, New Edition, Penguin, England, 1981.

Jolly, H., *Book of Child Care – the complete guide for today's parents*, Revised Edition, Sphere Books, England, 1977.

#### **TOYS TO MAKE – OVER 60 SIMPLE, EDUCATIONAL TOYS FOR BABIES AND PRE-SCHOOLERS**

**Susan Esdaile and Angela Sanderson**  
**Viking O'Neil Penguin Books, Australia,**  
**1987.**

**135pp. PB: \$12.95**

"Toys to Make" was produced by two women whose combined personal and professional experiences in parenting and child and family services give this book a very solid grounding.

The stated aim of the book is "to enhance child development and the enjoyment of parenting and child care through participation in the creative process of toy making". The authors begin with the notion that keeping pace with a child's development can be an expensive process. It does in fact appear that the emphasis in the media on the importance of educational toys designed to stimulate children's learning has sent many parents racing to the toy store for the latest Fischer-Price gear, only to be let down in later days by both the bankcard statement and their child's apparent disinterest in the toy. What has been lacking is a concurrent emphasis on the reasons for which specific toys can be educational and the ways in which parents can and should become actively involved in the play process with their children.

"Toys to Make" goes some way to redressing this imbalance. Many parents will be comforted by this book's philosophy that "when making toys for your child you don't need to make an "educational" toy. Try to be just as concerned with *why* a child likes a particular toy . . . it will only stimulate learning if the child likes it and finds it fun to play with".

The book is divided into seven chapters on different types of toys to make: Babies playthings, toys from recycled materials, dolls, soft toys, puppets, sound and percussion toys. Each toy making activity is set out with a brief description of the possible uses, the material needed and illustrated step by step instructions. The book concludes with a section on play, covering developmental stages from birth to five, ideas for active play, ideas for outside play, ideas for play around the house and ideas for quiet play. There are also some useful comments on organising Toy Making workshops.

While many of the toys are indeed simple and inexpensive to make, many people have commented that there are an equal number which are in fact quite difficult, requiring much motivation, skill and in some instances, expensive equipment to achieve the desired outcome. Our chief concern with this book was that, while offering a great source of knowledge for people living or working with young children, its presentation and style are such that it will probably only reach and interest those who already know a great deal about children. We would love to see the authors extend their work to cater for families who may be experiencing difficulties in raising their children, who may be unskilled or unmotivated and who are in great need of encouragement and education about the importance of play. The emphasis needs to be on very simple, very inexpensive toys and ways to enjoy them together with their children. It is crucial that material such as this be geared toward these families and ideally used in small workshop settings. While this is beyond the mandate of this particular book, it is a challenging area which deserves the benefit of the knowledge and experience which have gone into "Toys to Make".

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#### **FAMILIES IN COLONIAL AUSTRALIA**

**Edited by:**

**Patricia Grimshaw, Chris McConville  
and Ellen McEwen.**

**George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985,**  
**227pp. PB: \$12.95**

Although the study of variations in the structure and experience of families has long been central to sociology, only in the last two decades have historians paid serious attention to these issues. The growth of the 'new social history' in Europe, Britain and North America was triggered in part by the explosion of quantitative demographic analysis made possible by computers, but also by radical historians' interest in those neglected by traditional historiography, the poor, ethnic minorities and women. *Families in Colonial*