



## Childbirth without Fear: The Principles and Practice of Natural Childbirth

*Grantly Dick-Read, Michel Odent (Foreword)*

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In an age where birth has often been overtaken by obstetrics, Dr Dick-Read's philosophy is still as fresh as it was when he originally wrote this book. He unpicks every possible root cause of western woman's fear and anxiety in pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding and does so with overwhelming heart and empathy. Essential reading for all mothers-to-be!

## **Childbirth without Fear: The Principles and Practice of Natural Childbirth Details**

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## **From Reader Review Childbirth without Fear: The Principles and Practice of Natural Childbirth for online ebook**

### **Gretchen says**

I LOVE this book. I agree it's not for everyone though. Some people will find the writing style too inaccessible or judge it as too outdated as it was originally written in 1933. But don't let that deter you from the wisdom this man has. He's called a pioneer for a reason and his reverence and respect for women is clearly apparent throughout the book. Everything I've read on natural childbirth has taken their ideas from Grantly Dick-Read. There are a few things that are outdated. (It isn't believed to be necessary to toughen the nipples ahead of time for breastfeeding anymore.) But again, don't dismiss the whole book as irrelevant. I totally understand the criticism many women have in accepting that childbirth can be painless, but again. Don't reject his premise because he's a man. For a doctor who's assisted births in the London slums, WWI trenches and during WWII air raids, that's a damn flimsy excuse.

Painless birth is still a revolutionary idea today and so I feel this book is just as topical now. The kind of natural birth Dick-Read emphasizes is possible and even the natural order of things is under attack in America today so you will have to go out of your way to find a doctor who agrees totally with his fear-tension-pain model. I don't see this as evidence that Dick-Read is off the mark but evidence of how we've lost touch with nature in the effort to make childbirth efficient.

Keep in mind that the natural birth he outlines is the ideal, nature-taking-it's-course birth and he acknowledges that some births can't or won't turn out this way. (Read ANYTHING by Ina May Gaskin for evidence on how rarely this truly happens.)

Other people have criticized this book for lacking step-by-step instructions on how to relax and prepare yourself for natural childbirth. This book is more about the philosophy of natural childbirth and introducing women to what is possible. I feel like that information is easy enough to find and that this book is really a good starting point for doing your own research.

This book has been very inspiring and only encouraged me more in my goal of a drug-free VBAC. I'm not going in expecting no pain but I now believe in the power of my own mind in relaxing and the very real effect that will have on my childbirth experience.

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### **Lisa C says**

Slow reading, as it is written by an OB during the first half of the 20th century--the writing style is a bit taxing. I skipped some of it, but all I read makes sense! Dick-Read expounds on his philosophy that childbirth was intended to be pain-free, and that any pain in childbirth is caused either by fear, or by an actual medical problem that the mother has.

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### **DaNette says**

As a HUGE supporter of natural childbirth I loved this book. It has a lot of information that calms, buoys up, and supports women in their quest for a natural childbirth. It encourages the idea that women have been having babies naturally for centuries without pain and fear and it's still possible today. Birth does not have to be a trial or affliction, it should be a right of passage into motherhood and can be a beautiful experience. This book addresses the most common fears among woman during childbirth with the idea that by eliminating

fear we eliminate pain. It also educates the reader on the physiology and anatomy of a woman's body during birth in hopes to decrease the fear felt by sensations experienced and allow them to relax and let their body work. I will definitely be reading this book again in preparation for my next birth.

Read it again for baby number two and still LOVED it. I nearly underlined the entire book! What a great confidence builder for an upcoming birth.

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### **Stephanie says**

While this book's philosophy jives with mine, I'm afraid it left me with the feeling of "Ok, great, but when do we get to the part that tells me how to birth a child without fear?" I read the first 7 chapters and decided to put it aside for now. Despite being updated, it doesn't really feel like it. In the first couple of chapters, Dick-Read waxes poetic about how ALL little girls desire to grow up, fall in love, get married, and become mothers, and it made me roll my eyes Liz-Lemon-hard. I did enjoy the chapter on the anatomy of the uterus and what it does physiologically during labor. It was very detailed and I gained insight into my own anatomy.

The language can be a bit hard to get through. I have an English degree and am used to reading lit from many different periods in many different genres, and even I found the language plodding. I'm on a quest to find good books to recommend to my pregnancy massage clients, but I think I'll leave this one off the list. There are many other great books that follow Dick-Read's philosophy (and are even influenced by this book), that are modern and more palatable.

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### **C.J. Prince says**

This was literally a life changing book for me. I haven't a clue if it is still in print but he was responsible for early education for women in approaching childbirth in a healthy way.

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### **Jasmyne says**

Didn't finish...too clinical for me right now. Maybe another time. Also written by a man, which means I'm skeptical. It's all well and good to talk about pain free childbirth and I have no doubt the pain is lessened if you can let go of the fear and tension, but pain free? I'm thinking this guy has never birthed a baby before....

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### **Kristin says**

For someone like myself who eats up medical books....well, this one left me upset. Perhaps because I read it right after a wonderful birth book that celebrated pregnancy and birth. I read the first chapter of this book without having read the authors name, and I just kept thinking "this HAS to be written by a man" sure enough I turn to the cover. Bingo, written by a man.

It seemed so out of date (Yes, it was written a long time ago, but it shows that it has been "updated and revised"....really? I just laughed when he mentions that the only time labor should be any discomfort is for a

period of maybe "6-8 contractions as the body is preparing for the third phase of labor" and even then it's only a slight discomfort.

I get that some labors are easier than others, that some people's bodies are built different, but I don't think this guy gets that. He simply restates that if it hurts it's because of fear. As I prepare for my 6th birth, I laugh at this. I have had babies at the hospital and at home. With an epidural and completely natural, ironically for me, the easiest birth was the one when I decided to switch to a midwife and have a natural birth at home. I can honestly say I had some real fear going into that birth, so by all accounts it should have been the worst, and yet it was the BEST! Go figure ;-)

Don't read this when there are so many other wonderful choices of books out there!

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### **Michelle says**

Some points are good and forward thinking for the 1940s but pregnancy is case by case basis. I believe in natural birth but women shouldn't feel bad for having assistance either. It's rare to find a woman these days who gives birth without intervention.

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### **Rachel says**

Excellent!! I read this book quickly, especially enjoying the author's tone and unapologetic honest insights into not only his observations of natural childbirth but pregnancy and women in general. He stresses that education about childbirth is key to alleviating fear (and therefore tension and inevitably "pain") in order to succeed in a happy natural birthing experience. Everything he discusses is ultimately common sense but so much so that our minds rarely think about these simple points which are too often overshadowed by the brainwashing our modern society has steeped so many women in: an irrational fear of our most natural physiological function.

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### **Beth says**

It's important to read this book selectively. That means when something sounds painfully anachronistic, ignore it. When something sounds like it makes damn good sense, memorize it. (It's not the author's fault that he was writing in the 1940s and that therefore many of his cultural notions about women are woefully outdated.) The careful and thorough explanation of the "fear-tension-pain" cycle is what I found absolutely most useful throughout my labor process. For that, this book gets five stars.

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### **Maggie says**

This guy was ahead of his time.

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## K. says

Life Changing.

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## Asho says

Although "Childbirth Without Fear" is a catchy title, I think a more accurate title would have been "Childbirth Without Ignorance." The basic gist is that the more a mother knows about the mechanics of childbirth, the more she is able to relax and break the fear-tension-pain cycle that leads to [in Dick-Read's view, abnormally] painful labors. The book also strongly encourages medical professionals to allow mothers to fully participate in their natural labor and the baby's delivery, rather than being sedated. This book is apparently a classic in the field of natural childbirth. As such, it is important to keep a few things in mind when reading it (things that I wish I had known about it before I picked it up):

- 1) It was written quite a long time ago. The earliest sections were written in the 1930s and 1940s and the "updated" version I read was published earlier this year with a few editor's notes but for all intents and purposes written in 1953. That makes some parts of the book seem extremely dated. Some of the social stuff (such as the idea that motherhood is every woman's dream) definitely made me snort.
- 2) The intended audience for this book is NOT the mother-to-be, it is the doctors and midwives who will be attending the mother. After a while I got tired of reading about myself referred to as "the woman".
- 3) The whole book is about encouraging the mother to relax and avoid fear, and yet there is surprisingly little practical information on how to actually relax and push fear out of your mind during labor.
- 4) This book must have been an extraordinary pioneering text when it was first written, but now most of these teachings have been absorbed by anyone who advocates for natural birth. I still wouldn't say the desire for natural childbirth is completely mainstream, but it's no longer the sort of thing that makes people look at you like you are a totally wacky, on-the-fringes hippie. So most of the ideas in this book are now pretty well understood, and if you read a variety of other childbirth preparation books you can probably skip this one and leave it to the medical professionals who need to understand the history of their profession.

The other thing about this book is that I could see how it could become a bit demoralizing in the event that labor does end up being especially challenging. Dick-Read points out again and again that sometimes pain relief is necessary in the case of abnormal presentations, and of course c-sections are sometimes necessary in the case of really abnormal circumstances. So certainly his intention is to simply be reassuring. Yet I sometimes got the feeling from reading this that if my labor experience does end up being painful, it is only my own fault for perceiving it that way. That just seems...unfair and probably unreasonable. I especially found the parts of the book that say that things like morning sickness and fatigue are basically just neuroses and if the mother can get over her fear and apprehension she'll magically not be sick pretty unbelievable. I think medical advances since the '50s have made it clear that there are definite biological reasons for pregnancy symptoms like morning sickness. So I have a hard time believing that labor pain could also be something entirely a product of the mother's perception.

Anyway, I'm glad that I read this, but I am also glad I read it conjunction with other childbirth prep books that were more practical.

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### **Rachel says**

Bought it for \$2 - changed my mindset toward birth and made for an amazing experience.

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### **Amina Al motery says**

great book indeed for both obstetricians and pregnant women, Dr Grantly has made it clear from his own observations that childbirth is painless. mentioning a great information that fear is the only enemy of the whole natural process of giving birth

by fear the uterus shuts down and becomes white without oxygen or blood the thing that makes the muscles so tense and eventually the contractions so hard to bear

the key to avoid all of this is to relax and let it go, is to not interpret contractions as pain and to rest physically and emotionally before laboring, plus to avoid listening to the horror birth stories of some women, it has a negative impact on pregnant mamas according to the writer.

only 3 stars because the book is written in the early fifties with so much details many of them addressed to obstetricians

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