

Book proposal

Title: *Confident Parenting*

Subtitle: Making the first decisions for your infant and your family

Author: Lisa Sansom

Premise: New parents need to make several decisions in the first few hours, days and weeks of an infant's life. This book supports parents in making those decisions, collaboratively, supportively, openly and positively. This will set a foundation for how parents can make future decisions as they continue their parenting journey together.

Introduction: Ann, a new mother, made the decision that her infant daughter would never have a pacifier in her mouth – artificial sucking devices were completely banned from the house. One afternoon, Ann went out to run errands, leaving her baby in the care of her grandmother. When Ann returned a couple of hours later, there was Grandma, with a sleeping baby on her lap, and a contraband soother that Grandma has smuggled into the house, firmly planted in the baby's mouth – with Grandma holding it in place for good measure!

Erica and Sam, new parents, decided that they would co-sleep with their new baby girl. They put their double mattress on the floor, and each slept on one side with baby in the middle so that baby could breastfeed on demand and parents would still be rested in the morning. After another child, Erica and Sam upgraded to a King-sized mattress and after two more children, they are still sleeping, quite happily, on a mattress on the floor. The youngest ones stay with them and the older ones choose.

However, when Lisa and James, new parents, thought about their sleeping arrangements with their new son, they had nightmares about losing the baby in the sheets and pillows, and decided that their baby would sleep in his own crib in their room. The baby would still have easy access for breastfeeding, but parents would be more rested in their own bed without a baby between them.

When Michelle, a new mom, had her baby, she really wanted to try breastfeeding, but after several days of trying and consultation with lactation specialists and supporters, it became clear that she and her new son were getting overly stressed out. So she decided to move to bottle-feeding. Mom was calmer, baby was calmer, and the entire family settled in nicely.

New parents have to make important decisions early on in an infant's life. The decisions are not always easy to make, and once made, can sometimes be undone, resulting in lack of confidence on the parents' part. New mothers and fathers need to support each

other, and gain support from others around them, in order to make and sustain confident decisions.

Confident Parenting is for those parents: couples who love each other and want to raise a family together, yet haven't made those early decisions that can affect the first few days of their new family's life. The latest research, presented positively and supportively, will help new parents make confident baby-raising decisions, so that the entire family – parents and child – will benefit.

Benefits: After reading this book, parents-to-be and new parents will be able to:

- openly discuss their parenting choices with each other
- come to a mutual decision around how to care for their infant in the first few weeks of that baby's life
- discuss the importance of their own relationship, as the foundation of a stable family
- make confident choices about how to support their relationship and each other during the transition from couplehood to parenthood
- deal with unwanted contradictory advice
- mutually support each other in those choices.

Features: *Confident Parenting* takes parenting books to a higher level. *Confident Parenting* is an evidence- and research-based book that helps parents make the right choices for them and their baby, choosing from many valid possibilities. For example, do parent co-sleep with their baby or does baby have his/her own crib? This is a decision that parents need to make early on in the baby's life, and it's one that can affect the parents' relationship. Therefore, it is a decision that needs to be made together. There has been research done that supports both sides, and in the long run, babies are successfully raised either way. The same is true of other decisions such as pacifier versus thumb-sucking, breastfeeding versus bottle feeding, cloth diapers versus disposable diapers, and baby-wearing versus strollers. The actual decision made may be less important than how it was made and why it was chosen. The decision needs to be made together, for the mutually right reasons, and it needs to be made with confidence, because confident parents create happy families.

Most parenting books tell parents the "right" way to parent: attachment parenting, baby-wearing, co-sleeping, crying it out, and so on. There is an entire philosophy to these books, and if you break one rule, then you are not following the author's

prescribed dictum. Other parenting books are about “just the facts”: milestones that your baby must reach in order to be “normal” – at what age he holds up his head, at what age she smiles in response to a stimulus, at what age he reaches for an object, at what age she rolls over, and so on. This book is neither of those.

This book comes with a set of helpful and supportive magnets and stickers that parents can place on mirrors, change tables, kitchen cupboards, and other places where a positive mantra will help. The magnets and stickers will say simply: “It’s OK”. This will help parents reflect, re-energize and focus, especially in those high-emotion parenting times, such as an inconsolable crying baby, meddling advice or ill-timed baby accidents when there is a rush to get out. For most parenting decisions, it’s ok. Most of the time when the baby cries, it’s ok. When someone offers contradictory and unwanted advice, it’s ok. Parents need to be reminded that it’s ok, things will work out, and this too shall pass. This will help new parents be more confident, and create a happy family.

This book will be research-based and each chapter will highlight the most recent research supporting both sides of the decision. This is not a book that promotes a certain philosophy of parenting: it promotes choice, but that choice needs to be well-researched and that choice needs to be discussed between the parents and care-givers.

Each chapter will also include interviews and stories from parents who have used the different techniques successfully. For example, the chapter on co-sleeping versus baby’s own bed will feature a story from parents of four children, ranging in age from 8 years old to just a few months old, who co-sleep in a big King-sized mattress on the floor of their house because it was the easy choice for them to make, as well as a story from parents of two children, who had nightmares about co-sleeping and found it easier to have their babies sleep in their own crib – sometimes in the parents’ room, and sometimes in the baby’s own room. Each story will be supportive, and help new parents make the required choice.

Future potential:

This book will be the first of a series. Future books will present research to help parents make positive decisions about the ages from 1-6 months, when decisions are being made about child care (does a parent stay at home or return to work, thus requiring alternative care arrangements?) and introduction of solid foods. Sleep matters are also still being questioned during these months of a baby’s life.

The next book would address positive decisions being made in the ages from 6-18 months, when the child is becoming more interactive and starting to move independently and acquire language skills. Topics to be discussed would include how to

baby-proof your home (do you use playpens or say “no”?) and the use of sign language and/or baby videos and/or music to stimulate language acquisition.

Future books could address the toddler years, pre-school years, and primary school years.

The book is also a natural springboard to a website with interactive chat rooms, discussion forums and notice boards. Parents would belong to a virtual community where they can access the latest research about any of the topics and choices presented in *Confident Parenting*, and suggest other avenues for investigation based on their own experience and questions. Different discussion areas would allow parents to support each other on their choices – no trash talking allowed! – and share best practices and helpful tips within each choice array.

Eventually, a series of parenting workshops would be designed developed using the material from the book and the website interactivity. The workshops would be taught to couples and walk them through the decisions in each chapter. Couples would be from the target demographic of the book, and would enrol in the course at about 4-6 months pregnant. The course would be 6-8 weeks, meeting once per week, and delivered initially by Lisa Sansom, the author. After the course has been proven as a success, a train-the-trainers manual will be developed, and the material could be licensed out to other facilitators who were interested in delivering the course in their own local community.

Overview: The book will be divided into 10 chapters. They are listed below.

Introduction

Chapter 1: Parenting Gurus

Chapter 2: Birthing choices

Chapter 3: Feeding choices

Chapter 4: Sleeping choices

Chapter 5: How well does your baby sleep at night?

Chapter 6: Sucking choices

Chapter 7: Diapering choices

Chapter 8: Dealing with unwanted advice

Chapter 9: Caring for the parents

Chapter 10: Conclusion and next steps

Other possible choices: boys' circumcision, environmental baby raising, how to deal with baby's crying (pick up, leave alone)

The Market: First-time expectant and new parents. Over 4 million babies were born in the US in 2007 – the highest number ever, surpassing the peak of the baby boom in 1957¹ – and 377,000 babies in Canada from July 1 2008 to June 30 2009². Most of the increase in births over the years comes from women in the 25-34 year age range, indicating a certain level of education and professional background. As a result, the parenting and child care publishing category is “booming”³. Over 40% of these babies are born to new parents, who are seeking information from reliable sources as they embark on the new adventure of parenting.

Motivations: First-time parents who are highly-educated are the least confident in their parenting choices and abilities. Yet, due to their high education level, they are comfortable seeking out relevant and factual information. This book will, for the first time, address empirical research and scientific studies on many of the choices that parents need to make in the early days of an infant's new life. Ideally, parents will read through this book and discuss it together, as a mutually supportive couple, in order to make confident decisions before the birth of the baby.

Differentiation: There are three main categories of parenting books which pose competition to *Confident Parenting*.

1. Books that advocate a specific parenting philosophy. Examples include *The Attachment Parenting Book* by Dr. William Sears and *The No-Cry Sleep Solution* by Elizabeth Pantley. Books in this category provide an essential underlying philosophy and tell parents how they “should” care for their infants. *Confident Parenting* will present choices so that parents can knowledgeably and supportively make their own decisions.
2. Books that outline the baby's developmental milestones. Examples include *What to Expect: The First Year* by Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel. Books in this category proceed chronologically through the infant's ages and stages, and prescribe or

¹ http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr57/nvsr57_12.pdf

² Statistics Canada

³ <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20100315/42422-parenting-grows-up.html>

suggest parental interventions as the child ages. *Confident Parenting* focuses on the first few weeks of a baby's life, and proposes choices rather than making suggestions.

3. Niche books aimed at specific audiences. These books may be aimed at adoptive parents, homosexual couples, parents of infants with diseases or developmental delays, and so on.

The Author

Background: Lisa Sansom is a mother of two boys and has been happily married since 1998. Her first son was born in Paris, France, while her husband was working there on a one-year contract. Although Lisa speaks French very well, she felt lonely in Paris and became part of a mothers' support network that consisted of 1000 expatriate families in the city of Paris and surrounding area. These families came from a variety of backgrounds: British, American, Canadian, German, Chinese, Swiss, Australian and so on. They only had three things in common: the parents spoke English, they were not from France, and they had children. Out of that, some strong friendships grew.

Playgroups were arranged, and advice was shared on how to get around Paris: what were the best strollers to buy? What discounts did your children qualify for? What was the schooling system like? And, most importantly, how to raise your children.

It quickly became apparent that there was no one right way to raise a child. With so many families and so many different cultural backgrounds, there was a diversity of opinion. For some families, they started feeding their child solids at 3 months. For others, it was 6 months. Some families chose rice cereal as the first solid food. Others chose carrots. Others chose mixed vegetables, and there was one family that chose mixed vegetables with meat. Some families made their own baby food; others bought jarred. Some families co-slept with their babies; others used cribs. Some parents used slings and wore their babies; others invested in strollers. The list of differences went on.

Yet it also became apparent that, for the most part, it simply did not matter. As long as the parents were united in their choices and felt confident, the babies were fine. Parents who made safe and healthy choices out of love and confidence had babies who were well-behaved, healthy and happy. Parents who were not aligned or waffled on their choices – trying one thing tentatively one day and then switching randomly to something else – had fussy babies, and the parents were stressed out.

It wasn't the actual choice that mattered as much as the fact that a choice needed to be made, and it needed to be made confidently. Hence, this book.

As the mother of two children, Lisa knows better than to try and offer parenting advice. However, as a life-long learner with four degrees, including a Masters of Applied Positive Psychology, Lisa does know how to research. And as the former Editor of a national magazine on workplace wellness, Lisa knows how to interview and write a good story. Lisa is also representative of the target audience of this book: well-educated, a good researcher, and initially clueless about babies and nervous about doing things the “right” way as a new parent. Lisa writes from the heart and the head.

This book has been percolating for over eight years – ever since that first son was born in Paris. In all of that time, nothing close has come onto the book shelves, yet the parenting book market continues to be strong.

Biography: Lisa Sansom started her career as a high school French teacher and quickly realized the importance of motivation, both in self and others. Lisa is now the owner of LVS Consulting, providing leadership coaching, team facilitation, effective communications workshops and change management consulting / training.

Lisa is an accredited professional coach whose clients wish to improve their positive impact in their organizations. Lisa’s style is friendly with a practical drive to get to the “tough stuff”.

Lisa obtained her MBA from the Rotman School of Management, and earned her coaching accreditation from Adler International Learning / OISE-UT. In addition she holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts from the University of Waterloo and a Bachelor of Education from Brock University. Lisa’s most recent academic accomplishment is her Master of Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania.

Lisa currently serves on the Board of Directors for Kingston Employment and Youth Services (KEYS) and is the mother of two young boys, who keep her hopping and motivated.

Previous Writing: Lisa has previously written magazine articles for *Your Workplace* magazine, including two series on change management, and many book reviews.

Personal Marketing: In order to help with the sales of *Confident Parenting*, Lisa will...

- Establish a website that links with the book. This website will have different areas, each pertaining to a different chapter of the book. Website users will be able to access the pages and read the latest research pertaining to each chapter. The website will also include discussion

forums where parents can support each other in their early parenting choices. The website will also:

- Include the media kit for the book
 - Post the book's cover with table of contents and a sample chapter (or extract)
 - Include a discussion guide for expectant parents who wish to create groups around these parenting choices
 - List past and future media, speaking and teaching appearances
 - Exchange reciprocal links with as many sites as possible to generate further traffic to and interest in the book and website
 - Include links to purchase the book
 - Be updated frequently with news, articles and research.
 - Provide a resource directory for parents interested in further researching the parenting choices discussed in the book
 - Feature research and discussions on topics not featured in the book (should any be suggested by readers / researchers / others)
- Belong to several existing and popular parenting websites, for mothers and fathers, to share insights from her book and drive traffic to her website.
 - Attend and speak at parenting conferences around North America.
 - Attend and speak at book conferences around North America.
 - Prepare and pilot parenting training programs based on the book's philosophy.

Chapter Outline:

Note: medical information will be researched through both peer-reviewed publications and interviews with professionals. The book will have a disclaimer that all medical decisions should be reviewed with the parents' health care provider, and that the author is not a medical professional. Before making significant health decisions for themselves or their children, parents should always consult with their health care providers and other professionals close to them to be able to ensure accurate and timely information for their particular situation and needs.

Introduction: the author will introduce herself and present the overriding philosophy of this book, notably that parents today are distanced from natural instincts and that for many parents, who are extremely capable in all other matters of life, the desire is to enter parenthood prepared and educated. This book will help them to become educated and make informed and deliberate choices for their children. The family is the first instrument of socialization for the child, and so parents will want to socialize their child as they best see fit to produce a positively contributing member of society. This means making choices that are aligned with a family's values and lifestyle from the beginning. These choices are not consistent among cultures or among families in the same culture, but "it's OK" because well-adjusted happy children are raised though a number of different parenting philosophies. It is all about the choices that parents make, and this book will help with that process. And it's OK to change your mind once you get going too – different situations and ages and realizations may well call for different choices. It's all about growing together.

Preliminary words: What does it mean to make a decision? This chapter will review how good decisions are made by couple entering parenthood. A good decision, for the purposes of this book and discussion, is one that is made by both parents supportively and confidently. It takes into consideration the physical and psychological health of the child, parents and family unit. It is one that has a desirable and positive outcome. Principles of good decision-making will be covered, including how parents can communicate effectively with each other and how they can agree to disagree and still be supportive.

Chapter 1: The book will start with an overview of parenting philosophies from the (in)famous Dr. Spock through to modern day, commenting on the proliferation of parenting books from non-existent to hundreds of titles available today. The philosophies of some of the current parenting "gurus" will be profiled, such as The Baby Whisperer (Tracy Hogg), Dr. Sears (Attachment Parenting), Richard Ferber, etc. Throughout the rest of this book, these "gurus" will be referenced as well as other scientific studies. This will enable parents who wish to justify their parenting choices by saying "Oh, I'm following the Dr. Sears approach" or "According to the Chicago study, this is really the optimal method for feeding a baby", which will absolutely wow the socks off anyone who gave unwanted advice or criticism. The philosophy of this book will be outlined, i.e. this book is intended to encourage parents in making safe and healthy choices for their infants that fit into the lifestyle and values they wish their family to embody. Research has been done into each controversy which is dealt with in the following chapters, and parents are encouraged to "read the baby, not the book". However, given that any new parent will be anxious and subject to criticism, overt or implied, from a number of audiences, parents will also be given the tools to thoughtfully justify their choices, if they wish to enter into that discussion, or to otherwise politely and confidently handle unwanted comments. A discussion of what constitutes "safe and healthy" will follow.

Chapter 2: Birthing choices: vaginal or caesarian? This chapter will deal with the controversy surrounding birth plans, and the two basic ways we all emerge into the world. Studies will

be cited showing statistics on topics such as child and infant mortality stemming from either vaginal or caesarian births, as well as issues such as recovery rates, birth complications, and other topics of interest that parents might wish to know about in order to make an informed choice about the birth of their child. The philosophy of this book will be “healthy mom and healthy baby” when it comes to birthing choices. The author, however, will support birthing choices that are safe and healthy, which in some cases could be at different locations, with different pain management techniques, and with different supporting personnel.

Chapter 3: Feeding choices: bottle or breast? After the birth of the baby, the next immediate issue is how to feed the child. Again, studies will be cited on topics of interest to this debate such as health for the child, health for the mother, cost of either technique, toxicity concerns, convenience, and other areas of concern. While “everyone” recognizes that “breast is best” and after a generation of formula-fed babies, there has been a WHO-endorsed return to breastfeeding, this is still not the choice of all mothers and some, who are well-educated, choose formula instead of breast milk. Formula is not the dangerous choice that it used to be as formulas are highly regulated and the canning process is much safer (e.g. no lead soldering) than it used to be. Parents will also be encouraged to let hospital staff know of their choices, so that the choice can be supported immediately after the baby’s birth.

Chapter 4: Family bed or baby’s crib? Once the baby is fed, sleep is the next issue to be discussed. Again, there are typically two choices and some families struggle with this dilemma. Sometimes this choice is linked to the previous discussion, as mothers who are breastfeeding find that to be more convenient if they share a bed with their baby. This leads to questions of safety and how can the family bed approach work while minimizing any danger to the infant. Questions of safety also arise if the baby has her own crib – risks of suffocation, strangulation and SIDS are of great concern, leading to many different professional recommendations. These studies, for both family bed and baby’s own crib sleeping arrangements, will be surveyed and summarized for the readers. Other possible sleeping arrangements will also be discussed, showing that this issue is not as black and white as many novice parents may think.

Chapter 5: How well does your baby sleep at night? This is likely the biggest challenge for new parents – getting enough sleep and ensuring that baby also gets enough sleep. So while this book will not espouse any specific sleeping strategies (other than patience), scientific literature on this topic will be surveyed and summarized. Notably, that it is neurologically improbable that a baby will be able to sleep “through the night” (and a discussion will arise on what that exactly means) until the age of approximately 6 weeks, and that once a baby starts “sleeping through the night”, progression is not linear and there are many events which can disrupt a baby’s sleep patterns, such as the all-famous growth spurts, teething, increased neurological functions, leaps in physical development (e.g. baby learns how to roll over), and so on. There are many differences between individual babies, even in the same family, and so while parents will be encouraged to share successful strategies with each other, they will be

discouraged from comparing number of hours slept in any given 24-hr period, etc. as this will only lead to frustration.

Chapter 6: Pacifier or thumb? It is recognized that babies need to suck, though some do enjoy this more than others. Typically, there are two options, although other options (such as baby's fingers, parent's fingers, mother's breast, etc) will also be discussed. Scientific studies on this topic will be surveyed and summarized, with issues of concern addressed such as tooth decay, palate deformation, weaning difficulties later in life, and so on.

Chapter 7: Cloth or disposable diapers?

Chapter 8: How to deal with unwanted criticism?

Chapter 9: How to maintain the marital relationship – looking after yourselves as parents, as partners and as individuals

Chapter 10: Conclusion