

OUR OPINION

Baby-care book could be dangerous

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Drs. Zuckerman

One relatively new entry to the ranks of child-rearing books concerns us a great deal. On *Becoming Babywise*, by Gary Ezzo and Robert Bucknam, M.D., contains information that is not only inaccurate but also

has the potential to harm infants.

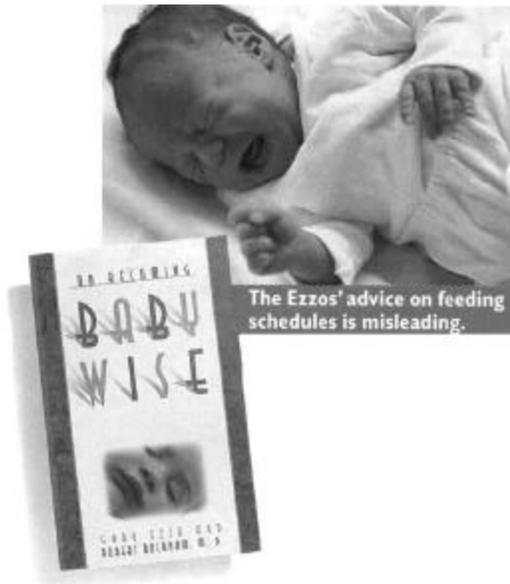
On *Becoming Babywise*, which has sold more than 200,000 copies since it was published in 1995, emphasizes the acquisition of important values such as kindness, honesty, and respect for others. While we certainly agree with these childrearing goals, the authors' recommendations about how to achieve them are harsh and punitive.

For example, the "parent directed feeding plan" that they advocate calls for adherence to a strict feeding schedule. If your newborn doesn't finish what he's given at one feeding, contends Ezzo, he shouldn't be fed until three hours later—even if he displays signs of hunger—because "babies learn from natural consequences." Learning to be accountable for behavior is reasonable for older children, but it is absolutely inappropriate for infants. At least one infant has been hospitalized for dehydration and malnutrition while on this regimen.

Furthermore, the authors recommended spanking (with an instrument that is not too stiff) to punish certain behaviors. (Their advice on "chastisement," as they call it, reminds us of that dispensed by the Rev. John Robinson, who wrote in the early 1700s that "by the time a child is 1 year he must be taught to fear being beaten with a stick. The unpleasant noise of crying will be rarely heard in the house and the family will live in as much quietness as if there were not a child

among them.") Ezzo's suggestions for using physical punishment and other "parent-centered" methods of childrearing are hardly likely to produce well-adjusted children.

On *Becoming Babywise* grew out of a course and accompanying workbook entitled "Growing Kids God's Way," written and taught



by Ezzo and his wife, Anne Marie. The course has expanded to some 6,000 churches nationwide. As a commonsense, loving, and parent-centered approach to raising a baby, the book might be attractive to parents who are unaware that some of the information and advice is physically and emotionally dangerous to children. Because the Ezzos appeal to widely held childrearing goals, the book may fool some parents. If you have questions, we urge you to speak with your family physician or to write to us in care of *Child*, 375 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.