



The Data Game

New N.Y.C. parents find that when it comes to information, a lot can be way too much

BY TATIANA BONCOMPAGNI

It was the baby bottles that did her in.

“After years of trying to do the best for her toddler son—sourcing organic baby food, selecting the right playgroups and so on—Stephanie Hirsch, a pretty blond fashion designer and mother of a 5-year-old and 10-month-old, reached her breaking point when she heard that bisphenol A, a polycarbonate chemical commonly found in baby bottles and water bottles, could potentially be linked to various health problems.

“I lost my mind looking at the bottom of every bottle, every sippy cup,” she recalled. “I wrote the book [Mother Nurture, a collection of common-sense parenting stories and advice that was published last year] because I was so obsessed and crazy.”

Call it too much information: The daily deluge of parenting advice on everything from breast-feeding to potty training and beyond is enough to make any mother want to throw her hands up in despair and shout, Howard Beale-style, that they aren’t going to take it anymore.

“The more I am inundated with information, the more I ignore it and push it away and use my common sense,” says Belle in the Big Apple blogger and new mother Brooke Parkhurst. (Parkhurst, who has penned a cookbook with her chef husband, recently started On the Hip, a new mommy-friendly series on her popular blog.)

But not everyone is able to stand up to the madness with such ease. Dale Hrabí, author of the satirical *The Perfect Baby Handbook* and blog of the same name, got the idea to poke fun of hyper-parenting trends (he calls nursing 6-year-olds “weird,” and attachment parenting, a child-rearing method that emphasizes physical contact between mothers and babies, “ridiculous”) when his two best friends became pregnant with their first children at the exact same time.

“Both decided to consume enormous amounts of information; one read six profoundly conflicting books on the topic of sleep-training,” says Hrabí. “They were going insane.”



Top 10 Resources for Research-Addicted New York City Parents:

- 1** Stay plugged in to the coolest new products and trends for babies and toddlers at www.strollertraffic.com
- 2** Stock up on fresh, affordable groceries and kid-friendly recipes at www.weelicious.com
- 3** Learn all you need to know about breastfeeding at www.mamaknowsbreast.com
- 4** Find children’s gifts that will impress your friends at www.totsnob.com
- 5** Calm your fears with no-nonsense medical info at www.aap.org (American Academy of Pediatrics).
- 6** Best informational website about children’s developmental stages: www.seedlingsgroup.com
- 7** Get informed about the NYC school and camp landscape at www.parentsleague.org (Parents League of New York)
- 8** Meet new mommy friends through www.babybites.net
- 9** Best source for childproofing www.babybodyguards.com
- 10** Sample the BEST of everything NYC has to offer moms and families at events hosted by www.divamoms.com

According to Dr. Jamie Wells, a Manhattan-based pediatrician, it is the mothers who approach parenting like their careers who are most likely to try to read every bit of information, every book available on the subject of child rearing, in an effort to control their child’s well-being. “Control is a false perception when it comes to parenting,” says Dr. Wells. “Especially the very well educated, they do their due diligence to an extreme. But it’s the things they worry most about that are the things that don’t happen.”

What is worth worrying about? Not hormones in milk or plastic baby bottles, says Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, president of the American Council on Science and Health, a nonprofit advocacy group. Dr. Whelan paints the picture of a mother who takes her child in a taxi to the farmer’s market in search of organic fruit, only to forget to put the child’s seat belt on. “What happens is that people get so distracted by the hypothetical health threats that they stop paying attention to the real ones,” says Dr. Whelan.

Case in point: “My kooky friends who travel extensively but haven’t vaccinated their children. Or the extremists that bring organic eggs to a diner,” offers Kelly Cutrone, a fashion publicist and mother of a 7-year-old.

But of all the madness created by information overload, Laura Vanderkam’s surreal encounter with another mother takes the cake. Amid the pastel party decorations, cupcakes and friendly chatter at a friend’s baby shower, another guest mentioned that it was important to be careful with long hair, which could end up wrapped around a baby’s finger, cutting off the baby’s circulation.

Her thought? “Yeah, and a gorilla could escape from the zoo, come into my baby’s room and kill him. So what am I supposed to do? Sleep in the doorway every night?”

