

Babywise? Bewary!

PART 2 OF 2

WHAT EZZO DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT MAY HURT YOUR BABY

by Cindy Webb

Part One of this article addressed some of the controversy that has surrounded Gary Ezzo, author of such books and parenting materials as "On Becoming Babywise" and "Growing Kids God's Way." Mr. Ezzo's training in ministry rather than in medicine, psychology or child development has created concern from Christian and secular healthcare and child development professionals about his parenting philosophy. Additionally, according to Matthew Aney, M.D., a pediatrician at Kaiser Urgent Care Unit in Orange County, CA, Ezzo's "parent-directed feeding" (PDF) plan has been implicated in over 200 cases of poor weight gain and failure-to-thrive in infants across the country.

Despite the controversy, many parents use Ezzo's methods and speak highly of their effectiveness with their babies and children.

Part 2 of this article explores the book "On Becoming Babywise, Book Two" in which Ezzo gives advice on the rearing of the five to fifteen-month-old baby.

Is your five-month-old spitting spinach? Squeeze her hand. Is your ten-month-old arching his back in the high chair? Swat his thigh. Is your fourteen-month-old fascinated with the remote? Slap his hand. Are none of these methods working? Repeat with slightly more force for, as Gary Ezzo writes in *On Becoming Babywise Book 2*, "Swats need to count."

Ezzo is a fundamentalist minister and director of Growing Families International (GFI), a huge for-profit corporation that markets his parenting books and curriculum to churches and families nationwide. Despite the fact that he has been disowned by his parent church, and disavowed by many other evangelical Christian professionals (including James Dobson and his Focus on the Family ministry), Ezzo's techniques continue to be popular with some parents, in both the Christian community and the secular public.

The Christian materials "Growing Kids' God's Way" are stripped of religious references and are sold under the titles "On Becoming Babywise," "On Becoming Babywise Book 2," and recently released, "On Becoming Childwise."

"On Becoming Babywise Book 2" is the secular version of Ezzo's Preparation for the Toddler Years, an evangelical Christian manual for raising the "pre-toddler." And though Ezzo's only reference to religion in *Babywise 2* is a paragraph advocating prayer before meals, readers should be aware that his religious belief system - that babies -are born with a "sin nature" that must be controlled by the parents -guides the book's philosophy.

Ezzo's techniques are often disturbing to pediatric health care and child development professionals. For example, Ezzo's belief that leaving weeks old babies to cry teaches them "delayed gratification" demonstrates a lack of knowledge about the most basic

tenants of pediatric care and child development.

The Study of Child Development

Babies grow according to a schedule of development in five different areas: 1. Social-emotional; 2. Cognitive; 3. Language; 4. Motor; 5. Self-help.

In each of these areas, all human babies across all cultures develop similarly. Through decades of study, child development professionals have come to identify certain tasks and skills important to each age. Skills build upon other skills until the baby becomes a child and the child an adult.

According to the study of child development, Ezzo's teachings fall short in four primary areas;

1. Inappropriate expectations
2. Misinterpretation of developmentally appropriate behavior
3. Overly controlling parenting style

4. Inappropriate and overly harsh punishment (especially when directed toward babies)

Inappropriate Expectations/ Misinterpretation of Developmentally Appropriate Behavior

Throughout *Babywise Book 2* Ezzo sets the scene for babies to fail by expecting more from them than they are developmentally ready to give. When they don't meet these expectations they are punished.

Ezzo often uses such phrases as, "When you sense your baby understands..." as a guide for parents to know when babies should be disciplined. But as Barbara Wright M.A., L.P.C., Certified Child Development Specialist with Hillcrest Center for Women's Health says, "Just because a baby can imitate a task doesn't mean he or she is 'ready' (cognitively, emotionally, or

physically) to carry it out consistently."

The following internet posting found on a GFI parent's forum demonstrates this:

"[My wife and I have come to realize that we probably have not asked our 13-month-old daughter to do very much in terms of positive obedience. In other words, she is fairly good at the 'no's' (obeying 'no') but we've discovered that now we can't get her to do things like sign 'all done' to get down from the high chair or other things we ask her to do ... For example, she will go back and forth from isolation to the high chair for up to 4 hours and still refuse to sign 'all done', even though she has done it before, and knows exactly what we are asking of her. She will look away from us and whine, or have a temper tantrum as soon as we ask her to do it ... she is our first and has been a fairly obedient child to date (apparently because we have not asked much of her). Are we doing something wrong? ... We are exhausted.]"

"If you teach a child a new skill," says Wright, "when the child is ready intellectually, physically and emotionally then the teaching will be easy to almost effortless. However," she continues, "if you try to teach the skill before he or she is ready it will be like beating your head against the wall."

Ezzo has difficulty with expectations partially because theologically he believes "parents should insist on moral behavior long before their child is capable of understanding moral concepts." And Ezzo's view of what constitutes "moral behavior" is lengthy. Such innocent actions as an infant exploring food with her hands, or dropping food off the high chair are viewed morally by Ezzo in his chapter on "High Chair Manners". "...don't let her help you put pureed food into her mouth with her hands..." writes Ezzo, "She doesn't need to hold the utensil you're using to feed her."

And "...if you have to, hold your baby's hands away from her food. Even better teach her where to place her hands while being fed."

Ezzo believes a baby should be trained to keep hands "either on the side of the highchair tray or underneath the tray on baby's lap."

Babies are trained through a progressive series of reprimands: "First, correct the child verbally. Next, provide an attention-getting squeeze or swat to the hand, if necessary. Finally, isolate him or her to the crib...when the isolation period is finished, bring him or her back to the highchair and try again. If the child persists in the behavior (and some will), mealtime may be over and naptime might begin."

According to child development professional Molly Steele, "It is developmentally inappropriate to expect babies not to touch their food."

Steele, who has a master's degree in Family Relations and Child Development, states, "Babies learn with all their senses and need to enjoy the feeding experience. With that in mind," continues Steele, "parents set parameters. There must be a middle ground between no rules and over-restriction."

The mother who is aware of normal child development views applesauce on the high chair tray not only as food, but also as a learning experience. As baby spreads it, licks her fingers and even splats it, her brain stores information about texture, taste and smell and cause and effect. These simple actions, according to current brain research, actually create new neural pathways in baby's brain-increasing her intellect, her confidence, and her understanding about her world.

And what of dropping food off the high chair tray? "There is a reason babies enjoy dropping food and other objects," says Steele, adding, "Through this simple 'game' babies' brains learn about gravity, cause and effect and 'object permanence'—the fact that something disappears then reappears."

Babies are fascinated with this new discovery and, for a time, will endlessly drop things off their highchair tray. The mother who has an understanding of cognitive development, will be patient during this relatively short-lived stage as baby's neural pathways grow and develop.

"If babies are punished for exploratory behaviors," says Wright, they learn not to be curious, not to question."

Ezzo writes that "Missed training opportunities (in enforcing high chair rules) result in slower intellectual growth." In fact, his high chair rules could have a negative affect, not only on a baby's intellectual growth, but on social/emotional growth as well, as baby is constantly frustrated and chastised for behavior he or she has been "hardwired" to perform.

Other areas Ezzo shows inappropriate expectations for and/or misinterpretation of are:

Separation Anxiety

Ezzo: "If you find that your child clings to you, refuses to go to dad or siblings, and cries when you leave the mom, it may be the result of too much playtime with mom."

Wright: "Separation anxiety is a normal developmental stage usually displayed between 8 and 9 months, at 15 to 18 months and again at 2 years and sometimes again at 5 years. It is a sign of cognitive growth and positive attachment and does not mean that the mother has done anything wrong."

Playpen Use

Ezzo: "The partnership a child has with the playpen establishes foundational intellectual skills. If your child misses structured playtime (in the playpen), the repertoire of skills he might otherwise attain

by these activities could be seriously delayed."

Wright: "A playpen is certainly not necessary for baby's cognitive growth. It may be used when a mother needs to do such things as vacuum or shower, or to keep baby safe from a rambunctious toddler."

Cognitive growth occurs when baby interacts with interesting stimuli. Overuse of a playpen, especially if it contains the same toys day after day, will result in a bored, unhappy baby. An understimulated baby means an understimulated intellect.

Thumb Sucking

Ezzo: "of the two nonnutritive sucking techniques, thumb sucking is the most difficult to control ... parents won't be able to break the habit over night." (Advocates limiting it between six and eighteen months of age)

Wright: "Babies need non-nutritive sucking. It is a very strong instinct in the first two years of life- even starting sometimes in utero. They suck to comfort themselves. By 2 to 3 years thumb sucking can be diminished by redirection and by providing alternative activities."

Toilet Training

Ezzo: "...once you know your child is capable of going to the potty but refuses, then you are facing a potential discipline issue ... If soiling continues to be a problem with a child who is over two-and-a-half years of age, hold the child accountable for his or her accidents ... the child should clean up himself or herself, plus the soiled clothes ... Once you start training, stay with it. False starts are confusing..."

Wright: "Many children, particularly boys, are simply not ready for complete potty training before age 3-some even later than that. While a child may be able to imitate and potty in the potty chair once or twice, that does not mean he or she has the sphincter control for consistent compliance. Discipline at this stage could be seriously damaging, setting up anxiety and resistance. Children who are pressed to potty train too early may not end up being fully trained until they are three-and-a-half or four. And, it is simply developmentally incorrect that once you start you must stick with it. If the child doesn't seem ready (consistent accidents being the primary sign) back off. Put the potty-

Developmental Confusion

Ezzo justifies his overly controlling parenting techniques by writing that "excessive freedom" leads to "developmental confusion." But what exactly is "developmental confusion"?

Mark Severance, Ezzo's spokesperson at Growing Families said he would contact Ezzo to find out. The next day Severance called to say that developmental confusion is "what happens when a child gets more freedom than he or she is ready for."

While that may answer when developmental confusion occurs, it doesn't answer what it is. Severance said he would contact Ezzo again for a clearer definition. At the time of printing Severance was still unable to give an answer to the question, "What is developmental confusion."

chair away and say nothing about it for a few weeks.”

Over-Controlling Parent

In “Babywise Book 2” Ezzo includes the story of a mother whose seven-month-old baby physically resists having her arm manipulated to teach the sign for “sorry” (Ezzo teaches that pre-verbal babies should learn sign language to communicate their needs): I was taken aback when she resisted and actually tried to fight me,’ the mother explained. ‘I realized this was one of the first battles that I, the mother, must win.’”

Sadly, mothers trying to win battles with babies over normal developmental behaviors can lead to intense frustration for both babies and mothers. The following are examples attained from the internet on a GFI parent’s forum:

Parent-

“My eight-month-old Bethany gained so many new things the past couple of weeks all at once ... The problem is that now she only wants to be walking around with someone (anyone’s) fingers, or standing up against something to hold onto. Blanket time (Ezzo believes babies should be taught to stay on blankets and not crawl off them for periods of time every day) has been a nightmare because as soon as you stop walking with her and sit her down she swings herself backwards onto her back and cries ... We have swatted her and told her we don’t act that way, but it doesn’t seem to help ... Its like she only wants to be up and about. Any suggestions?”

Response from “Contact Mom”-

(Contact Moms are trained using the Ezzo method):

“Sounds familiar to me. Our first daughter did something like that ... Isolation is probably the best bet at her age (squeezing the hand works too), actual swats are usually reserved for 15 months and up. You might try isolation, it may take several times per incident to get through to her.”

Parent-

“Our two-year-old shares a room with her brother who is one. She is in her toddler bed, while he is in a crib. Early this summer she began getting out of bed at night to get a toy, see her brother, pick up his blanket

Are Non-Spanking Parents Responsible for our Increasingly Violent Society?

Ezzo defends his stance on physical punishment by stating in Growing Kids God’s Way, “As our society moved toward the no-spank philosophy in the late 1960’s and throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s, violent behavior in the schools escalated with crimes being rape, robbery, assault, burglary, arson”

It is not the children of the “no spank” parents who commit violent crimes:

National studies of prison populations show that 80% to 90% of the inmates (the perpetrators of violent crime in our society) were not just inappropriately spanked, but physically abused as children.

that he dropped, etc. She knows that she is not supposed to get out of her bed unless mommy or daddy come and get her...We started dealing with it with chastisement. We were spanking about five to seven times in a matter of an hour ... I checked (on the forum) and there was a blurb where someone said be sure the consequences reach the heart. Obviously spanking was not ... we decided that a logical consequence of her getting out of bed was that she would lose the privilege of sleeping in a big girl bed and she had to spend the next three nights in the playpen with no blanket or pillow. (She loves her blanket). She hated this and cried and cried. It worked for a few days, and then she got out of bed again. So we immediately put her back in the playpen ... She spent another three days in the playpen (nights and naps) ... It worked for one night. Back in the playpen for five days. After five days in her big bed, she got out again.

Response from “Contact Mom”-

“Camp by the door where you can see her, but she can’t see you and catch her as soon as she starts out of the bed-before she’s to the door or her brother’s crib or toys, etc...the idea being to not let her enjoy the ‘fruits of her sin’”

“Ezzo is very legalistic,” observes Wright in discussing Ezzo’s style of parenting. “He doesn’t give children a lot of grace.”

Though Wright believes it’s important for parents to see themselves as “in charge” and able to set limits, she states, “There must be a happy balance. Authoritarian parents create kids with a lot of internalized anger,”

Jim Fay of the Cline/Fay Institute and co-author with child

psychiatrist Foster Cline of the book “Parenting With Love and Logic,” agrees with Wright adding, “The kind of parents who would be enthusiastic about treating kids this way (according to Ezzo’s principles) truly deserve the teenagers they will get in a few years.”

Physical Punishment

“There is no substitute for biblical chastisement,” writes Ezzo in Growing Kids God’s Way. “Parents may wish for an ‘easier’ or more seemingly ‘humane’ way, but chastisement [Ezzo’s word for spanking] is really the easiest method. Chastisement is God’s method for parents to establish and maintain control of their children.”

Ezzo believes that spanking for issues of rebellion should begin when a baby is between fourteen and eighteen months old and should be used as a first line of defense, not a last resort.

“In Babywise Book 2” Ezzo says that babies less than 18 months old should not be spanked, yet he advocates swatting, squeezing and slapping babies hands and thighs. He views the pain inflicted in swats and slaps to babies not as spanking, but as simply a way of “getting their attention.”

For children over 14 months old Ezzo recommends using a “chastisement tool,” which he defines as “a somewhat flexible instrument (that) stings without inflicting bone or muscle damage...”

The Child Abuse Prevention Counsel of Orange County California, reacting to calls from physicians and nurses about Ezzo’s teachings, reviewed Ezzo’s material and came up with the following conclusion, “...(in) advocating this type of child discipline is the assumption that the entire listening audience

possesses the emotional maturity to administer corporal punishment with appropriate restraint. For a great many parents this is not true. National statistics tell us that 5 children die every day of the year in the U.S. at the hands of their parent or caretaker and 90% of those children killed were under the age of 5 ... I would liked to have seen the Ezzo’s offer warning against the use of corporal punishment for those parents who are struggling with high risk issues in their own lives such as chemical dependency, a childhood abuse history, or poor anger management skills and impulse control.”

“We know from long-term studies,” says Barbara Wright, “that children who are frequently spanked are much more likely to be -aggressive. Instead of looking at spanking as a first choice, it should be viewed as a last choice.” Wright recommends:

1. Redirecting: Turning the baby’s attention to something other than the undesirable activity or object
2. Logical consequences: “If you track in mud, you must help wipe it UP.”
3. Time out for mishandled object or toy: “Music boxes are for listening to, not for throwing. Let’s put the music box in time out for awhile to help you remember.”
4. “Thinking chair”: A time out for the child to consider his or her misbehavior. A basic rule of thumb is that children sit in the “thinking chair” for no longer than they are old: the one-year-old sits for one minute, two-year-old for two minutes, etc.

The Ezzo trained baby lives in a narrow world. Ezzo claims that, unless babies have the restrictions he advocates, such as high chair “manners” training, and playpen time, they are at risk of “slower intellectual growth” and “seriously delayed” skill development. According to Wright and Steele there is no scientific evidence to support this view.

Parents who leave infants to cry, who restrict babies to playpens and blankets, and who slap and swat babies for normal development- driven activities may not be acting “wise.” They may, instead, be depriving their babies of emotional, physical and cognitive nurturing. These are the babies at risk.

For more information about child development and parenting issues Barbara Wright and Molly Steele recommend the following authors:

Penelope Leach, Ph.D.
Dr. T. Berry Brazelton,
Dr. Foster Cline and Jim Fay
or contact the American Academy of Pediatrics for scientifically sound information.

For those interested in a Christian perspective on child rearing:

Dr. Kevin Leman,
Dr. William Sears and Martha Sears R.N.
Dr. James Dobson.

Cindy Webb, B.S., worked Professionally in the field of child development and parenting for ten years (five of those years at the prestigious Child Study Center in Fort Worth, Texas) before becoming a free-lance writer in Tulsa. She and her husband, a Presbyterian minister, have two children.

To report a condition of poor weight gain or failure-to-thrive associated with On Becoming Babywise or Preparation for Parenting, contact Matthew

T. Aney MD. at Aneybody@aol.com

Aney, an evangelical Christian and pediatrician at Kaiser Pediatric Urgent Care Unit in Orange county, California, has investigated at least 200 cases of failure-to-thrive or poor weight gain in infants nationwide as a result of Ezzo's parent-directed feeding plan. Aney has also documented 35 medical inaccuracies in Ezzo's On Becoming Babywise.

For more information about the controversy surrounding Babywise and Babywise Book 2, check the following websites: www.mailing-list.net/redrhino/ezzo
www.babycenter.com/refeap/8369.html

What the Professionals Say:

Ezzo writes: 'Between seven and nine weeks, parents [who have followed Babywise] can expect nighttime sleep cycles to be 'a continuous 7-8 hours. After three months of age, that time is extended to 9-11 hours each night.'

Dr. Richard Ferber, director of Boston's Center for Pediatric Sleep Disorders at Children's Hospital and the author of the bestselling 'Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems' says: 'Parents shouldn't expect babies to sleep that long that early, although a very few will on their own and in that case, you may sometimes need to actually wake them to feed them. There is no good evidence that babies that young can go that long without a feeding.'

James McKenna, director of the Mother-Baby Behavioral Sleep Laboratory at the University of Notre Dame: "The Ezzos appear to be the masters of the 'one-size-should-fit-all' school of childcare. Their simplistic, judgmental, and utterly self-serving program confuses personal and religious values with science, and strictly controlled infant care with successful parenting. The two are anything but compatible."

Amy Scott, a mother, writer and sociologist who has observed extensively on the GFI Internet message boards in order to gain greater insight into how and why parents are using Ezzo's programs says: 'Part of the appeal is a wish by busy parents to train babies to conveniently adapt to their lives. Many of these mothers are working very hard at being good parents. The problem is this: through simple bad luck or through their religious institution, they have been offered a seemingly rational plan for childcare that is full of misinformation, denial and disguised child-hate.'

Penelope Leach, British psychologist and author of "Your Baby and Child": 'I believe the Ezzo's programs incite child abuse and should carry a government health warning. We don't allow pediatric pornography [in Great Britain] so we should not allow this.'

Pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton: 'Parenting like this [Ezzo's] shows very little respect for children. It's very adultamorphic and not sensitive to the baby. Although parents should gently set limits, punitive discipline for very young children and babies is repressive and can squash exploration and excitement in the first two years of life. It will be interesting to see some follow on these kids in later years. I suspect they'll have a lot of inner rebellion.'

Dr. William Sears, practicing pediatrician and clinical assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Southern California School of Medicine and bestselling author of more than 20 child-care titles, says: "Babywise is probably the most dangerous program of teaching about babies and children that I have seen in my 25 years of being a pediatrician."

Jeanne Elium, family therapist and co-author of 'Raising a Son,' and 'Raising a Daughter': "Leaving a baby alone to cry in order to punish or to train them to sleep can create a sense of rage that comes from abandonment and hopelessness. These children will probably pay an expensive price in therapy later."

Source: www.salon.com/mwt/feature/1999/10/26/leach/index
www.babycenter.com/refcap/8369.html#4