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# Dealing with discontented babies

PARENTS of newborns are no strangers to advice. Some of it may be unsolicited from well-meaning strangers in supermarket aisles, but many parents will seek guidance from a number of healthcare providers (doctors, midwives and early childhood nurses, to name a few).

Dr Pamela Douglas is a GP with extensive clinical experience of mothers and babies, and 15 years of research in the area of unsettled babies.

Her new book focuses on the first 16 weeks of a baby's life, with particular emphasis on the main activities that dominate that short period of time: feeding, sleeping and crying.

With much of the literature and advice aimed at new parents who are concerned about the establishment of routines, spaced feeding and working towards the holy grail of an uninterrupted night's sleep, Dr Douglas introduces a concept she calls "cued care".

In a nutshell, it means good two-way communication between mother and baby, where the mother responds without deliberate delay to the baby's cries (as can occur when trying to help a baby to self-

settle or spaced-out feeding).

Like any typical type A personality, I must admit I approached the book with some scepticism, having subscribed to routines and their welcome predictability with my own children. However, after finishing the book, and letting the messages settle in, I found my opinions somewhat swayed.

Dr Douglas writes with a clear tone of empathy and does not set out to dictate. She wants mothers to feel that they are the experts when it comes to their new baby, a message that can be lost in those first few months with all the well-intentioned advice.

Her chapters on nourishing the baby's senses and enjoying the baby were instructive, with suggestions about how to practice mindfulness during stressful situations, lessons which apply beyond the first four months of parenting.

I don't think this book could stand alone as the definitive text for new parents as it has a particular focus on mothers and babies, while fathers are hardly mentioned, but I would recommend reading it before the arrival of baby.

Dr Douglas offers ideas for further reading at the end of the book (with references for both parents and health professionals).

For me, perhaps the main message was that mothers should enjoy their babies, and particularly the first few months of parenthood, rather than just 'survive' them.

While there is no such thing as a good night's sleep when baby arrives (and often for a few years following), there is good (enough) sleep to be had and much joy to be experienced during this fleeting time.

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## The Info

**TITLE** The Discontented Little Baby Book

**AUTHOR** Dr Pamela Douglas

**PUBLISHER** University of Queensland Press