



TITLE OF THE BOOK: The Unicorn Baby. Debunking 10 Myths of Modern Parenting

AUTHOR: Roxanne Atkinson

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A review of: The Unicorn Baby. Debunking 10 Myths of Modern Parenting. Written by Roxanne Atkinson

Information on the author

Roxanne Atkinson is a Cape Town based occupational therapist. She holds an Honours degree in Occupational Therapy from the University of Cape Town. She has a special interest in paediatrics and neuro-developmental therapy and completed her Bobath training. Graduating in 2006, Roxanne has worked at Milner Road Private Practice, Vista Nova School for children with Cerebral Palsy; Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital and Victoria Hospital Wynberg. When she decided to have her own babies, she started her private practice. Her focus has been on early identification, educating and empowering caregivers and giving evidence-based intervention when necessary. Roxanne works mostly with children aged 0-7 years old who have developmental delays or trouble learning age-appropriate skills, and their families. Roxanne is the proud mom of two – and she calls them her non-unicorn babies.

The Review

The author starts this delightful book as follows:
“If you have read a few baby books or searched the Internet for parenting tips, you have most likely stumbled across the mythical Unicorn Baby. This baby is said to pee pure gold and poop rainbows. While most parents have heard about the Unicorn Baby, few have ever seen one.

The Unicorn Baby is elusive, so it may be easier to spot the parents of the Unicorn Baby. These parents will be looking good and claiming to feel great. This is largely because the Unicorn Baby has not changed their lives. Their Unicorn Baby has fitted seamlessly into the ideal routine as prescribed by an accredited, opinionated person. Their babies have breastfed with ease every four hours and, of course, slept through the night since they were six weeks old. Their Unicorn Baby grows and develops above the 50th percentile, leaving very little for their parents to work on or worry about.

These parents attribute their baby’s success to their superior parenting practices, as well as the stimulation classes that are sure to turn their Unicorn Baby into an even more super baby. This will be the baby who not only hits their developmental milestones on time but smashes them out of the park. They will go on to speak four languages thanks to a fabulous foreign language app.

Whether this baby exists or not does not really matter. What does matter is this: apparently, you did not get this baby. And that is probably why you are reading this book.”

She then continuous to unpack the following 10 myths, that young parents and professionals working with young babies in early intervention have all heard:

Myth 1: Babies are all the same Reality 1: Every baby is unique

You have busted Myth 1 when you recognise that you baby is unique. That there is no perfect baby, just as there is no perfect parent. You recognise both the wins and the challenges your baby faces.

Myth 2: A baby does not have to change your life Reality 2: Your

baby will change your life

You have busted Myth 2 when you have devised a new normal survival plan. You have made space for your new family to form by pausing as many commitments as you can.

Myth 3: You need to get your baby into the perfect routine

Reality 3: There is no such thing as a perfect routine.

You have busted Myth 3 when your baby likes you – they fall asleep on your body and calm down at the sound of your voice.

Myth 4: Breastfeeding comes naturally Reality 4: Breastfeeding is hard work and may be very different from what you expected.

You have busted Myth 4 when you see breastfeeding as a new skill and know it will take time to learn how to do it. You may not be able to breastfeed. And that's okay.

Myth 5: You should only feed your baby every four hours

Reality 5: You should practice responsive, not scheduled, feeding.

You have busted Myth 5 when your baby is an active participant in feeding. You let them explore foods and give them feedback when they need it.

Myth 6: You must teach your baby to sleep through the night Reality 6: There is no magic formula that will make your baby sleep through the night.

You have busted Myth 6 when your baby likes sleeping (even if you think they should sleep for longer).

Myth 7: Your baby grows and develops everyday Reality 7: Your baby will grow and develop in spurts.

You have busted Myth 7 when you are proud of what your baby can do and are enjoying each stage of the first year, rather than rushing towards one milestone.

Myth 8: Your baby needs specialised stimulation classes and educational toys to thrive Reality 8: You and your baby are not always going to want to play when it is playtime, and that is normal – your baby will learn from you, from everyday objects and from experiences.

You have busted Myth 8 when you and your baby are getting one dose of shared joy each day.

Myth 9: Your baby must do tummy time for 20 minutes every day Reality 9: Your baby needs more than tummy time to develop good postural control

You have busted Myth 9 when your baby is happy in a variety of positions; firstly, horizontally and later, vertically.

Myth 10: Technology gives you and your baby an advantage Reality 10: You need to learn to trust yourself rather than technology.

You have busted Myth 10 when you are spending more time getting to know your baby than researching babies on your phone.

This book is a breath of fresh air in modern times, where parents are inundated by unrealistic expectations for raising children. This easy-to-read book will set to rest the anxiety and uncertainty that these myths create. Roxanne looks at the first year of a baby's life from a realistic point of view, combining it with scientific background explained in an

easy-to-read fashion. It offers an in-depth but easily digestible narrative of the most important aspects of development in the first year. Roxanne shares practical ideas and activities that support a baby's development. Her approach is a good combination of occupational therapy and down-to-earth advice which is easy to understand and follow – and fits into the hectic schedule of new parents. Her writing style is light but informative. The book is enhanced by the striking and appropriate illustrations done by Lester Atkinson, who happens to be father to Roxanne's non-unicorn babies.

As an occupational therapist working with babies in early intervention, I found that the book confirms those themes that so often come up with first-time, or even third-time parents, and especially parents who are raising those non-typical babies. The book need not be read in the order of chapters, as each chapter attends to an important aspect of development. Roxanne covers these aspects in exceptional detail, without it becoming overwhelming. As a therapist, I have used her explanations that are simple and practical on more than one occasion. I especially like the following example: *“Viewing development as a ladder where one skill is gained before moving onto another can be a barrier to normal development. In reality, development is more like a bowl of spaghetti. Each skill is intricately wrapped up into another, and it is hard to see where one spaghetti strand starts and where it ends. In other words, every area of development affects every other area of development.”* The chapter regarding the eighth myth covers a pet subject of mine i.e., the importance of play and how to play. In the current technological era this is a skill that many new parents actually need to be taught as it does not seem to come naturally.

The book is strongly recommended to occupational therapists who work with expecting parents, new parents and even grandparents, and should evoke interesting discussions amongst them. It is a useful resource for therapists working with young children and especially with non-typical, non-unicorn babies who are often the ones seen in occupational therapy practices.