

“Medical Advice on the Bodily and Mental Health of Children” (1794)

Abstract

Bernhard Christian Faust, a court physician in the principality of Schaumburg-Lippe, adopted the familiar literary form of the Christian catechism for his widely read proclamation of Enlightenment medical and pedagogical principles. In the Catholic ecclesiastical principality [*Hochstift*] of Würzburg, Faust's work was distributed to all schoolteachers. This self-consciously “modernizing” work is notable for its emphasis on “the rational” and “the natural,” its assumption that childhood is a separate stage of life, in which children's potential for goodness and happiness should be realized, and – apart from its invocation of the Enlightenment's God of rational nature – its avoidance of religious accents (especially doctrines of innate sinfulness).

Source

[...]

IV. On the Attending and Nursing of Infants.

45. *What does the little helpless infant stand most in need of?*

The love and care of his mother.

46. *Can this love and care be shown by other persons?*

No. Nothing equals maternal love.

47. *Why does a child stand so much in need of the love and care of his mother?*

Because the attendance and nursing, the tender and affectionate treatment which a child stands in need of can only be expected from a mother.

48. *How ought infants to be attended and nursed?*

They ought always to breathe fresh and pure air; be kept dry and clean, and immersed in cold water every day.

49. *Why so?*

Because children are now, at the time alluded to, more placid, because not being irritable, they grow and thrive better.

50. *Is it good to swathe a child?*

No. Swathing is a very bad custom, and produces in children great anxiety and pains; it is injurious to the growth of the body, and prevents children from being kept clean and dry.

51. *Is the rocking of children proper?*

No. It makes them uneasy, giddy, and stupid; and is therefore as hurtful to the soul as to the body.

52. *Do children rest and sleep without being rocked?*

Yes. If they be kept continually dry and clean, and in fresh air, they will rest and sleep well, if not disturbed; the rocking and carrying about of children is quite useless.

(Observation. As the human soul in a state of infancy is disturbed by rocking, carrying about and dancing, such practices ought to be considered as dangerous and erroneous. The mother ought to play with the child in an affectionate and gentle manner; ought to give it frequent and bland exercise, and instil gradually into its mind a knowledge of such objects as attract its notice.)

53. *Is it in general necessary to keep children quiet?*

Yes, it is.

54. *What is therefore very bad?*

The making a great noise about children; and it is still worse to frighten them.

55. *It is, therefore, not advisable, I suppose to frighten children into sleep?*

By no means, because they may be thrown into convulsions, and get cramps.

56. *Is it necessary or good to give children composing draughts, or other medicines that tend to promote sleep?*

No. They cause an unnatural, and, of course, unwholesome, sleep; and are very dangerous and hurtful.

57. *How long must a mother suckle her child?*

For nine or twelve months.

(Observation. In fact the child ought to be suckled till it has two teeth in each jaw. Some children are suckled for two or three years; a practice not only erroneous, but hurtful both to mother and child.)

58. *What sort of aliment is prejudicial to the health of children?*

Meal-pap, pancakes, and tough, heavy, and fat meats.

59. *What harm do they do?*

They obstruct the bowels; and children's bellies get, by those indigestible meals, hard and swelled.

60. *What food is most suitable for children?*

Pure, unadulterated new milk and thin gruel; grated crusts of bread; or biscuit boiled with water only, or mixed with milk.

61. *Is it proper to chew the food before you give it to children?*

No. It is disgusting and hurtful.

(Observation. To suffer children to suck the mock-bubby, boats, &c. are very bad and disgusting customs, which occasion gripes, and therefore are dangerous.)

62. *What is in general to be observed with regard to the feeding of children?*

That they be regularly and moderately fed, and their stomachs not loaded with milk or other things. It is, therefore, necessary to prevent people from giving children sweetmeats, or food out of season: the feeding of the child ought to be entirely left to its mother.

63. *Do affectionate careful mothers act right when they take their infants with them to bed?*

No. It is dangerous and hurtful; children ought, therefore, to lay by themselves. [...]

64. *Is it necessary to keep infants very warm?*

No. They must not be kept too warm.

65. *Is it good to cover their heads?*

By no means; it causes humours to break out.

(Observation. From the hour of birth the head of a child ought to be kept uncovered. Mothers will find that, even in the coldest night, when they lay their hands on an infant's head, it is always warm.)

66. *Children are eager to stare at everything, particularly at the light; what is to be observed with regard to this?*

They ought to be immediately turned so as to have the object in a direct line before them; they should never be suffered to look at it sideways, as that would cause them to squint.

67. *By what means is the getting of teeth rendered difficult and dangerous?*

By caps; by keeping the head too warm; by uncleanness, and improper food.

(Observation. Nature herself causes pains at teething time, and the child is afterwards the cause of many more. It may not be amiss here to observe, 1. That pains and agonies are the first instructors of man; they teach him to avoid ills, and make him provident, compassionate, humane, and courageous. 2. Natural bodily pain, in many instances, and particularly in childhood, is less hurtful to man and his happiness than the anxiety and mortification of soul which a child suffers that is irritated, put in a passion, or treated with contempt; and it is as bad to frighten children.)

68. *What is to be observed with regard to making children walk?*

They ought not to be taught to walk in strings, or chairs, or go-carts, or be led by the arm; they ought to be suffered to creep on the floor, till by degrees they learn to walk.

69. *How can we best assist children in speaking?*

We ought to pronounce the words to them very distinctly and slowly; first single sounds, and then easy words.

(Observation. It is of the greatest importance that man, from his earliest infancy, should be accustomed to a distinct pronunciation.)

70. *What are the principal reasons why one fourth of the number of children that come into the world, die in the course of the first two years?*

Want of fresh pure air, uncleanness, bad indigestible food, particularly meal-pap; the anxiety and misery of parents are also among the causes of the death of so many children.

V. Of the Treatment of Children with respect to their Bodies [...]

(Observation. From the third to the seventh year the child has 20 milk-teeth, and during that time the body is weak; these are changed from that period to the twelfth year for strong teeth. In the ninth year the child has 10 milk, and 12 perfect teeth. In the twelfth year both sexes have 24 strong and perfect teeth, and not until then the body begins to receive its natural real strength.)

71. If man is to grow up healthy and strong, how must he be educated?

He ought to receive a liberal, judicious, and prudent education in his infancy, as well as in his youth.

72. Is this of so much importance?

Yes; for upon that depends his health, strength, and the happiness of his succeeding days.

73. What is understood by a judicious education?

That man be educated agreeably with the nature of his soul and body.

74. What is, therefore, necessary to be known that we may give a judicious education to children?

The nature of man and of his existence.

75. What changes does man undergo during the first nine or twelve years of his existence?

His body grows and acquires shape; his soul learns the use of the body; his senses, with regard to conception and perception, increase; and he is joyful and happy in company with those of his own age.

76. What does nature particularly attempt to effect during infancy?

The formation of the body.

77. Is the energy of the soul, and the accomplishment of man, promoted by the perfection of the body?

Yes; the more perfect the body is the more perfect is the soul, and the more man is capable of promoting his own happiness, and that of his fellow-creatures.

78. Can the mind know the nature and structure of the body without instruction and labour?

No; the mind must for many years, during the whole period of infancy, study to acquire a thorough knowledge of the use of the body, composed of so many parts.

(Observation. All voluntary actions of the body are caused by about 440 muscles, which the mind puts in motion by means of a still greater number of nerves; the mind, therefore, during infancy, when we are full of life and vigour, and that the body is alert, must endeavour to learn the use of these 440 muscles, so as judiciously to call forth, as occasion may require, the various motions and energies of the body.)

79. Are those motions or actions of any use to the body?

Yes; its perfection is thereby promoted, and the whole body filled with life and vigour.

80. Of what use are those sensations and ideas to the child which its soul conceives through the senses?

They are the foundation of its understanding; for the more the mind has seen, heard, and felt, and the more distinct its sensations are, the more sensible will man become.

81. What particular purpose is answered by children living together?

They learn to know, to understand, and to love each other, and so lay a foundation for unanimity, mutual fondness, and the happiness of their lives.

82. But if children live in society merry and happy together, can that have any influence upon them when they arrive at a state of maturity?

Yes; it contributes very much to make man spend his life, according to his destination, in virtue and happiness.

83. By what means are those wise designs of Nature promoted?

By activity, and gentle, though constant exercise both of the mind and body of children.

84. Is such exercise compatible with the nature of children?

Yes; children are full of vigour and activity, sense and feeling; they are joyful and merry, and desire to associate with other children.

(Observation. From the twelfth to the eighteenth year the supple body should be invigorated by exercise and plays; the intuitive mind, by instruction and reflection, may lay up a store of knowledge, and man, whose infancy was passed in joy and happiness, learn to become virtuous in his youth; and he will become so if he has experienced the vicissitudes of fortune, her smiles and frowns, and shared his joys with others; if he firmly believes that all the descendants of Adam have an equal right to enjoy pleasures, and are equally obnoxious to pain; and that an all-wise good God created every thing good, and mankind, with a view of making them happy.)

85. What ought we further particularly to observe with respect to children?

That children be suffered to exercise their bodies and minds in company with each other in the open air.

(Observation. Parents ought not only to be present at the exercises and amusements of their children, and guard them from all dangers and injuries, but they ought also to encourage them, and lead them to all that is good and becoming, by their own virtuous example.)

86. Ought female children to receive the same education as boys in their infancy.

Yes; that they may at a future period enjoy the blessings of perfect health as well as men.

(Observation. The most pernicious consequences to the rising generation flow from separating female children, at the earliest period of their existence, from male children; from dressing them in a different manner, preventing them from taking the same kind of exercise, and compelling them to lead a more sedentary life.)

87. What are the consequences of preventing children from taking the necessary exercises before the ninth year?

Their growth is impeded, and they remain weak and sickly for life.

88. What effect will it have upon children if they are kept to too hard work before the twelfth year?

They will very soon grow stiff, and old before their time.

VI. Of Clothes to be worn by Children from the beginning of the Third to the End of the Seventh or

Eighth Year [...]

102. *How ought children's garments to be arranged?*

So as not to impede the free and easy motions of the body, or prevent the access of the fresh strengthening air to it; they, therefore, ought to be free, wide, and open.

103. *What further is requisite for this dress?*

It ought to be simple, clean, light, cool, cheap, and easy to put on or take off; it ought to be different in every respect from that of older or grown-up persons.

104. *What other reason is there for making this distinction between the dress of children and grown up persons?*

To induce children to live with less restraint and greater happiness in the society of each other;

[...] to check the too early ebullitions of that pride which leads children to ape the customs and actions of grown-up persons; [...]

105. *How, and of what materials, ought children's garments to be made?*

A child ought to wear a wide linen frock, white, with blue stripes, having wide short sleeves, and a shirt of the same form. [...]

Source: Bernhard Christoph Faust, *Catechism of health: For the Use of Schools, and for Domestic Instruction*. Translated by J. H. Basse. London: C. Dilly, in the Poultry, 1794, pp. 23–41.

Source of original German text: Bernhard Christoph Faust, *Gesundheits-Katechismus zum Gebrauche in den Schulen und beim häuslichen Unterrichte*. Bückeburg, 1794, pp. 17–28.

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