

# [Birth without Violence \(1975\), by Frederick Leboyer](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

By: Conley, Olivia Keywords: [Fetus](#) <sup>[2]</sup> [Human development](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

In *Birth without Violence* (1975), French obstetrician [Frederick Leboyer](#) <sup>[4]</sup> describes in poetic form the possible perceptions and feelings of embryos and fetuses before, during, and after birth. His work has helped to promote a gentler and more sensitive birthing method with the goal of easing the newborn's transition from the [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup> to the outside world. Leboyer's birthing method influenced later birth techniques such as [water birth](#) <sup>[6]</sup> and [unassisted childbirth](#) <sup>[7]</sup>.

In the opening of his book, Leboyer asks readers to consider how a baby feels during its birth and whether indeed the baby has feelings at all. He addresses concepts such as consciousness and [personhood](#) <sup>[8]</sup> and asks when these are considered to become part of a human life. Leboyer then describes what he considers to be the horror, agony, and suffering experienced by newborn babies during medical births. He suggests that these negative experiences occur because the transition from the [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup> to the outside world is abrupt and insensitive to the newborn. Leboyer uses vivid depictions of newborn infants to illustrate the shock and misery a baby encounters at birth. He describes the sensations of sight, sound, and touch that babies encounter during birthing and how these sensations starkly contrast with their comfort inside the [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup>.

Leboyer instructs his readers to create an environment similar to the [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup> during birth and subsequently offers an interpretation of life in the [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. He labels the early weeks of [pregnancy](#) <sup>[9]</sup> as the golden age for embryos because during this time embryos feel safely anchored as they blossom into their development. He then discusses the "happy buoyancy" of the [fetus](#) <sup>[10]</sup> in later stages of development and finally he describes the feelings of entrapment as growing fetuses become cramped in their mothers' wombs.

Leboyer's suggestions for constructing a supportive, [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup>-like environment during delivery include silence, darkness, immediate placement of the baby on the mother's stomach after birth, delayed cutting of the [umbilical cord](#) <sup>[11]</sup>, infant massage, and a warm bath. According to Leboyer, laying the baby on the mother's stomach allows the infant to listen to a familiar heartbeat and remember the [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. Delaying the cutting of the [umbilical cord](#) <sup>[11]</sup> allows the baby time to adjust to breathing with his or her lungs and prevents shock from the sudden lack of [umbilical cord](#) <sup>[11]</sup> oxygen. Infant massage is meant to recreate the wave-like movement in the [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup> and a warm bath serves as an imitation of the weightless feelings from early embryonic development. All of Leboyer's techniques strive to imitate the experience of embryos and fetuses in the [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup> and avoid traumatizing newborn babies with new or uncomfortable sensations.

Near the end of *Birth without Violence*, Leboyer focuses on the potential impact of his birthing method. He theorizes that newborns establish fixed breathing patterns the moment they are born and that without the ability to breathe freely, one cannot live freely. He attributes a lifetime pattern of relaxed breathing to a more serene environment during birth.

Feedback from Leboyer's readers was mixed, but nonetheless he influenced the expansion of alternative birthing methods. Some interpreted his method to be dangerous because of its advocacy of delivering babies without the aid of bright light. These people claimed that birthing complications would be more likely to go unnoticed in the absence of standard lighting. Others believed that the Leboyer method intensified the parent-child attachment bond as well as enhanced physical development. Since the publication of *Birth without Violence*, other alternative birthing methods have been established. Water birth and [unassisted childbirth](#) <sup>[7]</sup> are two of the styles that promote Leboyer's serene birth environment and a smooth transition from the [womb](#) <sup>[5]</sup> to the outside world.

## Sources

1. Leboyer, Frederick. *Birth Without Violence* <sup>[12]</sup>. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
2. Shanley, Laura Kaplan. *Unassisted Birth*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994.
3. Trotter, Robert J. "Leboyer's Babies." *Science News* 111 (1997): 59.

In *Birth without Violence* (1975), French obstetrician Frederick Leboyer describes in poetic form the possible perceptions and feelings of embryos and fetuses before, during, and after birth. His work has helped to promote a gentler and more sensitive birthing method with the goal of easing the newborn's transition from the womb to the outside world. Leboyer's birthing method influenced later birth techniques such as water birth and unassisted childbirth.

## Subject

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