

## Parenting: an ancient art

- 1 Today's practice of leaving babies to cry, keeping them in buggies and car seats for long periods and not allowing them the freedom to roam outdoors is raising a dysfunctional generation, a psychologist claims. Early societies had better ideas about being a parent than many 21st century families, according to Professor Darcia Narvaez. 'Their children were cuddled and carried about, never left to cry, spent lots of time outdoors and were breastfed for years rather than months. But child-rearing nowadays is increasingly depriving them of the practices that lead to well-being and a moral sense.'
- 2 Professor Narvaez led a study that looked at the parents of three-year-olds and how their child rearing skills compare to those of foraging hunter-gatherer societies of the past. She found that, unlike parents nowadays, ancient communities relied on extended families to look after their children or, as she said, 'people beyond mum and dad who also love the child.'
- 3 They were also more likely to promptly respond to a baby's crying and fussing. 'Warm, responsive care-giving like this keeps the infant's brain calm in the years it is forming its personality and response to the world,' said Professor Narvaez. 'At the same time, our distant ancestors spent much of their time being held and caressed by their mother, forming a close bond. They were not spanked,' she added.
- 4 The findings, to be presented at a U.S. conference next month, run counter to current advice from parenting gurus to allow 'controlled crying' and to isolate misbehaving children on a 'naughty step' or in their rooms.
- 5 Professor Narvaez pointed to studies showing a decline in the well-being of American children over the past 50 years. 'There's an epidemic of anxiety among the young,' she said. 'Kids who don't get the emotional nurturing they need in early life tend to be more self-centred. They don't have the same compassion-related emotions as kids who were raised by warm, responsive families.'



*Daily Mail, 2010*