

# Shock of the old: Eight unnerving and eye-popping approaches to childcare <sup>[1]</sup>

How on earth do you keep children out of trouble? Parents have been trying to answer this question since for ever – with, er, mixed results

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## Excerpts

Babies: they are cute and everything, but what are you supposed to do with them all day? It has been a problem for busy parents for millennia. Precious, terrifyingly fragile and capable of wreaking untold carnage, they are profoundly inconducive to adult work. So, the central aim of childcare has long been safe containment.

Historians debate when childhood acquired a distinct status and children were viewed as something other than incompetent mini-adults, but anyone who has ever met a baby knows they are an absolute liability. The rich could hire childcare – wet nurses, nursemaids, even cradle rockers – but we know less about how ordinary people managed.

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Swaddling is the age-old, cross-cultural solution to restless infants. There is a woman on TikTok who swaddles stuff (a geriatric Labrador, rescue cats, chickens) and almost every subject seems deeply, physiologically calmed by the process.

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There was also a lingering suspicion that infants were a bit ... off. "Many Christian writers on infancy seem quite daunted and even frightened by how much an infant resembles an animal – or perhaps the devil – in lack of human skills and selfish and unbridled desires," says Russell, echoing what many a parent has thought once or twice at 4am. "Swaddling and moulding its limbs must have made it seem more human – a step away from brutish existence and closer to a state of grace."

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**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** parenting <sup>[4]</sup>

child care <sup>[5]</sup>

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