

routine

Standing *up for* routine

WORDS BY ALANA KIRK-GILLHAM

There has been plenty of debate recently in fact, there has probably been arguments since the first homo sapiens were born on the best way to bring up a baby. Recent rantings have escalated in no small part thanks to the C4 documentary series *Bringing Up Baby* last autumn, which followed three methods of childrearing with a view to exploring which was best. Naturally they couldn't come to a conclusion because at the end of the day, different approaches suit different people. But sadly it also failed because in the interest of TV ratings, no doubt it focussed on the extremes of each method, which was pointless because as everyone knows, no baby is text book and all the 'rules' out there are to be used as guidelines to be adapted to fit in best with your situation. Scandalously though, to some degree, it also involved child cruelty and I point the finger here not just at Truby King leaving hungry babies to cry, but to the continuum method which seemed to stifle infant's need to exercise their limbs, and, worse, encouraged children aged two to play with knives!

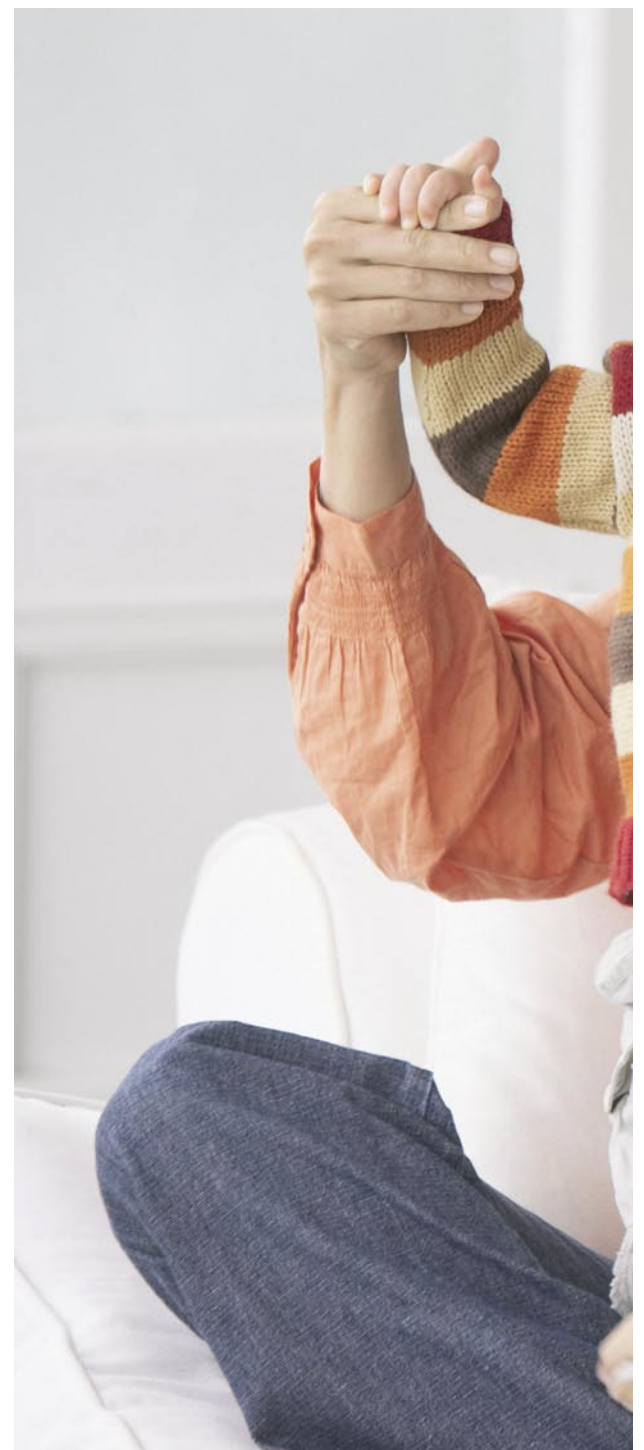
The greatest damage I felt though was the impact it had on modern routine methods. Sadly all 'routine' methods are now being lumped together, when in reality Truby King's militant approach bears little relation to any other book I've read on the subject, including Gina Ford.

Now I'm going to do something I don't normally do out loud. I'm going to stand up and confess 'My name is Alana, and I use Gina Ford's Contented Little

Baby Book.' Why am I normally a little reticent about this? After all, it's one of the best-selling books on the subject of childrearing, and in my experience, it works (and by 'works' I mean in developing a very contented little baby). What I have noticed is that people who use a routine method pass no judgement on those who don't merely shrug with a 'there but for the grace of God go I' as mothers talk of sleep resistant babies, whereas people who don't use the routine method and I would vouch have never even read the book seem to feel they have the right to criticise us who do. So I want to start a revolution. I want to stand up and be proud and urge all you who quietly follow Gina to scream it from the rooftops.

So why am I an advocate? Because for me, and lots of my friends, it works. I accept that it might not work for everyone, and pass no judgement on how other parents bring up their children as long as everyone is happy and the baby and family and marriage is thriving. For me, following a routine has made my baby rearing enjoyable, satisfying and fun, and more importantly, I have two very, very contented little babies, and one very happy family.

I'm the kind of person who lives by lists, and I personally love routine. When I had my first baby two years ago, I was overwhelmed with love, and with fear. And while I was a very competent adult who had backpacked the world and reached the top of my career, I was pretty clueless with the little bundle of joy, who, without having to pass any sort of test, and with no instruction manual, I was allowed to



take home from the hospital. And so I read some books. Actually I read a lot of books. And I decided to follow the one that seemed to fit my personality, and our family's needs, the best. I don't agree with those people who rubbish the use of books and say it should all be instinctual. Personally, I felt like I'd had a lobotomy and could hardly remember my name, so trying to find, never mind rely on, my instinct was too frightening for words and I know most mothers feel the same. Also, what is wrong with reading books? In 'the good old days', mothers probably didn't need to read books on childrearing because they were surrounded by their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and a close-knit community. Certainly in the West, those days are gone, and so of course we seek out advice. When we



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she gets older, the same daily patterns of food, play and sleep, food, play and sleep give the child comfort and security, no matter where they are or what they are doing. My two-year-old finishes her lunch and pulls me to the stairs to take her up to bed because she knows she is going to have a lovely lunch-time sleep. If we are out, I put down the buggy seat and she goes to sleep there. Every single night of her life she has had the same bedtime routine tea, play, bath, books and bed. It means she is secure in the knowledge that while so much changes around her, there is comfort in the familiar. We can travel anywhere and as long as we can give her the comfort of the same bedtime ritual, she is happy to sleep. Both my toddler and six-month-old baby have developed great sleep patterns, sleeping through the night, and eating well, (of course they have their off days like everyone else they're not Stepford children!)

The second reason it works is that it helps a mother's sanity and compliments the family dynamic rather than disrupt it. I know when my babies will sleep; I know when they will want to eat. I'm not trying to second guess their needs, and I can arrange our days accordingly. I'm not saying it's easy it's bloody hard at first, but the benefits are worth it, a hundred times over. Every night since Daisy was born, she went to sleep at 7pm. Even in the early days of initial parenthood, my husband and I were able to sit down together in the evening and take stock. Now, both of them sleep through the night from 7pm and, having devoted ourselves to them all day, we now devote time to each other, sitting down together every night for a meal and a chat. My babies are happy and sleeping well, and we as a couple are happy, still able to spend essential quality time together. Our children are the centre of our world but they don't rule it. We are the parents and it is our responsibility to set the boundaries. I'm aware that what has worked for me and others like me won't work for someone else. That's as it should be life would be very dull if we were all the same. My children will be no cleverer or happier than someone who takes a more instinctual approach what works is what makes the family happy. But for those who do follow Gina Ford, or routines like hers, please, stand up and be proud. Be content, and enjoy your contented little babies. *

learn to drive, we read up on the road codes, take driving lessons and pass a test. When we buy a computer, we read an instruction manual. Why on earth, when we do the most important thing we'll ever do, would we not consult the experts?

Routine methods are criticised because they organise children to fit into our Western lifestyle. I'm unsure why this is seen as a negative. Surely it is an essential! The continuum method where the baby is physically attached to the mother or father for the first six months of its life, including sleeping in the marital bed is apparently based on a tribal method. I worked for UNICEF for years and travelled to several African countries where indeed the women carried their babies around with them all day, strapped to their bodies. Why? Not because they had debated the

best way to bring up a baby! But because that was essential to their culture and way of life. Those women had to carry the babies with them as they worked in the fields, or ground corn or walked miles for water. They didn't have cr_ches and they breastfed. They don't sleep in the same room as their children because that is what some expert tells them. They do it because they don't have lots of bedrooms! They bring their babies up in the manner that suits their lifestyle, and we should do the same. What is best for the baby, and its family, is surely what enables the baby to thrive best in its actual situation.

Routine works for two reasons it benefits the baby and the family. Firstly, children thrive on the familiar. As a baby, the routine is developed to ensure she is never hungry and never over-tired. As