

Evidence ancient humans not ‘violent apes’ but distinctly compassionate

[Editor’s note: [Penny Spikins](#) is an archaeologist who specializes in early prehistory and human origins.]

Yes, there is evidence of interpersonal violence in our ancient history. But actually there is far less of it than one might assume. There is, in fact, far more evidence of interpersonal care: of people who have tended to the injured and ensured that the sick or lame were kept alive. This tendency—for kindness, compassion, and care—is far more unique to the human species than our tendency to lash out. Many animals respond to threats by fighting back. Very few animals tend to their wounded friends, and only humans do it consistently.

There are, perhaps surprisingly, only two known cases of likely interpersonal violence in the archaic species most closely related to us, Neanderthals. That’s out of a total of about 30 near-complete skeletons and 300 partial Neanderthal finds.

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Evidence of human care, on the other hand, goes back at least 1.5 million years—to long before humans were anatomically modern.

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It is easy to think of ourselves as “violent apes.” But on the whole, a better descriptor would be “compassionate apes.” After all, it is our tendency for kindness that sets us apart.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [Compassion Sets Humans Apart](#)