



Positive Parenting of Infants

Crying

Crying is a normal part of children's development, yet there is probably nothing quite so upsetting to parents as the sound of their baby crying. Crying is a baby's way of communicating and it is important to respond quickly and consistently when babies cry. There are things that parents can do to check that their baby is comfortable, and to help them settle. However, it is not always possible to settle a crying baby quickly and this can be stressful for parents. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you understand your baby's crying, and to help you care for yourself and your baby when they cry.

When babies cry, it can range from mild fussing or whimpering to intense crying and screaming. There may be no tears or lots of tears. While crying, babies may squirm and appear uncomfortable. Their face may turn red, and they may draw up their legs and cry or even scream as if in pain. Crying can stop as quickly as it started or last for hours at a time.

Why Do Babies Cry?

Children have different temperaments. Some babies cry more easily and more often than others, and are more difficult to console. These babies are easily unsettled by sudden changes and noises.

Babies may cry when they are tired, hungry, thirsty, too full or uncomfortable. Babies also cry when they are hot, cold, wet or soiled, or in pain. Sometimes it is not possible to work out why a baby is crying. They may seem to cry for no obvious reason.

Too much noise, activity, direct eye contact, change or stress at home can make a baby tired, tense or over excited. Some babies find it hard to switch off when they have had enough. They get upset and cry. Crying helps them to release tension. After releasing tension, babies sleep well and wake ready for more interaction with their environment. By about three months of age, babies cry less as they learn to cope with more things going on around them. Other behaviours, such as sucking, cooing, watching their hands and turning over, replace crying.



Sometimes parents' efforts to stop their baby crying, particularly when parents are tense and worried, can make the baby continue to cry. Parents may accidentally over stimulate their baby or disrupt their sleeping or eating routines in their attempts to console them.

It can be stressful for parents when they are trying to soothe and settle their baby, especially when the crying does not stop. It may seem that the baby is crying on purpose, but babies do not cry to upset their parents.

Babies learn to communicate in a number of ways such as making sounds, pulling faces, smiling and laughing. As babies learn such ways of communicating, they tend to cry less. However, if babies learn that these ways of communicating are ignored and that they get more attention when they cry than when they are calm, they may cry more than expected for their age.

How Much Do Babies Cry?

Babies cry for differing amounts of time. Babies aged between one and three months, generally cry for about two hours each day. Crying is often worse in the late afternoon or early evening when long periods of crying may occur. After three months of age, there is a decrease in the evening peak and the overall amount of crying.

Research by Dr T. B. Brazelton, a well-known American paediatrician, has measured the total number of hours babies generally cry each day in the first 12 weeks (see below). Remember, all babies differ and some will cry less and others will cry more than expected.

Age in Weeks	Approximate Number of Hours/Day
2	1.75
4	2 or more
6	2.75
8	2
10	1.5
12	1

How To Encourage Contentment

Spend Time With Your Baby When They Are Calm

When your baby is awake and calm, try looking at them, talking softly, touching, rocking, walking, playing, cuddling or carrying them. You may also like to have music playing. Your baby will learn they will get attention from you when they are calm. You can also enjoy your baby while they are quiet, alert and content.

Give Your Baby Something To Do

When your baby is calm and awake, give them something to look at or touch. Place a toy or other interesting object, such as a mobile or rattle, 20 to 30 cm in front of them. Change your baby's position often and give them new things to look at or do.

Carry Your Baby

When your baby is quiet and alert, you may like to carry them. Carrying your baby for part of the day can help prevent crying, especially in the first three months. Using a baby sling can be helpful when you are busy.

How To Manage Crying

There are lots of things you can try to comfort your baby when they cry. Have a routine that you can use every time your baby cries. When your baby cries, calmly and quietly spend 10 to 15 minutes trying to settle them. Here is a suggested routine for settling your baby when they cry.

React Quickly When Your Baby Cries

Respond to your baby's cries as quickly as you can. It is important that your baby learns their cries will get a response. Reacting quickly may also prevent your baby getting more upset, or being hurt if they are in danger. The way you respond will depend on where your baby is, what they are doing, and the type of cry. Listen to your baby's different cries and assess the situation.

Try To Find a Reason for Your Baby's Cry

Be practical. If your baby has been awake for some time, they may be tired. If you fed your baby recently, they are unlikely to be hungry, but they may be thirsty. Tune in to your baby's other signals. Straining and pushing with their arms and legs can be signs that your baby may be tense or over stimulated.

Make Your Baby Comfortable

Once you have an idea about why your baby is crying, do what you can to make them comfortable. Here are some suggestions:

- Check your baby's nappy. If the nappy is wet or soiled, change it. At night, use nappy liners and pilchers to stop the urine from sitting against your baby's skin. Some babies settle if they have a few minutes with their nappy off. Put a nappy on the floor so you do not have a mess to clean if your baby wets or soils.
- Feel your baby's body to check if they are too hot or too cold. A drink of boiled water cooled to room temperature may settle your baby when they are hot. More clothing or blankets can help warm your baby when they are cold.
- Check your baby's position. If your baby looks awkward or uncomfortable, move them into another position.
- Offer your baby a brief breastfeed or a drink of cooled boiled water if you think they might be thirsty.

Relax Your Baby

If you have checked your baby and made them as comfortable as you can, try to relax them. There are many things you can do to help your baby relax. First, act calmly and warmly with your baby. Try out different ideas and see which ones work. Remember, to avoid overstimulating your baby, only do one thing at a time. Here are some ideas:

- Hold your baby upright, close to your body. You may like to walk around while you hold them.
- Gently pat or rub your baby's back or massage their body.
- Sing, hum or talk to your baby.
- Play gentle music.
- Use dim lights and a gentle voice, and limit eye contact.
- Rock your baby in a bassinet, or push them in rhythmic movements in the pram.
- Give your baby a relaxing bath.
- Take your baby for a ride in the pram or a drive in the car during the day.
- Help your baby develop their own ways of settling. If they do not suck their thumb, offer them a bottle of cooled boiled water or a dummy to suck.

What To Do if Crying Persists

It is natural for parents to feel stressed or anxious when their baby cries for a long period of time. If crying continues after you have spent 10 to 15 minutes trying to settle your baby using a routine like the one suggested above, there may be nothing more you can do to help your baby settle—they will settle by themselves. The important thing now is to look after yourself. Try the following suggestions.

Put Your Baby in a Safe Space

If crying persists, put your baby in a cot or other safe place. Quieten things down, for example, turn off any music and leave them for about three to five minutes. If you are worried about leaving your baby, you may choose to stay with them.

Take Care of Yourself

If you have done your best to settle your baby, there is nothing more you can do except try to stay calm yourself. It is important that you get some relief from the crying. Here are some suggestions to help you feel more relaxed:

- Take some deep breaths.
- Have a cup of tea or coffee.
- Read a paper, magazine or short story.
- Listen to your favourite music.
- Get some fresh air.

- Telephone a relative or friend.
- Have a shower.

Remember, even if your baby does not settle quickly, they will eventually stop crying.

Check on Your Baby

After about three to five minutes, briefly look in and check on your baby. Do not pick them up. If your baby is still crying, calmly leave them again. Your goal is to reassure yourself that your baby is alright, not to help them to stop crying. Continue checking on your baby every three to five minutes.

If your baby is still crying after about 15 minutes, assess the situation again. There may be a different reason for your baby's crying. You may decide to start your routine again by trying to find why your baby is crying, trying to make them comfortable, or trying to relax them. You may decide to wait a while longer and just keep checking until your baby settles.

Encourage Your Baby for Being Quiet

When your baby is quiet for at least 30 seconds, go back to them. If your baby is falling asleep, let them sleep. If your baby is awake and it is not sleep time, spend time with them. Use the strategies for encouraging contentment described earlier.

Points To Remember

Above all, remember that all healthy babies cry. Remind yourself that your baby will cry less as they get older.

If your baby is crying and you have assured yourself that your baby is safe and well, sometimes there is nothing more you can do to comfort your baby. At these times, remember that no baby has ever damaged themselves physically or emotionally simply by crying. Babies can, and occasionally do, cry for long periods without doing any harm except upsetting their parents.

If you are concerned that your baby is crying more than normal, it is important to check for any possible causes, such as an infection. Contact your family doctor or maternal and child health nurse.

As children get older, they may cry just to get attention. It is best not to encourage this. Try not to give extra attention to this type of crying. Watch for when your child is calm and behaving well. Give them praise and attention at these times.

Key Steps

Encouraging Contentment

- Spend time with your baby when they are awake and calm.
- Give your baby something to look at or do.
- Carry your baby when you can, especially in the first three months.

Managing Crying

- Respond quickly when your baby cries.
- Listen to your baby and try to work out why they are crying.
- Do what you can to make your baby comfortable.
- Calmly try to relax your baby.

If Crying Persists

- Put your baby in a safe place and leave them.
- Take care of yourself.
- Check on your baby every three to five minutes.
- Use the strategies for encouraging contentment when your baby is quiet.

If Problems Persist

Sometimes your baby will not settle after much trying.

Further help is available:

- Seek support from your partner, family and friends.
- Make time for yourself to do something you enjoy. Be honest with yourself about your feelings. Acknowledge that you are tired, frustrated or angry and do something to relax.
- Visit your local maternal and child health nurse to discuss your baby's behaviour and get some ideas to help you manage it.
- Attend a parent group or play group to share your experiences and swap ideas and techniques with other parents.
- Contact the centre where you received this tip sheet if you are having problems or feeling unable to handle things. Outside of business hours, call the Maternal and Child Health After Hours Telephone Service on 132229.
- Consult your doctor to check that there is no medical problem causing the crying.
- Ask your maternal and child health nurse about parent seminars, day stay and residential programs offered by Early Parenting Centres.

See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.



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