

Soothing A Crying Infant

One of the most stressful experiences for new parents is dealing with a crying baby. Babies cry for all sorts of reasons, and it's sometimes difficult to figure out why your baby is crying and how to soothe your baby. It's important to remember that crying is one of the main ways that babies communicate, and their crying can mean lots of different things. With a new baby, it may be difficult to distinguish different types of crying; as babies get older, parents may be able to tell "wet-diaper crying" from "I'm hungry" crying.

Here are some things to check for in a crying baby:

- ☆ Is the baby sick? Take the baby's temperature, and call a health care provider if there is a fever or if you're not sure about any other symptoms. If your baby cries for hours at a time, be sure to have him or her checked out by a pediatrician.
- ☆ Is the baby hungry? Try feeding the baby. Newborns like to eat frequently. Even if the baby isn't hungry, he or she may respond to sucking on a pacifier.
- ☆ Is the diaper wet or dirty? This is a common cause for crying.
- ☆ Is the room too hot or cold, or is the baby overdressed or underdressed?
- ☆ Is the baby lonely or afraid? Try holding the baby and comforting him or her.
- ☆ Is the baby overstimulated? Try turning down the lights and the noise level.

Calming the baby. Often, a parent has made sure that the problem is not hunger or sickness or a wet diaper—but the baby is still crying! What are some other ways to calm a crying baby?

- ☆ Swaddle the baby in a soft blanket and hold the baby next to you.
- ☆ Sing or hum to the baby.
- ☆ Rock the baby in a chair or swing, or gently sway your body while holding the baby close.
- ☆ Take the baby for a ride in the stroller or car. Motion often puts a baby to sleep.
- ☆ Distract the baby by making faces or quiet noises.
- ☆ Give the baby a warm bath to relax him or her.
- ☆ Use some "white noise" such as running a vacuum cleaner or hair dryer to help lull the baby to sleep.

Calming yourself. There are few things more stressful than a crying baby. It is normal for babies to cry—sometimes as much as 2 to 4 hours a day—and sometimes nothing parents try to soothe the baby will work. Coupled with a parent's own lack of sleep and the general adjustment to having a new baby in the house, a crying baby can seem overwhelming. There are some things parents can do to maintain control over the situation, even when the baby continues to cry.

- ☆ Take a break. Put the baby safely in a crib, and take a few minutes for yourself in another room.
- ☆ Call a friend or relative who will listen to your problem and be sympathetic.
- ☆ Ask a trusted friend or neighbor to watch your child while you take a short break or a brief nap.
- ☆ If you feel as though you are losing control and might hurt your child, call a hotline, such as the 24-hour National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-4-A-CHILD) offered by Childhelp USA®.

It's normal for babies to cry sometimes, and it's certainly normal for parents to feel frustrated by the crying. Different babies respond to different soothing techniques, and parents will eventually learn what works best with their baby. In the meantime, it's helpful for new parents to have some support in the form of friends, relatives, and neighbors who can lend a sympathetic ear or even some babysitting help!

For more information about soothing infant crying, visit the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome website at www.dontshake.com.

