

Fact Sheet

The Crying Baby



Crying is normal and is the only way your baby can let you know that something is upsetting them and that they need you. When babies cry they may be hungry, thirsty, too hot, too cold, unwell, in pain, over-tired or uncomfortable. They may have been startled and just need to be resettled by holding close and cuddling for a while.

There are some babies who cry a lot from the time they are born. They pull up their legs, clench their fists, go red in the face and become very distressed. The problem may be worse in the afternoons and evenings. Other babies may develop severe bouts or attacks of crying when they are a few weeks old. After six to eight weeks these bouts of crying usually become less intense and most babies become more settled at about four to five months old. Some babies however may continue to cry for longer than that. If this happens, remember your baby has a lot of growing and developing to do and will eventually be able to stay calm for longer.

It can be worrying when your baby won't stop crying or has terrible attacks of crying, especially when you can't find what is wrong. Something is upsetting your baby but you may not be able to find out what it is. It is not necessary to ignore the crying because you can't find a reason for it. Your baby is not "being naughty", "getting spoiled" or "just putting it over" you.

Babies often need a lot of soothing and holding when they are very upset. Some babies, especially those who are very alert and physically active, may need more help than others to settle. Babies will not develop bad habits or become spoilt if they are comforted and soothed when they are distressed.

What to do

The following ideas will help with most babies. Try them and over time you will learn what works best for you.

Give each strategy you use time to see if it works and try not to switch too quickly from one to another. Some things will work some times and not at others. When something doesn't appear to be working, it often helps to change your settling strategy and then go back and try it again a day or two later, or even a week or two later.

Holding

At this time in your baby's life, he is learning that he can trust you to meet his needs. The best way to do this when he is crying is to hold him.

- Hold and comfort your crying baby if you can.
- Hold the baby close and snuggled in to you. Try to keep the baby still.
- Avoid constantly changing the baby from one position to another or continually picking up and putting the baby down.
- You can rock or sway gently, or walk around slowly with the baby if it helps, but avoid fast, frantic or rough movement. Remind yourself that you can't *make* the baby stop crying.

It is not always easy. Some babies push away and won't be held closely. If this happens, try holding the baby close but facing away from you and give the baby a chance to calm down.

Movement

- Pick up your crying baby. Carry, or **gently** rock the baby or use any kind of slow, rhythmical movement. Try not to do too many things at once. If you realise you are patting and jiggling and shooshing and swaying all at the same time, try to slow down.
- Try putting your baby in a pouch or sling. Walk around and see if you can get on with your daily routine.

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- Put your baby in a pram and walk around outside. First wrap the baby in a sheet or other wrap and then put the pram harness on. This will keep the baby safe and still while the pram is moving. Babies like the feel of a gentle breeze; they like to see the movement of trees and shadows but don't like the sun in their eyes. Go for a walk in a quiet place where you can feel more relaxed. Stay away from people who are likely to be critical of the baby's crying because their comments may increase your anxiety.
- Use a bouncinette for short periods. Ensure the harness or belt is used and that the bouncinette is on the floor, not on a table, or bench.
- You may like to try going for a drive in the car in an attempt to settle the baby. Make sure your baby is in a child restraint approved by the Australian Standard.

Sucking

- Sucking can help calm your baby and reduce the crying. Let the baby suck on his/her fist, fingers or thumb. Try giving a dummy. One trick is to place the dummy just on the baby's lips - the lips will automatically latch on to the dummy. If your baby is breast-fed try to avoid giving a dummy during the first 2-4 weeks as it may affect your baby's suckling ability and impact on your milk supply..
- If breast feeding, try offering the breast. If formula feeding, try giving a drink of cool boiled water. Sometimes it might help to give the next feed a little earlier but try not to give formula more often than every three hours as this may encourage snacking or the baby using the bottle as a dummy.

A Soothing bath

A bath may help your baby calm down. Some babies will relax and enjoy a bath but others will become tense and more distressed. Make sure to run the cold water first, then add hot water. Always check it isn't too hot before putting the baby in the water. ***Never leave your baby alone in the bath, even for a moment.***

Baby massage

Rub the baby's tummy gently and firmly in a circular clockwise motion. You can find more information about baby massage in most baby books.

Playing

Try distracting your baby with a favourite toy. This will not work if the baby is very upset or overtired and may even make things worse. If it doesn't work, stop.

What to do when nothing seems to be working

It is very hard to cope with a baby who seems to be crying all the time.

- You may feel helpless when your baby keeps on crying. Just think - it's not always easy for you to calm down if you're very upset. It is the same for the baby. Try to remember that you can't always *stop* the crying but you can still *comfort* the baby.
- Tune in to your baby's cry. Don't let the distress become too great before you decide to comfort the baby. Take a few deep breaths first if it helps you to slow/calm down.

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- If your baby continues to cry and you are starting to feel desperate, put the baby down in a safe place and walk into another room for a short break, or if available, ask somebody to take over the settling for a while. Remember you are doing the best you can. When you go back, you may find the baby is easier to calm.
- At times you may feel you are failing at being a parent. Most parents feel like this at one time or another. It may be difficult to ask for help, but it is easier if someone can help you. Things will improve with time, but you have to survive in the meantime! It is important to look after and be kind to yourself.

You will probably get a lot of advice from many different people. This can be very confusing and you may wonder what to do. The best advice to take is usually what feels right to you. You may decide that the best thing to do is to pick up and cuddle the baby. Be prepared for well-meaning people to tell you that you are giving in and that the baby has gotten its own way. Be reassured that your baby is far too young to think like that.

If your baby is crying a lot and is fed on infant formula, friends or relatives may suggest you change this or use medications or herbal preparations. You might like to talk to your Doctor or Child and Family Health nurse (Early Childhood Nurse) about this.

If the sound of the baby's crying changes or you think your baby may be sick, or have a physical problem, see your Doctor or go to your local hospital.

If you are finding it difficult to cope, or find you are not enjoying being a parent at all, contact your Child and Family Health nurse (Early Childhood Nurse), call the Tresillian Telephone Help Line (1800 637 357) or the Karitane Telephone Help Line (1800 677 961) or see your doctor for help and advice.

Remember

- **Play safe. Pick up and comfort your baby.**
- **Remember no matter how upset you feel, shaking your baby is just not the deal.**

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

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