



0-4 Months

If your newborn could talk:

Sometimes when I cry it has nothing at all to do with being hungry. Sometimes I just cry because I find the world around me overwhelming. Other times I cry to release tension. Adjusting to this outside world is hard work! Whenever I cry, I need you. Please come as soon as you can. As you get to know me, you'll learn to "read" and respond to my different cries through trial and error. Sometimes nothing seems to work. But I'm not mad at you. I may just need to cry awhile to let off steam. If my crying really gets on your nerves--and it might--it's okay to put me down in a safe place for just a few minutes or get someone else to try to help. And always remember, we're both adjusting to big changes in our lives.

What your newborn is learning:

When you comfort your baby, you are letting her know the world is a safe place and that someone cares about her feelings. The more content she feels, the more energy she has to connect with others and learn how the world around her works. Responding promptly when your newborn cries teaches her that you'll always care for her, and she learns that she is an effective communicator. Don't worry, you won't spoil her. In fact, research shows that babies whose cries are responded to quickly and sensitively tend to cry less overall because they have learned that care is coming. When you comfort her, you are teaching her ways to soothe herself. For example, if cuddling calms her now, she may later cuddle up with her "lovey" (perhaps a stuffed bear) to help put herself to sleep. Over the years, your prompt attention will help her feel confident that she can comfort herself and manage, even in stressful situations.

What you can do:

When your baby "tells" you she's distressed, try different things. See if she's hungry or needs to burp. Check her diaper. Hold her in different positions. Sing or talk to her softly. Swaddle her in one of her baby blankets. Take her for a ride in her stroller or in the car. Learn how your baby likes to be comforted. For example, some babies might find it overwhelming if you talk to them and look at them at the same time. You may need to do one thing at a time; gaze into her eyes without talking, sing to her without making eye contact.

Reading your baby's cues

	What to expect	What you can do
<i>I need support</i>	A newborn's head is large in proportion to the rest of his body. In fact, until his neck muscles develop over the next 6 weeks, he couldn't possibly support it on his own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make certain to support his neck and head whenever you're lifting him or laying him down; and make sure that his car seat and stroller are set at an angle that will keep his head from flopping forward. • Help strengthen those neck muscles with lots of games that involve moving his eyes (and, eventually, his head) from side to side (known as "tracking") while he's propped up or lying on his back. When he focuses on a toy, move it back and forth above him.
<i>So much to hear</i>	Research shows that infants are great listeners. By 1 month they connect sounds with their sources, and their favorite sound of all is the human voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it a point to talk to your infant about everything. "Now I'm going to take off that wet diaper." "Daddy is starving. What should I eat?" Remember though, if your baby turns away when you're talking, it may be her way of saying, "Quiet please." • Be attentive to what kind of sounds your baby likes best. Some infants love music with strong beats, while others prefer softer melodies. And don't be shy about singing. No matter how in or out of tune, she'll like your voice best of all
<i>So much to see</i>	For the first 2 months, your infant will focus best on things that are 8 to 12 inches from his eyes--just the distance of your face during feeding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold your baby's toys in that optimal vision range, and try to find toys that have high contrast (black and white) and bright colors. • Play lots of tracking games that involve moving an object slowly from side to side while you're talking to your baby. If he's awake and alert, he'll follow with his eyes. • Respect your baby's cues. He'll tell you when he needs a break by turning away or crying.
<i>I'm a hands-on learner</i>	Newborns have great grips, but they can't intentionally hold on to things. They grasp on to things that you put in their palm because of a reflex that they're born with.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to find toys that make gentle sounds when they move. The sound will draw your baby's attention to the toy and to her hands. • Safety is priority number 1! Make sure all objects are too big to fit in her mouth.

<i>I'm a hands-on learner</i>	At around 3 months, when babies realize that their hands are part of their bodies and that they can control them, they delight in using them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer your baby lots of opportunities to hold, grab, poke, and wave safe objects. • As soon as your baby develops control of his hands, you can expect him to move whatever he happens to be holding to his mouth. Make sure everything he holds is clean and too big to fit entirely in his mouth.
<i>Within my reach</i>	Although infants can grasp things you place in their hands, they don't begin to really reach for things until around 3 months, and they do it with both hands together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lay your baby on her back, and hold a brightly colored toy over her chest within arms reach. She'll delight in reaching up for it with both hands together and bringing it to her face for closer examination • Talk to your baby while she's reaching out for things. Cheer her on. Even at this age, she loves to know that you appreciate her efforts
<i>Big Time Babbling</i>	Between 3 and 4 months babies begin to really enjoy babbling, and there's no one they'd rather babble to than you. They'll progress from open vowels (ohs and ahs) to new sounds and combinations, with Ps, Ms, Bs, and Ds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When your baby babbles to you, don't just babble back. Talk to him as though he understands every word you're saying. Long before he utters his first real word he'll understand hundreds of them as a result of these early conversations. • Pay special attention to the rhythm of your baby's babbles. He'll babble and then pause, waiting for you to respond. When you say something and then pause, he'll pick right up. This is how babies learn the art of conversation.
<i>My smile says it all</i>	Your baby's earliest smiles (the one she does in her sleep) are reflex reactions from her early nervous system. By 2 months, however, she has a very special smile just for you, and it's a true reflection of her love for you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We obviously don't have to tell you to smile back at your baby whenever she smiles at you! We can tell you that the exchange of smiles is the earliest form of play, and it sets the stage for a lifetime of loving relationships. • When she feels like playing, let the games begin. Blow gently on her belly, play peek-a-boo, make happy sounds and expect to see a toothless grin. If she's not in a smiling mood it may be time for a cuddle and a cozy nap.

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