



Crying and Reading a Baby's Cues

Before they have words to express themselves, babies use crying as their way of communicating. Crying is how the infant lets you know about needs, such as to be fed (I'm hungry), comforted (I'm upset), warmed (I'm cold) or stimulated (I'm bored).

Does responding to a newborn's crying help brain development?

Responding to a newborn's crying by picking him up, stroking her skin, or softly talking tells the baby that you are listening and care. We call this responsive caregiving. When you let the infant know you care by helping soothe her, you provide the baby with a supportive context for healthy brain development. Your repeated response and actions over time will also help the infant learn ways to calm herself down.

Infants have different types of cries that communicate different information. For example, there is a cry of hunger, pain, lack of physical contact, discomfort (too cold or too hot), and a cry that tells you the infant is receiving too much stimulation (e.g., too much bouncing, too much noise, too much light, etc.).

If a caregiver responds to an infant's crying all of the time will she spoil him?

No. Your response is an important way of saying to the baby, "I hear you. I am trying to figure out what you want. Your message is clear and you are important." Research shows that consistently responding to an infant is a critical part of creating a strong, loving caregiving relationship that supports the infant's development.

What you can do:

- Listen and respond to cries by feeding, holding, changing the diaper, etc. This will help you figure out what the infant is trying to tell you.
- Your response to crying tells infants they are important, and that they can rely on you for their needs.
- Get to know what most effectively calms this particular baby.
- Try bringing the infant close to your body and walk or rock.
- Gently stroke the infant's arms, legs, or back.
- Swaddle the infant in a blanket. This limits his movement (a calming effect) and increases body warmth.
- Talk softly to the newborn. Your verbal stimulation in the form of a soothing voice will help calm her down.
- Play soft rhythmic music or sounds. Continuous, monotonous, rhythmic sounds such as a fan whirring, a clock ticking, or gentle music can be effective. Infants hear the mother's heartbeat before birth; listening to a heartbeat, or a similar slow rhythm, may soothe them better than listening to faster rhythms (e.g., pop music, rock or rap).
- Help the infant find an object for sucking such as his or her fist, or a pacifier.
- If these simple things don't work, try a new room, or moving the infant in a stroller to another location.

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Babies will often let you know exactly how they are feeling. You just have to watch and learn how to read his or her cues. If you do it well, babies won't cry that often, since you can anticipate their needs or alter their environment before they cry their frustration.



"You never cease to amaze me, do it more!"



"Look at those eyes! I'm completely engaged. Let's keep at this."



"I could just sit here and look at you all day. So stay put."



"I'm awake now, wet and you deserted me!"



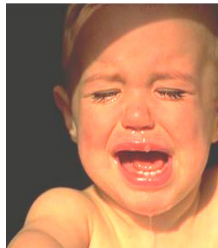
"You are the most wonderful person I have ever met in my whole life!"



"What's that noise? Someone better reassure me or I'm gonna lose it."



"That was really cool! Do it again."



"I'm tired and cranky and I did NOT like that bath. Help me calm down."



"Your breath smells and your face is scratchy. Mom? Mom? Where are you?"



"You may be finding this a great read, but I am bored. If you don't stop, I'm gonna get fussy. Let's just rock a while instead."