

## Tip Sheet

# When baby cries...and cries

The truth is.....you can't raise a child without listening to crying. It's just what babies do. Some cry a little but most of the time babies cry a lot as they are fully dependent on their carers/parents to meet their needs. Although this can be very hard for parents/carers, it is important to remember that crying is a baby's way of communicating with you - and early on, this is the only way they know how!

As babies grow, they will begin to use smiling, eye contact and other more civilised means of getting their messages across. Working out what babies are trying to communicate can present many challenges. It's so important for you to recognise that understanding your babies needs and how to best respond takes time, so don't be too hard on yourself!

## Why they cry - what is the message from baby?

**Baby:** I am tired - I've had enough

**Suggestion:** The younger your baby is, the more trouble they might have letting you know what they need. When it comes to sleep, some babies fuss and cry and make jerky movements, while others stare into space and can't focus. Some remain quiet and still. It will take a little while to learn your baby's cues, but don't give up! Try taking them to a quiet room before bed to help them calm down and sleep. Maybe go for a walk outside, rub or pat their back, sing softly to them and calm your breathing - they will often respond well to you being calm.

**Baby:** I am hungry

**Suggestion:** If you're breast feeding, offer your baby your breast, you can't over breast feed your baby so you can always try this if you are unsure! If you're formula feeding, have the bottles sterilised and ready to go then offer them the bottle. You might go through lots of formula before you work out a feeding routine (and just when you do this might change!). It might seem as though you just fed them, but your baby's stomach is small and cannot hold very much. At times they just need a top-up, other times they are on a growth spurt and just need more. If a baby is really hungry no amount of distraction or care will work. Having said that, it won't really harm a baby if they have to wait a while until the bottle is ready, (they might just be very loud about it).

**Baby:** I am scared - help me feel safe

**Suggestion:** The world is overwhelming for all of us at times, and more so for a baby. Try holding them close. The comforting sound of your heartbeat, the warmth of your body and your familiar smell may help them to feel content and reassured. A quiet room with soft lighting may also help. If you think the environment is too loud or the behaviour of others may be scaring your baby, be a protective parent and try to leave the situation as soon as possible.

**Baby:** I am bored

**Suggestion:** While the world is brand new for a little baby, as they get older they become more curious so they may get bored and require stimulation to keep them entertained. Try giving them age appropriate toys, hanging mobiles, rattles etc. Take them for regular walks in a stroller, the fresh air, continuous movement and changing environment is good for them. A trip in the car can also be entertaining and helpful.



**Baby:** I am wet

**Suggestion:** Your baby may have a dirty nappy and dislike that feeling – it is often cold (especially at night) or itchy. The nappy changing process isn't a pleasant one for most babies because of the strange feeling of cold air on their skin. Using warm water and cloths can help with this (and can also be cheaper than wipes). Distracting your baby with a song or a toy they can look at during changes may be just the thing they need to be distracted long enough for you to clean them up. As they get older they will notice wet nappies less, so you will need to keep an eye on it to prevent nappy rash.

**Baby:** I have tummy pain

**Suggestion:** Babies take a while to grow digestive systems that can manage milk, and just like us, babies have tummy aches from time to time. If they are displaying behaviour they don't usually display - clenching their fists, drawing up their knees, or arching their backs and whining or crying, these can be signs of tummy pain. This is tricky as it may be just a maturation of their system that is needed – in the first 8 weeks a bit of fussing when digesting is normal. After a feed it is good to hold them vertically so things move downwards. If these issues don't go away this could be due to a number of reasons. Do not feel inadequate as a parent. If problems persist, visit your Maternal Child Health Nurse or a GP for advice.

**Baby:** I am too hot or cold

**Suggestion:** Unfortunately, babies can't take off their jacket or ask for a jumper yet. You can check whether your baby is too hot or too cold by feeling their chest or the middle of their back. Make sure they are dressed appropriately for the weather and temperature of a room. As a general rule, they will need to wear one more layer of clothing than you to be comfortable. If you're worried your baby is often hot or cold, visit your GP.

**Baby:** I don't feel well

**Suggestion:** If your baby feels sick, you might hear them crying in a tone you're not used to – it may be weaker, more urgent, continuous, or high-pitched. If they usually cry a lot but then become unusually quiet, this may also be a sign that they are unwell. They could also refuse or decrease amounts taken for their normal feeds. While this may be from teething or other completely natural causes, trust your gut instinct as a parent and if you're concerned, visit your GP.

**Baby:** I just want to be held by you!

**Suggestion:** Your baby relies on you for everything, including contact and reassurance. You are their favourite person. It is important to understand that. They will need lots of your physical contact and verbal reassurance to feel calm. Try swaying/rocking and singing gently to them. You could also try putting your baby in a sling close to your body, as this allows them to be close to you for longer periods.

**Baby:** I don't know why I am crying... but I am

**Suggestion:** While it hurts us to hear it, crying is the only way babies can communicate. Sometimes there's a point to it, and sometimes they're just feeling overwhelmed and don't know what they want! If cuddling or feeding isn't working, you can always try

- playing a constant (soothing) sound. There are many apps you can download that have lots of soothing sounds, from raindrops to white noise to a heartbeat.
- taking them on a walk in the pram or for a drive.
- a massage or a tummy rub with unscented baby oil.
- a warm bath. Letting them play in warm water (make sure not to have it too hot or cold) may help distract and soothe your little one. Make sure to always be present and alert while they bathe!
- holding them tight and walking around the house.

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Sometimes nothing seems to work with babies... but it doesn't last forever. If you get really stressed, try to hand over your baby to someone else for 30 minutes. Go for a walk or a shower or have a lay down with some soothing music. We all need a break sometimes.

If you do not have anyone to help:

- put your baby down in a safe place like the cot or bassinet and let them cry for a while. Take some deep breaths for 10 to 15 minutes and then try to soothe them again if they are not settled.
- take 10 slow deep breaths.
- put on quiet music to distract yourself.
- put your baby in the pram and walk around the block, this will help them settle.

Useful contacts

- Contact your Maternal and Child Health Service
- Call the Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) 13 22 29
- Call Nurse on Call (24 hours) 1300 606 024
- Call Parentline 13 22 89
- For longer-term support call Drummond Street Services on 9663 6733

Useful websites and online information

- Raising Children Network - raisingchildren.net.au
- Maternal and Child Health app - download the **MCH app on Google Play** or **MCH app on the App Store**