



Infant Crying

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Infants practice crying even before birth. By taking in and expelling amniotic fluid, they experience the breath control of crying. At birth the crying reflex is the only reflex strong enough to really help a newborn survive—and that is only because we adults are perfectly attuned to respond to the cries! At birth and for the first month, infants cry and make throaty sounds when they are hungry, wet, tired, in pain, or when they want to be held.

By two months, most infants do not cry as much, but they do cry more loudly and strongly than before. Two- and three-month-olds like to see familiar faces and hear familiar sounds. Some babies may have colic at this age, which is painful and may cause extra crying. Babies with colic need to be held gently, given warm baths, and have understanding parents; with some time, the colic will pass.

Infants between four and eight months often cry when they see strangers, hear a loud noise, or are afraid of being left. They also cry when they get excited or tired, and when they are teething or feeling ill. At around six months, babies may be distracted from crying by music or by seeing something interesting. Infants sometimes need reassurance, and they often need love and affection when they cry. It is not too early to accept their emotions.

Toward the end of the first year, infants are very sensitive to the emotions of others. They may even cry if they hear another person cry! At the same time, nine- to twelve- month-old infants can be willful and stubborn. Temper tantrums may even emerge at this age. Infants react to approval and need attention and guidance at this age. Toddlers can be moody, and their moods usually change quickly. They like to imitate and learn much from adults' ways of handling situations. This is a time for extra patience.

Because we adults are not attuned to the sounds of infant crying, it can be very upsetting to deal with an infant who cries often. With care and patience, infants pass quickly through the crying phase into words that can tell us what they need. If you are upset by the crying of your infant or toddler, please ask someone to help you.

There are few things so compelling to adults as the sound of an infant crying. Here are a few questions to consider that may bring closer the notion of infant crying and what it does to us.

- Think of a recent time you needed something and could not get it for yourself. How did you communicate this need? Was your message received? Did you get what you desired? How did you feel about it? Does anything from this experience relate to fulfilling the needs of infants?
- A baby in your care is crying! What do you do (list in order) to determine and meet her needs? Why does responding promptly and consistently seem to have beneficial effects?
- What kind of crying irritates you? Is there an individual child whose cry "pushes your button"? Why? What do you do about it? What else could you do? To whom could you turn for help?

References

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