

Eyes on



# Crying

Listen: they're talking to you!



CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

Early Childhood Development

PARENTS



***“By crying, babies can express their pain, hunger, anger and boredom but sometimes they cry for no specific reason.”***

## What do we know?

- Crying is the main way of communicating for babies less than 3 months old.
- By crying, babies can express their pain, hunger, anger and boredom but sometimes they cry for no specific reason.
- Even healthy babies who get excellent care cry a lot.
- In the first 3 months of life, around 25% of babies cry for more than 3 and a half hour each day.
- At around 3 months old, babies start to cry less. They begin to babble and to move more easily, and start to be able to express themselves in ways other than crying.
- Persistent crying that seems to have no reason can make parents feel worried, upset or out of control.
- All babies go through times where their crying is excessive, unexpected and inconsolable, but those who experience this a lot (about 10 to 20%) are sometimes called “colicky” infants.
- The most common sign that a baby might have colic is if he cries for more than 3 hours per day, at least 3 days a week, for 3 weeks in a row.
- There are 5 specific characteristics of normal excessive crying or infant colic:
  - The crying is often unexpected, unpredictable and inconsolable (not related to hunger or wet diapers);
  - It often starts at the end of the afternoon or in the evening;
  - It can last 35-40 minutes, or even as much as 2 hours;
  - It increases as the weeks go by, is most intense when the baby is about 2 months and then decreases until about the age of 5 months;
  - The baby seems to be suffering.
- Excessive crying that continues after the colicky period (past the 4th or 5th month) is often associated with a difficult temperament (agitated baby, hard to calm down).
- These characteristics can make the parent feel powerless, discouraged or incompetent. It can create problems for the parent-child relationship, because the parent may become less involved and be less comforting with the child.

## Paying attention to...

... the reasons behind the crying (such as hunger, physical discomfort, fear).

... crying that cannot be explained.

... the anger that inconsolable crying can provoke in a parent.

... abnormal, high-pitched sounds that are irritating to hear, especially if they are frequent and still happening at the age of 5 months.

## What can be done?

- Respond quickly and calmly to the need that the baby is expressing.
- Hold the baby close to your body as often as possible and watch to see if the crying calms down.
- If it becomes frustrating to respond the baby's needs when he won't stop crying, pull away and calm down before going back to the baby.
- Ask someone else to take over if you are not able to calm down.
- Respond quickly to the crying to try to comfort the baby, even if it's difficult to bear (cuddle him, take the baby in your arms, speak softly).
- Ask for help if you need it.



## Information

The Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development identifies and summarizes the best scientific work on the social and emotional development of young children. It disseminates this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of crying in early childhood, consult our experts' articles in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at [www.child-encyclopedia.com](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com).

This information sheet is published by the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development, one of four Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being. Funding for the Centres of Excellence is provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors/researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

We are grateful to the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon for its financial contribution to produce this information sheet.

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In this document, the masculine form is used to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.

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