Eyes on

Crying
Listen: they're talking to you!
“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...

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>What can be done</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... the reasons behind the crying (such as hunger, physical discomfort, fear).</td>
<td>- Respond quickly and calmly to the need that the baby is expressing.</td>
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<td>... crying that cannot be explained.</td>
<td>- Hold the baby close to your body as often as possible and watch to see if the crying calms down.</td>
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<td>... the anger that inconsolable crying can provoke in a parent.</td>
<td>- 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.</td>
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<td>... abnormal, high-pitched sounds that are irritating to hear, especially if they are frequent and still happening at the age of 5 months.</td>
<td>- 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).</td>
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<td>- Ask for help if you need it.</td>
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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.


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