Crying is the main way babies have of letting us know when they need help, but it is not always easy to work out why a baby is crying.

Babies often cry a lot in the early weeks and some babies cry a lot more than others. Some babies cry for two hours or more each day and this can be normal for them.

For many babies the time that they cry often gets longer until they are around six – eight weeks old, then gets less by the time they are around three months old.

It is hard to be with a crying baby and it may be distressing for parents.

It can be very difficult when your baby does not become calm when you try so hard to settle her. Babies can be harmed if handled roughly. Remember never to shake your baby or handle her roughly.

Some babies who cry a lot find it hard to settle into a pattern of eating and sleeping, so everyone gets very overtired.

**Normal crying patterns**

- Parents often feel their baby cries more than other babies, or more than they expected.
- There is a wide range of normal crying. Some babies cry much more than other babies for no clear reason.
- Studies show babies fuss or cry about two hours a day on average, some more and some less.
- Young babies may have one or two times each day when they usually cry, with some unsettled behaviour in-between. The late afternoon and evening is a common time for many babies to cry.

**Some reasons why babies cry**

- Hunger - young babies may need feeding fairly often, especially if they are breastfed.
- Uncomfortable - hot, cold, needs nappy change, wind or tummy pain, clothing uncomfortable or tight around tummy.
- Is she having a bowel action? Young babies can make a lot of fuss about doing a poo, even when it is soft or runny.
- Tired - is she in the best place to settle? Some prefer a dark quiet place, others do better with some noise and activity.
- Unwell - if your baby is crying a lot, check with your doctor so you can feel sure that your baby is well. Check for signs of illness, especially if her crying is different to her usual pattern.
  Seek help if you are worried.
- Overtired.
- Needs a cuddle.
- Too much has happened in the day and the baby is stressed.
- Some babies seem to be in pain due to reflux or colic.
- Many times when young babies cry, no reason can be found.

**Comforting your baby**

- If your baby is crying, she needs you to go to her, and care for her.
- You cannot spoil a baby by doing this.
- In the early months a baby needs to learn that her world is a safe place to be in, and that she can trust her carers to meet her needs.
- You may not be able to stop the crying every time, but you need to do what you can to provide comfort, and help your baby learn to cope with her distress.
- Research has shown that when parents give comfort to young crying babies, they may cry less when they are older.
Settling ideas

- Hold your baby. Crying babies arch their heads back and stiffen their legs. Holding them curved into a C or flexed position can help them calm down.
- Wrapping a baby can be calming and help the baby sleep for longer. Make sure you leave plenty of room so your baby’s legs can be bent up and not wrapped tightly.
- Dummies help some babies to settle, but if you are breastfeeding your baby, don’t use one in the early weeks until the breastfeeding is well established.
- Baby slings are great to provide the comfort and contact that babies need when you have something else to do. However some babies have suffocated in baby slings - they need to be used with care.
- Soft music, rhythmic sounds or continuous machine noises (e.g. the noise made by a washing machine) soothe some babies. Do not put your baby on top of the washing machine in a capsule or cradle. He may fall off and some babies have been seriously hurt like this.
- Many babies settle when taken for a walk in the pram, and the exercise helps parents feel better too. Don’t leave your baby sleeping by himself in a pram.
- Some babies only seem to settle when taken for a drive. This is not ideal but if you are able to do this safely (e.g. you are not too tired, or too distressed by your baby’s crying) this might be useful for the few weeks before he grows past this stage.
- Whispering to babies will sometimes get their attention and stop them crying.

For safety advice on wrapping and use of slings visit the SIDS and Kids website listed at the end.

Coping with your own feelings

It is very hard to always be patient with your baby, especially if she cries a lot. You may find yourself feeling frustrated, angry, helpless and distressed. These feelings are real and cannot just be ignored. Just because you love your baby doesn’t mean you have to like her behaviour all the time.

- Remind yourself that your baby cannot control her crying and is not trying to get at you. She is not ‘spoilt’ and attending to her will not spoil her.
- If there is someone nearby to help, give your baby to them while you take a break.
- If you are on your own, you may need to take a break when you feel angry feelings building up. Put your baby down in a safe place (her cot) and walk away. Go outside perhaps, and take some deep breaths, phone someone or make a cup of tea. When you feel calmer, go back to your baby and try to settle her again.
- It is important to look after yourself when you have a young baby who depends on you. Take up offers of help and get some regular breaks when you can.
- If things are really getting you down so you are finding it hard to enjoy your baby at all, or you are often tearful or feeling depressed, it is important to talk it over with your doctor, a child health nurse or a counsellor.

For more information contact:

- Local child health nurse
- Local family doctor
- Ngala Helpline: www.ngala.com.au
  8:00am–8:00pm 7 days a week
  Telephone (08) 9368 9368
  Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 111 546*
- Parenting WA Line: dlgc.wa.gov.au/parents
  Freecall 1800 654 432* (24 hour service)
- Raising Children Network: raisingchildren.net.au
- Kidsafe WA: www.kidsafewa.com.au
  8:30am–5:00pm (Monday to Friday)
  Telephone (08) 9340 8509
  Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 802 244*
- SIDS and Kids WA: sidsandkidswa.org
  Telephone (08) 9474 3544
  Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 199 466*

*Calls made from a mobile may be charged at a timed rate. This topic may use ‘he’ and ‘she’ in turn – please change to suit your child’s sex.

For more information visit

www.healthywa.wa.gov.au

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability. Please contact childcommunity@health.wa.gov.au.

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Produced by Child and Adolescent Health Service 2012
Reprinted June 2015