



Baby talk – understanding your baby's cries



The most longed-for cry in the world is that of the new-born baby. A sigh of relief will break the silence of bated breath, wet eyes may well brim over into tears of joy, and congratulations echo all round. Baby then calls the tune for the next few hours. He may have a well-earned sleep after his journey through the delivery canal, stay awake because a new experience has opened up for him, cuddles, sucking mummy's nipple. He may endeavour to fathom out the new surroundings by looking around and fixing his gaze on objects which to

him seem interesting and to everyone else of no significance at all. Worried frowns appear and just as quickly disappear across his forehead and he will enjoy stretching and yawning. What a liberating experience for this tiny person! This new environment must seem rather strange after being cooped up in mummy for so long. It is possible that some of the more agitated cries are because baby has a headache after a traumatic delivery experience. He needs peace and quiet, even a dimly-lit room, just as we do when we have a headache.

Feeding a new-born baby may be the blissful experience that we dream it to be. Conversely, it may present the first challenge of restoring a measure of peace to a fraught situation so that all parties may be able to achieve what was originally intended. Some babies don't seem to get the idea of feeding. 'Fraught' can be a good word to describe the dynamics between parents and baby. Crying baby, hot and bothered mummy and helpless daddy is not the ideal combination for the three newcomers to manage their first attempt at baby minding. This new family will be experiencing the first of many situations where a measure of peace and sensibility needs to be brought to bear before baby and mummy get the idea of how to make it work. Patience and persistence will bring their rewards. Failure, frustration and condemnation are never to be entertained. There may be many, many times during weeks, months and years to come where agitated emotions spill out into all sorts of family crisis situations. The first challenge is to bring a sense of equilibrium so that the problem can be coherently expressed and responded to in such a way that sound judgment and direction can be given to all parties concerned.

Trying to understand fretful, persistently crying and screaming babies can present grown-ups with a problem. Babies cannot talk. Babies cry when they are hungry, need a nappy change, are tired, want a cuddle, have trapped wind, feel sick, or want a change of scenery. They are merely little versions of ourselves. Very often, just as we do for older children, we can understand because, in measure, we know what it feels like to be them. It is all too easy to fall into little traps of attention-seeking. For instance, is a baby always hungry when they cry? A rush to pick baby up at the first sound of a whimper sets the tone for the future. 'Every time I cry I get what I want.' Wait to see what baby is really saying. He might have wet himself, shifted some wind or been momentarily startled. Wait a while, you might have a surprise, for baby might put himself back to sleep. There will be a longer gap before the next feed is due, mummy can have more time to herself or to finish what she was doing and baby will end up more satisfied for longer with more food in his tummy. Babies need their sleep just as much as we do and the baby being constantly picked up or fed each time they cry can become over-tired, bloated, windy or have a tummy ache.

A future scenario could go like this. Friend comes for a cup of tea. Child distracts all grown-up conversation with persistent interruptions. Excellent attention-demanding ploys. All very



embarrassing for both adults. The visit is a non-starter. Perhaps another time? With similar outcomes for other visits the visitor no longer comes. Little ones grow up into bigger children who rule the roost. There is little respect for family members or their property and in a worst case scenario anarchy reigns. What a tragedy that the little baby so longed for has, through bad parenting, been the instrument of such unhappiness in a family. It would be tragic if the neglect of a sound approach to the nurturing of a child to become an integral member of a family brought chaos and heartbreak. It is vital that we understand baby talk.

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