



Tears and more tears

A brooding dark cloud descends obscuring the sun, a flash of lightning and a rumble of thunder in the distance give warning of an impending storm. A dry mouth, funny feeling in the pit of your stomach, the temptation to do all the safety checks, to run for cover or even hide - or to dismiss all the signs, shrug your shoulders and carry on as if all is well are all possible reactions. What would you do?



Is it that much different with people? What if all the signs were the warnings of trouble? Someone about to let rip with feelings of anger, frustration or a blind rage? What would you do? Or a different scenario may develop when grey clouds hide the sun, and the rain, which may last for a long time, begins to fall. The grey atmosphere and continual dampening cloak begin to affect everything and everyone. These two weather conditions accurately describe anger and depression. The longer it takes for the storm or depressive state to end the greater the collateral damage caused. Foundations are undermined or structures smashed to smithereens, trust is undermined, relationships put under strain, fear instilled and former bonds never quite restored to former strengths of acceptance and joy.

In between these two extremes lie a number of other scenarios where tears may flow, accompanied by an audible or inaudible expression of the feelings from within that have been evoked. Tears have no barriers of age, intellect, gender or race. We all cry, perhaps loud boohoos, silent tears, private tears or those that say 'please help me'. We need them too, for they often express what words are unable to express. The stiff upper lip approach can leave us isolated. We give the impression of bravado where what you do and say to me cannot hurt me. Those can be lonely places when we most need a friend.

There are times when crying cannot be vocalised coherently. No amount of cuddles, applying sticking plaster, holding hands, looking for a lost toy, helping with a difficult piece of homework, bending a listening ear, giving practical advice to avoid disastrous consequences, or even firm encouragement to persevere, seems to work. What does a parent do when nothing helps and the crying continues, even escalates and is coupled with frenetic behaviour? How can we find an answer if we do not understand the problem? There is no easy solution, however, there are a few principles which can be applied to help avoid a cataclysmic eruption developing with the loss of respect for all concerned.

The most longed-for cry is that first cry of the newborn. Thereafter baby's cry is pacified with anything that works. Feeding, cuddles, rocking the cradle, patting or rubbing his back, walking the floor, yes, even a ride in the car on the bumpiest road possible, revving the car engine at traffic lights, in fact anything to keep baby on the move to stop the incessant crying. The continuous crying can rob a parent of all joy of having this baby. You are not alone. There are many parents who are either going through, or have gone through, what you are experiencing. Don't be afraid to talk to your Health Visitor or someone at the baby clinic. There are ways to relieve colicky and sickly babies. He can be given smaller feeds more frequently or increase the gaps between feeds. A little preparation given before a feed to settle baby's tummy might be helpful. This can only be prescribed by your doctor.



Sometimes it can appear that everyone fusses about baby. 'What does baby weigh now?' 'Are you still feeding baby yourself?' 'Is baby sleeping through the night?' 'Never mind dear, it won't last for long.' Maybe, someone will ask how you are so you can be centre stage for a while!

Comparisons don't help do they? 'My baby never did that?' 'Is your baby doing this - smile, roll over, sit up, stand, crawl, walk and begin to say intelligible words?' Mum will become the teary one who goes to pieces, a self-confessed failure who withdraws from the social scene. Wouldn't it be nice to have an adult conversation - to dress up and have an evening out? Share these thoughts with your own parents, sisters and brothers, your in-laws - that is if you get on well with them. Have you got a best friend or former colleague you can talk 'adult' with? More than any other time you need understanding and acceptance. You need to accept that you are not an odd bod. There are outlets for nursing mothers and their babies and toddlers. Don't give up. Ask at the clinic at the surgery. My Dad used to say to me, 'You won't know if you don't ask.' Look on the internet for outlets in your local vicinity. Your tears need not drag you down into depression.

It is possible, however, to not only go into the silence of depression after childbirth but to go the opposite emotional route of losing control. Those piercing non-stop cries, night and day can drive you into your own distracted place of irrational outbursts. When you feel it all becomes too much, these simple suggestions can help prevent a disaster. Make sure your baby is safe in his cot, shut the door, go downstairs, make a cup of tea and talk to someone either straight away or as soon as you can. You need a good practical outlet. There is no shame in saying how it really is. Aim to be a happy mum. Happy mums encourage happy dads and children.

Babies love to be centre stage. They don't need any encouragement or teaching about how to get what they want. Their ploys to gain this pre-eminent position will become more easily understood as crying is verbalised and as they use grizzling, whining, tantrums, stamping of feet and throwing toys around to try to get what they want. Dare I add that when we become adults these childish ploys, if left to become established, could well become more sophisticated and apparently justifiable.

What is baby saying? More cuddles or food, to be picked up and carried around? 'I am not going to sleep in my cot.' The next step will be, 'play with me - you cannot hold a conversation with anyone else - play with me.' In other words, baby, toddler or child will be saying, to some degree or other, 'the world revolves around me and no-one else matters.' We must ensure we don't sow seeds for future struggles. It won't be much fun in a few years' time trying to calm an aggressive teenager threatening to break up the 'happy family' which you had hoped for.

The first whimper from the cot does not mean baby is saying 'drop everything, I need you.' It means, 'I am letting you know that I am awake.' Take your time. Finish what you are doing. It might mean getting the tea ready. Helping an older child with their homework. If baby was fed an hour ago it might mean, 'I want more food even if I don't need it.' Baby could well decide to give up the crying, gaze around, do a loud burp and go back to sleep. The more a baby takes in a feed, the more settled they will be. Too many frequent nibbly feeds or snacking is a recipe for wind, tummy aches and looking for numerous feeds during the night.



Babies need plenty of sleep. They can, just as we do, become tired and fretful. Unhappy baby can lead to unhappy parents and family. Other children might well wish that baby not been born. It will take some courage when everything you have tried fails to pacify him, for the sake of the rest of a family, to put baby in another room for a while. Hopefully he will cool off and go to sleep or he will just have to cry for a while so that the rest of the family will not be neglected. Bad habits now will teach a baby that making a noise means, 'I will get attention.' Is there a responsible person who could take him for a walk in his pram while you do something with the other children? Everyone gets some quality time and when dad comes home there are good things to share not just grumbles. Often there are simple solutions to the problems that parents are faced with. You learnt the ropes in your place of work so you will be fine if you draw on the same principles now. Having a family is a work in progress. The job lasts for a lifetime. Wisdom comes out of failures and successes.



Imagine yourself looking out of the window and enjoying the view. It could be a scenic view or children playing in a garden, the car being cleaned by father and son - anything that is good. It begins to rain, a few drops at first, which as they slide down the pane, gather momentum until the view becomes distorted and then a blur. Tears can do that to us.

We lose sight of what is in front of us. Our thinking can become fuzzy and our judgment flawed. We can make wrong decisions and these in turn can turn to blame, collapse or absolving ourselves of responsibility for a happy family getting into a huge muddle. The tears must stop. The question is, 'How can we become that happy, united family again?' You could be the couple with their first baby or a family with a new arrival. What about having a family get-together where everyone can voice what they are feeling and make suggestions to get back on track and have fun? It is important to turn inwards to resolve issues and not outwards to escape.

Mothers are good at helping a family stick together. We just have to believe in ourselves and be open to support from others who understand and know us well. That is wisdom and not failure. In that way we have hope and the help needed to be the best mother and to have a happy, strong family who can weather the storms together. Tears are there to draw us together and never to drive us apart.

Merle Sparkes