

# SOB

By Robin Immerman Gruen • Photographs by Shannon Greer

# STORY

You knew your newborn would cry. A lot. Friends told you. Your mother told you. The baby books told you. Still, nothing can really prepare a new mom for how miserable those wails will make you feel. So if you're close to tears yourself, hang in there. Our simple checklist will help you decode your child's cries. And we've got dozens of expert and parent-tested tips for calming him down—fast.

## why they cry

**Hunger** If it's been at least two hours since your baby's last feeding, he could be ready for another meal. Sure signs: He may open and close his mouth or start sucking on his hand.

**Fatigue** If you notice your child is not active, seems bored with her toys, rubs her eyes a lot, or yawns repeatedly, it may be time for a nap.

**Discomfort** A cry of pain is sudden and shrill, and often includes long wails followed by a pause. "Your child may look like she's out of breath," says Ken Lyons, M.D., a pediatrician at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

**Boredom** Has your baby been in his bouncy seat for 20 minutes while you talk on the phone? He may need a little Mommy time—or something new to look at or touch.

**Loneliness** If your child falls asleep in your arms and then wakes up crying soon after you put her down in the crib, she's probably confused. Sobbing is her way of saying she misses the warmth of your embrace or wants you to pick her up.

**Overstimulation** Are too many people trying to get your baby's attention? Are you shaking a rattle and talking to him as music plays in the background? If he closes his eyes suddenly or turns his head away and wails, he needs some peace and quiet.

**Colic** If your baby cries for three hours or more every day for at least a week, she has colic. Although the jury is still out on the exact cause of this condition, most pediatricians believe colic is caused by reflux, gas, or other digestive problems. It usually begins when a child is 3 to 6 weeks old and ends by the time she hits the 3-month mark.

## soothe moves

**Get him going.** Infants like repetitive, rhythmic motion, such as rocking, swinging, and dancing. Many moms instinctively begin to sway while holding a fussy baby, and for good reason—the jiggly movement feels similar to what life feels like inside the womb, says Harvey Karp, M.D., a *Parents* advisor and creator of the DVD and book *The Happiest Baby on the Block*. Other ways to use motion to calm your child: Put him in a baby carrier, a bouncy seat, an infant swing, or a stroller; plop him into an infant car seat and go for a drive; or place him on your lap while you sit on an exercise ball, holding him as you gently bounce.

**Make some (white) noise.** The womb is a very noisy place. "Imitating the rhythmic sounds your baby heard when nesting inside of you can calm her down," says Dr. Karp. Any white noise will do, such as the sound of a vacuum, a hair dryer, a radio set to static, an air filter, or an air conditioner. You can also hold your child snugly and make a strong shushing sound.

**Try mellow music.** There's a reason why lullabies have been passed down through the ages. "Your baby knows your voice best and loves to hear it," explains Rosanne Locricchio Barnum, founder of Chicago's Musical Magic, an interactive music class for infants and toddlers. Sing one of the classics, or make up your own tune. You can also try playing soft, soothing CDs.

**Wrap her up.** Swaddling mimics the tight confines of the womb and calms many infants down. Make sure the receiving blanket

you use is large enough to wrap her properly. If you're having trouble with the technique, buy a swaddle blanket; many come with instructions. It's also a good idea to check periodically to make sure your child isn't overheated.

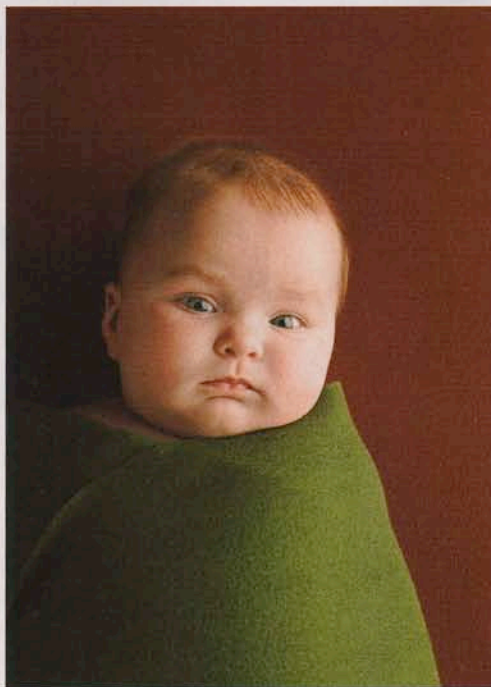
**Massage him.** Stroke your baby's skin and try patting, kneading, and rolling it (lightly, of course). Use a calming lavender-scented oil or gel if he seems to like it.

**Let her suck.** The most natural pacifier is your breast, but when she's had enough to eat, comfort her with a Binky, a teething toy, or a clean finger.

**Find a fan.** A little breeze is a great (and overlooked) way to distract your infant, says Dr. Lyons. Attach a portable fan to your stroller, or pack one in your diaper bag. If you have a ceiling fan at home (or if there's one at your favorite coffee shop), you're in luck: Babies are fascinated by watching the blades turn.

**Switch positions.** Sometimes, all it takes is a slight tweak in the way you cradle your baby. Most infants prefer to be held on their side, since this is how they floated in the womb. Try the reverse breastfeeding hold: Have your infant face outward, and

support her head with your hand as her feet rest against the inside of your elbow. Bounce or rock her to enhance the calming effect. Dads often prefer the football hold, which requires a bit more arm strength but is amazingly effective at silencing fussy babies. Rest your child with her stomach across your forearm, her arms and legs straddled limply, and her head sideways, face out, in your palm. ☆



## NO MORE TEARS

"Dena loves to look at herself in the mirror. She stops crying and starts to smile almost instantly."

—Madalyn Stein Kandelman  
Chicago, Ill.

"Tickling Cole gently behind his ears always seems to cheer him up."

—Emily Feldman; Dallas, Tex.

"I insert Garrett's name into common nursery rhymes, like 'Garrett had a little lamb.' He stops crying after a verse or two."

—Jessica Cohen; Richboro, Pa.

"I used to rub the small of Alexis's back. It worked like magic."

—Amy Bell; Los Angeles, Calif.

"I do lunges while holding Talia. My legs get a workout, and the up-and-down motion calms her."

—Jodi Lurie; Milwaukee, Wis.

"My wife, Jenn, and I laugh loudly. When Max sees us, he stops crying so he can join in on the fun."

—Ari Krug; New York, N.Y.