

# YOUR BABY'S UNIQUE CUES

Every baby is unique. There is no one simple formula for meeting their needs.

Secure attachment doesn't happen overnight. It's an ongoing partnership between you and your baby. It'll become easier to understand their cries, interpret cues and respond to their needs for food, rest, love, and comfort. Stay patient with yourself and your baby as you learn about each other. Be open and curious.

Each baby's nervous system is unique as well. Some might be soothed by noise and activity. Others might prefer calm and quiet. The key is to learn your baby's cues and respond to them accordingly.

Even though all of the sounds and cries may sound the same at first, they're communicating with you in different ways, using sound and movement.

An arched back, a scrunched-up face, eyes tightly closed, fists curled up, rubbing eyes or frenetic movement. These are all specific communication about their emotional and physical state. You need to be a sensory detective and find out they're communicating and how best to respond.

Watch their facial expressions and body movements for clues about their sensory needs. They may adjust their body position or change their facial expression, or move their arms in response to your voice, to indicate that they're cold or need to be held and cuddled.

Become familiar with the sounds they make and what they mean.

I'm hungry, maybe a short, low-pitched cry, while I'm tired, may be a choppy wail.

Note the kind of touch they enjoy and the amount of pressure that they experience as pleasurable. With every touch they're learning about life. The more tender your touch, they'll find the world a comforting place.

Pay attention to the kinds of movements, sounds, and environments they like. Some are comforted by motion, such as rocking or being walked back and forth. Others may respond to sounds like soft music, or a change of environment such as being carried outside.

Sometimes they'll fuss no matter what you do, as when teething, sick, or undergoing a big developmental change. When this happens, keep up your efforts to communicate with and soothe them. Your patience, presence and care benefit them even if they continue to fuss.

Learning takes time and experimentation. You can usually tell through their relaxation and connectedness. If it takes a few tries, don't rush. They can handle some frustration if you're there with them. Talk soothingly as you offer your best guesses. They'll feel your true intention.

Simply watch and listen carefully. You learn much faster when you aren't worried or anxious. Your instincts will guide you when you're connected to yourself. When you're in your body and not in your head.

Meeting their needs is not the same as giving them everything they want.

Watch out for pressure from well-meaning family and friends. What worked for their baby may not work for yours. By learning what it takes to calm and soothe them, you initiate trust and they begin the process of learning how to self soothe.

## **PAY CLOSE ATTENTION**

Get to know their preferences by engaging all of your senses as you try to figure out what they need.

## CHANGES IN MOOD

Do their mood changes seem to coincide with environment changes, the time of day, or in relation to food or naps?

If they get cranky in the late morning, watch to see if they are sending signals that you're missing, like an isolated yawn or eye rubbing.

## REACTIONS TO SITUATIONS OR ENVIRONMENTS

Babies often send signals that we just don't notice. Your baby might get overstimulated if too many people are around or become especially upset about schedule changes.

## DIFFERENCE IN THEIR CRIES

At first all cries will sound the same. But soon you'll know the difference between the I'm tired and I'm hungry cry. Notice noise level, pitch and intensity of the cry, as well as their body language and facial expressions. All of these signs communicate something specific about their emotional and physical state.

## EATING AND SLEEPING

Many of their early signs and signals are about the need for food and rest. Increasing the frequency of feedings or adding in some extra time for rest can make a big difference in their ability to engage and interact when they're awake.

Without proper rest, they can't be calm and alert and ready to engage with you. Babies sleep a lot and their signals will come more often than you might expect.

Babies who are overtired can act hyper-alert and move frenetically. You might mistake this energy for an invitation to engage, but really, it is their way of saying that naptime should have been 30 minutes ago.

Hunger will also be the cause of many early cues from your baby. Schedules are helpful, but growth spurts and developmental changes may cause their needs to change every few weeks so it is helpful to pay close attention to their unique signs and signals.

## TALK, LAUGH AND PLAY

Smiles, laughter, touch and interaction are as important to their development as food or sleep. Your body language, tone of voice, and loving touch are all important ways of communicating with them.

When you see signs that they want to play, try to relax and then exchange smiles, funny faces, and happy coos with them.

Their nervous systems are sensitive at first. It can become exhausted very quickly, so watch for signs that they need to withdraw from play because they have become over-stimulated.