



**“A healthy sleeping baby is key to a flourishing family. Our sleep strategy combines medical research with practical routines which assist parents achieve optimum sleep, feeding, growth and happiness in babies and children.**

Background series

## crying in babies

**“... knowledge, confidence and 'life balance' dramatically improve the quality of parenting.”**

**Babies cry. This is normal and there is a vast literature for parents on why it occurs, what it means and its impact on the child.**

This handout is principally targeted on the first three of months of life and is only a small part of the overall The Babysleep Doctor strategy. It makes an assumption that your baby is well. If the baby has a health problem this must take precedence over the information below.

As a mother you know that parenting can be complex. Our task is to simplify this complex time. Overleaf, we analyse some of the reasons why babies will cry in order that it assists parents to react accordingly.

### **So how long can you let a baby cry?**

This varies with the babies' age, weight and any special circumstances. Assuming good health and an average weight and once you are content that the baby just needs to get to sleep, leave a baby to settle independently for 20-45 minutes. If it goes beyond that time then wait for a little break in the crying and then reassure. Give contact for a few minutes. Check if they want more milk and then leave them again.

For a very young baby or one who is less than about 2.5kg, only leave the baby for 10-20 minutes. For an older stronger baby over 5kg, leave them for longer ie. 45 minutes, then re-feed and try again.

### **Does it cause harm?**

There is a large literature and some significant organisations which discuss the emotional damage caused by crying to sleep. The science behind this is non-existent apart from rare cases of severe emotional

Continued overleaf



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**“It is The Babysleep Doctor’s very clear experience that babies cared for using these philosophies cry less than average.”**

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deprivation. Remember that we are talking here of helping a baby learn totally appropriate skills ie. independent sleep. This may take a few days and is followed by months and years of good sleep and excellent relationships at home.

### Caring for your emotional wellbeing

The Babysleep Doctor does not apologise for wanting to look after mothers’ and fathers’ physical and emotional wellbeing. If we provide the parents knowledge, confidence in their skills and a 'life balance' where they have an appropriate balance of time for each other, themselves and their baby the quality of parenting improves dramatically.

In July 2013, the *British Medical Journal*, reported on a study demonstrating the relationship of sleep to brain development in children. Called the Millennium cohort Study, it followed 11,000 children. It showed that children who demonstrated irregular bedtimes up to the age of three were the most negatively affected when it came to reading, math skills and spatial awareness. When followed over time, they continued to lag developmentally even by the age of seven. The authors concluded that the first three years of life seem to be a particularly sensitive time for sleep and its relationship to brain development.

### Types of crying

#### Hungry

This tends to be an 'accelerating cry' ie. it gets louder and louder and louder. Babies who are growing rapidly may vigorously call until fed and then once fed are rapidly content. These babies are not reassured by being lifted for a cuddle.

#### Tired

More accurately called an overtired cry. This is quite a distressing cry for the mother. Whereas the hungry baby builds up to a crescendo the overtired baby starts with this urgent distressed cry. The key here is that if you attend to the baby the crying rapidly decreases and to a major extent. If you put the baby down once resettled the loud protest starts again. Ultimately you will have no choice but to make sure that the baby is fully fed, clean and dry, warmly dressed and then let them cry down. Research has shown that this will not harm the child BUT it is hard on the parents. The time taken to settle varies with the degree of tiredness. It can take 15-20 minutes. Even once asleep the baby may waken with a startled cry after 15-20 minutes and again need to be left to settle. Often they then sleep until the next feed. This problem is minimised by ensuring the baby achieves the best possible feeding, growth and sleep in the early weeks of life.

#### Room service

There is a time in about the second month of life where your baby develops an emotional response to you. For parents this is a major step and immensely enjoyable. We all know love is very attractive and we modify our behaviour to maximise the experience. Babies are the same. Unfortunately they do not have a stop point. In this setting, the baby stops crying as soon as picked up and starts again as soon as they are put down. Once you are satisfied that all is well, you have no choice but to let the baby cry down to sleep alone. It is OK to check the baby once they are asleep to ensure they are safe. The ability to go to sleep independently when tired is the first skill that you teach your baby. Some babies take 1, 2 or 3 weeks to learn but once they do, they prefer to achieve sleep alone.

#### Goodbye

The baby who is ready and put down alone to sleep will give very little crying apart from a little 'goodbye or settling' cry. Some mothers refer to that as a whinge rather than a cry. Depending upon the time of day and the babies' age it may last anything from 0-15 minutes. It is best managed by not responding beyond one or two reassurances in the first five minutes and then no further response until the baby is asleep. It will often be at its loudest from 4-8 pm and will often settle by about 12 weeks.

#### Learned

This is a very tough situation. The baby has cried excessively for days (or weeks). The mother is distraught. All medical checks are normal but the baby cries for very prolonged times (sometimes literally hours). There are two key indicators of what is wrong: i) the mother has responded to her baby's cry immediately and ii) the baby's cry is steady with minor ups and downs in volume, somewhat like an ambulance siren. The solution is to have two or three days of focusing entirely on feeding and sleeping. Minimise handling and try very hard not to respond to the crying. Parents are likely to benefit from significant support and guidance.

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