



Brazelton Centre UK

understanding baby behaviour



How Your Baby Communicates

An introduction to your baby's behaviour, states and cues from birth to three months



“ A baby’s behaviour
is their language...
and you can trust
that language.”

DR. T. BERRY BRAZELTON



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My communication

From the moment your baby is born they are communicating with you.

Your baby uses their behaviour to show you how they are feeling and to tell you what they would like from you. Behaviour is the word that describes all your baby's movements, sounds, responses and expressions.

You can watch and observe your baby in any moment and see what they may be communicating. Nothing a baby does is random - all behaviour has meaning!

Becoming familiar with your baby's behaviour will support you in meeting their needs and in getting to know them - as the precious, unique individual they already are.



Your baby's states

A helpful start to getting to know your baby's behaviour is by recognising when they are ready to play, feed, rest and sleep.

Identifying which state your baby is in will help you to see how they are feeling and how to respond to them at various times.

Here are the different states and how they look...



Sleep states



Deep sleep

My eyes are closed with no eye movements.

My breathing is soft and regular.

My body is still, but I may occasionally startle or have sucking movements.



Sleep is important for your baby as it is the time when they grow and develop. Try not to wake your baby up when they are in a deep sleep.

Light sleep

My eyes are closed or fluttering. You may see some rapid eye movements under my eyelids.

I may have some body and face movements.

My breathing may be more irregular.



During this time you may want to keep noises and disturbances to a minimum if you would like your baby to continue to sleep as they may be more easily disturbed.

Drowsy

My eyes may open and close, my eyelids are heavy.

My movements are smooth and I may suck.

I will react to noise and touch.



During this time your baby will either move to light sleep or to an awake, alert state. Watch, wait and see what your baby will do.

Awake states



Quiet alert

My eyes are open and bright.

My body is relaxed and still.

I focus and show interest in faces, voices and objects around me.

I may smile and make cooing or gurgling sounds.



This is the time to enjoy chatting and playing with your baby, which is so important for their developing brain. Remember at this young age your baby can only maintain this state for short periods, they will show you when they need a break (see 'Helping your baby to take a break').

Fussing

My body will be moving much more.

I may make more sounds like fussing.

I become much more sensitive to noise and movement.



This is your baby's way of telling you something is bothering them and needs to change. Try slowing things down or changing position. Your baby may be hungry, tired or need a nappy change. Or they may want to talk more.

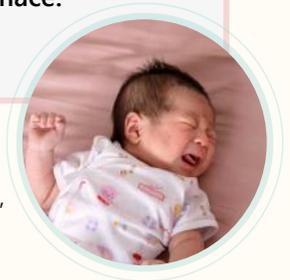
Crying

My eyes may be closed tight and my face will grimace.

My body will be moving lots.



Your baby is telling you they need something different. It is not always easy to know why your baby is upset and how to respond. By getting to know your baby over time, and through trial and error, you can make sense of what it is they want. (See 'Soothing and settling my baby').





You are your baby's favourite toy

- Babies are sociable and need interaction with their loving parents/caregivers.
- Your baby knows your face and voice - use their quiet and alert time to connect with them.
- Right from birth your baby will enjoy looking at your face watching your expressions and interacting with you.
- This special time together helps your baby's brain grow and develop.
- You are laying the foundation for a relationship that will last a lifetime.



Playing, talking and connecting with you is so exciting for your baby that sometimes they may need a small break. Allow your baby to renew their energy and help by lowering the level of stimulation before playing again when they show they are ready.

Helping your baby to take a break



Your baby has ways of telling you that they are overwhelmed, tired or stressed. By watching your baby's behaviour you will get to know when they are showing you that they need a break.

If you see these behaviours in your baby, think about what might be overwhelming them and help them to take a break. Slow down or stop the activity you are doing, or move your baby to a quieter, calmer environment. Or maybe your baby is ready for a feed or a sleep.

There is a change in my skin colour

I have hiccups, sneezing or yawning

I bring up a bit of milk

My body becomes stiff and tense

I fuss and cry

I look away or close my eyes

I tremble or startle

My breathing becomes quicker



Remember everything in this world is new for your baby. They are already using all their senses and working hard to process all their experiences. Helping to create supportive, calm surroundings when you can will really help your baby.



Soothing and settling your baby

Crying is one way that your baby communicates with you.

Hearing your baby cry can be hard. Even when you are unsure what is upsetting your baby, it's important and comforting to them to know that you are there and that you are responding to how they are feeling.



Be reassured that you cannot spoil your baby by responding to their crying.



Here are some soothing techniques you may like to try that can be comforting for your baby.

Take one step at a time and give time to see if they help. Changing things too fast can be unsettling for your baby.



In addition to these techniques, as you spend time getting to know your baby, you may find other ways that help soothe them when they are upset. You know your baby best. ♥

First try to soothe your baby by letting them know you are there, let them see your face. In a calm voice talk to your baby. You may have to speak quite loudly to be heard over the crying.



If this doesn't help, then try placing your hand gently on your baby's tummy, whilst continuing to talk.



If that's not enough, then bring your baby's hands and arms across their body.



If your baby is still upset, pick up your baby, continuing to talk to them. Try holding them still or try smooth rhythmic rocking.



You can also try wrapping your baby in their favourite blanket with their hands close to their mouth - we recommend that you unwrap your baby before placing them down to sleep. (See 'lullabytrust.org.uk' for safe sleep guidance.)



Encourage your baby to suck on something, such as their hand.





For more information and resources about your baby's communication visit:

www.brazelton.co.uk

This booklet has been published by the Brazelton Centre UK. We are a national charity dedicated to supporting parent-baby relationships through promoting an understanding of newborn communication. A large part of our work involves training healthcare professionals in infant behaviour so that they have the skills and knowledge to support new parents in getting to know their baby.



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Registered Charity Number: 1158765

Thank you to the health care professionals and parents who contributed to this booklet.

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