



## Baby's crying, stress response & cortisol levels

Listening to your baby crying is hard-our instinct usually tells us to pick them up and to cuddle away every single tear!

When it comes to newborns and babies up to 4 months (corrected age) it is vital to respond to their cries as fast as possible!

Saying that, latest by the 2<sup>nd</sup> child parents usually do not have the time to race to the rescue for every grizzle and cry: life doesn't just stop with a baby in the house and it's not really viable (at least for most parents) to try to have their baby never cry for more than a few seconds.

So don't feel guilty or stressed when your baby has to wait for you to do what you are doing (within reason of course). Once you get to them give them an extra sweet cuddle & your affection, which will quickly reduce their initially risen cortisol levels.

From 16 weeks onwards babies are neurologically able to learn how to self- soothe, which means they can learn how to self- settle to sleep and how to re- settle between sleep cycles.

But no matter if you want to teach your baby at 16 weeks, 9 months or 2 years how to master this important skill of being able to fall & stay asleep independently:

The process to get there is usually accompanied with some level of grizzling or crying, because *learning new things can be hard and frustrating*. And the older a child gets, the stronger they can voice their frustration, which usually comes with tears: depending on your child's temperament with more or less.

## You are not being a bad parent because you let your baby cry!

Yes, crying is the only way for babies to communicate and their needs have to be met, physically and emotionally.

But not every cry means there is a need that requires to be immediately fulfilled: some babies don't cry much at all and parents of course still care for them. Others are cared for & loved... and still cry. And as babies grow up and change, so do their cries.

*Not every cry has to mean pain or distress and a crying baby doesn't mean that you are doing anything wrong as a parent.* Crying seems to be just part of being a baby. In fact, it's part of being human.

So when your baby/child cries (especially when falling asleep or between sleep cycles) try to

**STOP. BREATH. LISTEN. WAIT.**

...and then respond with what you feel being appropriate for the situation.

A lot of people, even professionals, connect any form of cry based sleep training to studies around *toxic chronic stress*, stating that any form of crying causes cortisol and adrenalin levels to rise and therefore have a negative effect on the child's well-being, up to the point where a child left to cry for long enough just learns to give up that someone will ever come and help- which must be damaging to their emotional health and even be detrimental to their brain development.

*A toxic chronic stress response*, where the child gives up hope to be heard and which disrupts the development of the brain & their emotional attachment, can occur "*when a child experiences strong, frequent and/or prolonged adversity, such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect (...) exposure to violence (...) without adequate adult support.*"... (Source: American Academy of Paediatrics). A child that, apart from the times of the day where some form of cry based sleep training is practised, is loved and responded to, cuddled, kissed and has all his emotional and physical needs met, will not

be emotionally or physically damaged, because the parents who love them decide to take care of their own (mental) well-being, by making sure every family member gets the sleep they need & deserve.

At the end of the day everybody can make the choices that fit their own beliefs best, but claiming one way of parenting is better than the other (attachment parenting vs using cry based methods), is not warranted:

- there is no scientific evidence that one style or another causes specific outcomes
- what works or not depends a lot on the specific baby and temperament
- the ability to soothe your baby and put them to sleep depends on a lot more than the bond between you and your child
- there are so many methods how to sleep train-and sometimes it's not even your decision: you just have to do whatever works

*Your Village*

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