

SOOTHING A BABY

When holding a newborn, there are a few things that should be kept in mind. Most parents feel protective of their newborn, with good reason. By demonstrating a few safety and sanitary procedures, you can put the parents and yourself more at ease.

1. Be certain your hands are always clean when handling an infant. If it is your own child, you may wish to let a baby suck on your fingers or hands, but use caution and check with the parents first if you are going to do this with someone else's child. Remember that your hands have been many places and a newborn is especially at risk for infections and germs.
2. Avoid breathing directly into or blowing on the child's face. You may have some illness or infection that is unknown to you that may make the baby sick. Do not hold a child or breathe on him/her if you have a cold or any other contagious illness. While this sounds like common sense, any mother can tell a story of some sick person breathing on and coughing near her child. Again, this puts the infant at risk for an unnecessary illness. If your illness is not noticeable and the parent offers or asks you to hold the child, simply explain your concern and express your willingness to hold the baby on another occasion. This will be appreciated by any parent.
3. When holding an infant, be sure to support his/her neck. The neck is especially fragile and need extra support during the first few months. Keeping your hand or arm under the neck to support it is all that is needed for the safety of the baby.
4. Babies usually like to be held securely and closely. Avoid any quick, jerking movements. Enjoy snuggling them close to you.
5. As babies grow older you may want to throw the baby into the air a few inches and catch him/her. While this may cause a grin or even laughter from the baby, it is **VERY DANGEROUS** and should never be done. The sudden jerk as you catch the baby (no matter how careful you try to be) can cause a jolt to the brain that is severe enough to cause long term brain damage. While this may be a tradition in your family, it is very unsafe and should not be done.

It is always wise to watch the reaction of the parent as you handle the infant. You can usually tell if you are doing something that makes them uncomfortable. Most parents are very proud of their infant and love seeing other people accept and enjoy their new baby.

There will undoubtedly be times when a baby will cry. Sometimes it is difficult to tell just what it is he/she wants. Crying is an infant's attempt to communicate something to you. The problem for most new parents is that they are not sure WHAT the child is communicating. As parents spend time with their babies and try to understand the purpose of the crying, they learn to interpret the cry and become quite effective in supplying the baby with what he/she needs. Sometimes the message is, "Change me, I'm wet," or "Feed me, I'm hungry," or "Hold me, I'm lonely or scared," or even "Move me to another position, I'm bored." But, sometimes there really is no reason for the crying. According to Daniel Bronfin, MD, a pediatrician at Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans and assistant clinical professor at Tulane University School of Medicine, all babies spend some time crying for no apparent reason. This can be frustrating and even frightening for parents and should be discussed with a pediatrician. A physical exam will likely assure parents that nothing is wrong with the baby. A discussion about crying and comforting infants will also be helpful. The most successful parents are those who understand and use a variety of techniques to soothe their baby. (Working Mother, September, 1990; Twenty-one Ways To Soothe A Baby; by Dena K. Salmon)

Soothing techniques fall into three categories:

1. Those that rely on touch.
2. Those that rely on motion.
3. Those that rely on sound.

Using the transparency "Categories of Soothing Techniques," discuss with students how these techniques work and how they can be put into practical use to soothe a baby.

(Note to the Teacher: It is most effective to have a doll and a receiving blanket to demonstrate swaddling.)

Specific methods of COPING WITH CRYING are listed below:

1. Walk or dance with the baby.
2. Rock the baby.
3. Bounce the baby *gently* in your arms or on a bed.
4. Take the baby for a ride in the carriage.
5. Take the baby for a ride in the car.
6. Put the baby in a wind-up swing.
7. Turn up the music on the radio or stereo, run the vacuum, or let the water run in the tub as a distraction for you and the baby.
8. Offer the baby a noisy toy, shake it and rattle it.
9. Sing or talk in a quiet, sing-song way.
10. Put the baby in a soft front carrier, close to your body.
11. Lay the baby's tummy down across your lap and gently rub or tap his/her back.
12. Lay the baby across a *warm* hot-water bottle on your lap or a bed.
13. Massage the baby's body and limbs gently; using a warmed lotion, if the weather is cool.
14. Swaddle the baby tightly.
15. Feed and burp the baby one more time or offer a little warm water. In desperation, add a tiny bit of sugar to the water or to weak chamomile tea.
16. Offer a pacifier (the Nuk allows less air to pass in around the baby's mouth and is better for colicky baby) and hold it in the baby's mouth if necessary.
17. Hold the baby close and breathe slowly and calmly; the baby may feel your calmness and become quiet.
18. Cross the baby's arms across the chest and hold him or her down on a bed with gentle, firm pressure.
19. Remove yourself and let someone else take over for awhile. If a family member is not available, consider hiring a sitter for a short period of time.
20. If nothing works, put the baby in his/her bed, close the door, and turn up the TV or radio. Check the child every 15 minutes or so, for your own peace of mind.

CATEGORIES OF SOOTHING TECHNIQUES

TOUCH

Swaddling

Sucking

Hot-water bottle (with WARM water)

Warm bath

Cuddling

MOTION

Rocking

Walking

Stroller ride/rock

Car ride

Rhythmic patting

Bassinet or crib jiggle

Knee bends

SOUND

Rhythmic chants

Ticking clock

Singing

Humming

Chanting

Recording of heartbeat or womb sounds

A grandparent