



The Baby Psychologist

Why does your baby cry?

Is your little one bored, sleepy or in need of a feed? Before you break down in tears yourself, don't worry, Dr Richard C Woolfson is here to explain all...

When your baby cries, he's probably thinking, 'Please give me some attention.'

Crying is his way of telling you what he thinks and feels because he can't use words yet – it's his natural form of communication in the meantime.

Your baby also uses body language alongside his cries to let you know what's going on inside his head. This includes hand, arm, leg and foot movements, each of which communicates their own meaning.

Understanding his cries

At first, all his cries sound the same to you, but you steadily get to know what your baby is thinking and feeling when he does it. Here are some common ones.

'I don't feel good'

Crying is an instinctive reaction to pain or physical discomfort, and is a

reflex reaction that's present at birth. The pain could be internal, triggered by illness, or external, such as being in an awkward position or having something digging into him, which makes him feel uncomfortable. **HOW YOU CAN TELL:** If he's in pain, his cry is sharp, almost like a shriek. Then he gasps as he draws in breath, before shrieking again. And if he's ill, his limb movements are lethargic.

'I want you to keep me company'

Your baby likes being the centre of attention. He enjoys the feeling of being surrounded by a sea of loving faces, and he misses that stimulation when everyone else is busy doing other things. He quickly figures out that, if he cries, you'll rush over to him. **HOW YOU CAN TELL:** When he feels a bit lonely and sorry for himself because he can't see you, his cry is pitiful rather than loud. It actually sounds as if he's sad, not angry or in pain.

'I want to be fed'

When your baby thinks he's hungry, there's no better way for him to let you know this than by crying loudly. Right from birth he realises that his crying and your response with food are closely connected. Within a matter of hours of being born he links the two events in his mind. **HOW YOU CAN TELL:** The cry that stems from hunger usually follows a repetitive sequence in which he cries urgently, pauses to catch his breath, cries urgently again, then pauses for breath.

'I'm bored'

Like you, your baby is always seeking stimulation – that's how he learns about the world around him. At this young age, however, he's easily bored. Concentration is limited and he prefers change. So he cries to get your attention. **HOW YOU CAN TELL:** It's more of a shout than a tearful scream. He keeps shouting until you amuse him.

'I'm tired'

Sometimes your baby cries simply because he's tired and would like to

sleep. The problem is, he prefers to stay awake, so he fights sleep at every opportunity. He thinks you'll be able to help him, using a technique he finds soothing. **HOW YOU CAN TELL:** Your baby whines irritably, perhaps falling asleep for a few seconds, then waking up with a start. He'll also rub his eyes or pull at his ears.

The crying game...

How to handle the tears

1 Check it out The best way to verify if you're interpreting your baby's cries right is to take action to settle him – if you're wrong, he'll carry on crying.

2 Have patience Give yourself time to get to know why your baby is upset; it takes experience to learn how to differentiate between his various cries.

3 Comforting attention Whatever he thinks when he cries, your baby will love a cuddle from you as you try to soothe him.

4 Don't blame yourself Remind yourself that your baby's cries are his normal way of communicating; you haven't done anything wrong. **PP**

Try not to get too anxious or your baby will pick up on this and cry more