

Your baby's emotions are a window into his heart and mind. What he thinks and wants are expressed through them. The only way your new baby can communicate with you is by his emotions. Learning to understand them will help you to be a better parent.

His emotions allow you to respond to his needs. When he cries, you will either feed or change him. Or you may want to hold him close to you. When he is happy, you will talk to him, play with him or carry him around with you.

It's amazing that he can talk to you with his emotions. Your responses soothe and draw him closer to you. You will soon understand your baby's needs by how he behaves. What a relief to know that your new baby is born with the ability to communicate with you!

Emotions, Emotions, Emotions!

We used to believe that early experiences did not affect babies. We now know otherwise.

Your baby's brain begins to develop less than three weeks after conception. The neural tube, which looks like a fat earthworm, forms and stretches out along his entire back. This eventually forms into the brain and spinal cord. The first synapses begin to form by around the fifth week after conception. They allow the brain to talk to the body. By the sixth week, fetal movement begins. The brain continues to mature for a lifetime.

Your baby's brain is responsible for everything he does. It allows him to communicate with you through his emotions. His emotions are his only way to tell you what he needs and wants. His emotions help you to respond to him with the love, comfort and attention he needs.

Look deeply into his precious face. He may smile, yawn, cry or make a funny face. He is responding to things around him, and he is stirring you to meet his needs. We used to think that a baby's smile was due to "gas." But, we now know that an infant's smile is from the joy or satisfaction he feels. Soon, you will be able to tell the difference between a happy cry and a hungry cry.

Your baby expresses his uniqueness with his emotions. From birth, he has his own likes and dislikes. These will continue to develop and change as he grows. During the first six months, he can show distress by crying, joy by smiling, interest by watching, and distaste by frowning. In the next six months, he may be able to show anger, fear and sadness. After his second year, he may be able to show pride, possessiveness, affection, curiosity, and anxiety. After three, he can express shame, envy and embarrassment. Isn't it amazing that he can help you to meet his needs when he is only a few days old?

Reading Face, Hands and Emotions:

Watch your new baby carefully to learn about his many amazing ways of communicating with you. He may use "signals" to gesture his needs. He might move his lips or root when he is hungry. Or he might yawn or rub his eyes when he is tired.

He will have "emotions," which are his feelings (like happiness or anger). He will use "emotional expressions" to show his feelings. It has been proven that adults and babies have six common expressions. They are fear, sadness, joy, disgust, anger and surprise. After a while, you will learn to read his expressions and understand him like a pro!

Reading His Signals:

Your baby's expressions can tell you a lot about what he is thinking. This behavior can vary depending on whether he is actively or quietly asleep or awake. Babies have various stages of sleep. These patterns begin forming during the last months of pregnancy. Babies alternate between active or quiet sleep and then awaken as they pass from deep to light sleep. Most newborns sleep about nine hours during the daytime and about eight hours at night.

Once he is awake, your baby will move among three levels of activity and emotional expression. When he first awakens, he will be in a quiet alert phase. He will lie very still, watching and observing everything. He will respond to movements and sounds and even look deeply into your eyes. This is a great time to talk softly to him. He may try to imitate your expressions and play with you. His breathing will be regular, and he will appear very relaxed and content. This is a wonderful and satisfying time for you to play with and enjoy your baby.

He will next move into the active alert phase where he will still be interested in sights and sounds, but he will move his arms and legs actively and crane his neck to look around. The third phase is crying, which is your baby's most effective way of talking to you! He may be hungry, and it is always best to try to calm him by feeding him. In newborns, crying is usually a late sign of hunger. He may also be uncomfortable with a dirty diaper or over-stimulated by too much activity.

He will let you know when he is sleepy by rubbing his eyes, yawning, looking away or fussing. During this drowsy phase, you can rock or feed him until he becomes very sleepy if he has a hard time going to sleep on his own.

From the moment your baby is born, you can begin a lifetime of love and affection. This bonding is precious. Just look for the signals!

What if My Baby Cries a Lot?

A crying baby can be so stressful. Most babies can be comforted by being fed, changed or just snuggled. However, some babies cry excessively for no apparent reason and are difficult to calm or comfort.

If you have eliminated all the other possibilities and still cannot comfort your baby, he may have colic. He may scream as if in pain, get red in the face and sometimes pull his knees up to his stomach. It can last for several hours. It occurs mostly in the evening.

Colic has three distinct characteristics: **timing**, **intensity** and **unpredictability**. It is the most common reason that parents call their pediatricians for help.

- **Timing:** The unrelenting crying usually only occurs within the first three months and ends by four months.
- **Intensity:** The crying can last for several hours, and he may not respond to any soothing or comforting. This can be very frightening to a tired mom or dad.
- **Unpredictability:** Your baby may start crying for no apparent reason.

There are a few things you can do to help a colicky baby. Hold him as much as possible. Your body contact is very soothing to your baby. Put him on a routine that he can grow used to. Bathing him in the evening will signal to him that bedtime is near. Put him to bed the same time each night. Massage can be very comforting and help work out gas pains. If you cannot comfort your baby, and the crying goes on, then always call your doctor.

This is a time that you need to take good care of yourself, too. Getting plenty of sleep will help you to cope better with a fussy baby. Make sure that you are eating healthy. Call on a friend or family member to give you a much-needed break. Do something special for yourself.

Using His Head

As we said earlier, your baby's brain continues to grow. Your baby's brain grows in very special ways from birth to around three years of age. Depending on the part of the brain that is growing, he will learn different things. Most importantly, your love and care affect this growth.

The more you interact with him, comfort and meet his needs, the better he grows and develops. This interaction triggers electrical pathways in his brain. As he grows, the unused pathways fade away, and the ones most used strengthen.

Summary

Your baby is born with the ability to communicate with you and develop and grow. Your interaction with him helps him to do this. His emotional responses are his way of letting you know what he needs. His temperament is his way of responding to things. While some babies become over stimulated and cry excessively, most babies can be comforted by mom or dad's loving touch.

Watch your baby and learn to read the signals he gives you. There is nothing more wonderful than meeting your baby's needs and loving and caring for him. The bond that you develop will last forever!

References:

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