



Baby Behavior & Cues Tip Sheet



Your baby has his own individual personality and preferences. Getting to know his likes and dislikes will take time, just as it takes time for us to get to know any new person we meet. The amazing thing is that babies come with a unique set of communication abilities and behavior cues. Even at birth your baby will seek out ways to speak with you to make sure his needs are met. Some signals will be clear, such as a piercing cry if he are hurt or uncomfortable. Some cues will be subtle and difficult to interpret. A smile will indicate their pleasure but a furrowed brow can be a signal that your baby is becoming overwhelmed. Your child's body language can be a key into unlocking when he is ready to engage with you and also show you when he feels that it's time to take a break.

This tip sheet reviews some of the cues your baby might display to indicate certain needs they have.

Not all cries are hunger cries. Your baby will actually signal early and late hunger cues. It's best to feed your baby when he shows early signals. Waiting too long could cause your baby to get frustrated and have a difficult time feeding.

"I'm Hungry" Cues:

Early Hunger Cues – Rooting, licking lips, opening and closing mouth, sucking on hands, fingers, clothes or anything close to their mouths.

"I'm ready to feed now!" Hunger Cues – Fidgeting or very squirmy, pushing back when caregiver holds in attempt to get into a feeding position, rooting around on caregiver's chest, fussy

Late Hunger Cue – Frantically moving head from side to side, extreme fussiness, irritability, crying*

*Crying is a late sign of hunger

The best time to interact with your baby is when they are in a quiet and calm "alert" state.



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"I'm ready to play or interact" cues:

Alert

Bright Eyes – intently focused on face or object

Smiles, coos, happy expressions

Comfortable body language

Baby looks and listens carefully

Sometimes your baby will give signals that he is ready for something different (maybe a diaper change, different position or change of activity). He will transition through an Active Alert state when this happens.

"I need a change of scenery or time out" cues:

Hiccups

Arched back

Fussing

Looking away

Crying can be a cue that your baby has reached their limit. Sometimes it is a result of a parent or caregiver missing earlier signals from the baby (such as waiting too long to feed them) or an indication that they are overtired, overstimulated or experiencing some pain or discomfort.

"I've had it!" cues:

Eyes shut

Tears

Jerky Movements

Color Changes

Muscle Tension

Restless, fidgety body language

Crying

Just before your baby transitions into a sleep state, he will become drowsy. If it has been awhile since he has napped, then this would be a good time to put him down to sleep. If he has been asleep and exhibits these cues, you can give him a few minutes to see if they transition back to sleep before picking him up.



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"I'm getting sleepy" and "Drowsy" cues:

Decreased Activity
Slower Motions
Less Vocal
Sucking becomes weak or slow
Quieter
Calmer
Disinterested in Surroundings
Eyes less Focused
Drooping Eyelids
Yawning

*Crying can be a sign that your baby has become overtired

For more information about Baby Behavior & Cues, please visit our Development section in the library.



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