

# Understanding Your Baby



## Why is my baby upset? What can I do to help?

All babies cry. They fuss and have meltdowns, often for what seems like no reason. It can be confusing and parents get a lot of advice about what to do.

Before deciding what to do, it can be easier to understand a bit more about the baby's world. If your baby could talk, you might hear something like this:

*My brain and my nervous system are as new as my body. Getting upset is just part of my life. I don't like it, and I can't manage it on my own. I need your help.*

The younger the baby, the more he or she will need your help to get some emotional balance back. Just like with walking or talking, babies all grow and develop at their own rate, so some babies have greater needs than others.



## All babies are different.

Some are naturally calmer and easier to please. Others are more highly strung. Some are like their parents, others are quite different. Let's listen to your baby again:

*I'm my own unique person, but I'm not quite sure what that means yet. I can't talk in words but I'm always trying to tell you something. I like it when you watch and listen to me and try to decode my needs. I like it when you try and learn about who I am. Then I learn about you and I learn to be me.*

Babies need us to 'tune in' not turn away. They don't need us to be experts, only parents who are good enough. Good enough means each day you do your best to understand your baby's needs and respond to them. You don't always get it right and you don't always succeed. But with each attempt, you learn more about who your baby is, what he or she can do and what he or she is not yet ready to manage. This is important. It's not about perfection. It's about you and your baby getting to know each other. When you have a warm, positive relationship you can both handle the ups and downs.

*When I am unwell or when I have had a busy time or a lot of changes, I may find it especially hard to settle myself down again. I will need you to be with me while I do this. Sometimes, this might take a little while.*



---

**“It's intuitive to want to calm your baby; it's not intuitive to know how. That's a skill.”**

**Harvey Karp**

---



Once you and your baby begin to learn more about each other, you will find what works and what doesn't to help your baby feel calm and secure. Over time, you'll begin to see what kind of personality your baby has as well. It might surprise you. That's OK. We can grow close connections to our children no matter what they are like, no matter what surprises and challenges they come with and no matter how different they are from us.

Before you can calm your baby, there is a step that is almost always essential. You must first calm yourself. Calming yourself isn't always easy. At the end of a long day or a sleepless night, it can be quite a challenge. Just as you're getting to know what soothes your baby, remember what soothes you. Sometimes it's the same thing!

**Babies like music, singing, water and touch.**

Thankfully, music, singing, water and touch are things that settle adults too. Put on your

---

**“The first task is to create space in the child's heart for the certainty that she is precisely the person the parents want and love.”**

**Gordon Neufeld**

---

favourite song and rock in your chair with baby or dance around the house. If getting outside calms you, get out for a walk. Focus on small goals - things like relaxing your breathing, unclenching your jaw and taking 3 deep breaths. You will find things that work for you both.

Remember, getting upset is part of life. And for babies, it can be a big part of life. Trust that your baby's needs are real and that there is meaning in what's being communicated. Trust yourself to learn this new language; with each age and stage will come new joys and new challenges.

**As you respond to your child you will gain both confidence and connection.**

Don't be afraid to reach out for help, but don't forget no book, website or person knows your baby like you do.



© 2015 Dr Lauren Porter and Dr Patricia Champion,



The Champion Cen

**IMHAANZ**  **WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR  
INFANT MENTAL HEALTH**  
INFANT MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND