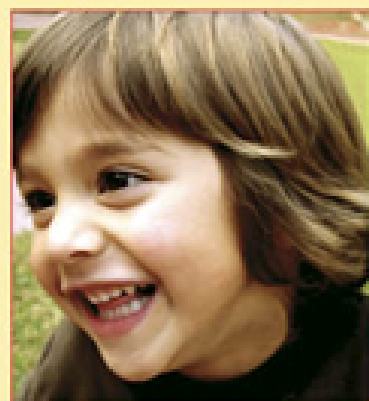




The  
Happiest  
Baby  
on the Block

HARVEY KARP, M.D.

The  
Happiest  
Toddler  
on the Block



Harvey Karp, M.D.

*The Happiest Baby on the Block*

*and*

*The Happiest Toddler on the Block*



Bantam Books

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*The Happiest Baby on the Block*

*The Happiest Toddler on the Block*



## Professionals Praise Dr. Karp

“This beautifully written volume meets a tremendous need for a scientifically sound and effective parent guide to the care of persistently crying babies. Dr. Karp has written the best book that I’ve read on this challenging topic.”

—Morris Green, M.D., Perry W. Lesh Professor of Pediatrics, Indiana University School of Medicine

“What a marvelous book! Parents for years to come will be grateful to Dr. Karp for this lucid and entertaining explanation of why babies cry and how to help them.”

—Martin Stein, M.D., Professor of Pediatrics, University of California, San Diego Medical School, co-author of *Encounters with Children: Pediatric Behavior and Development*

“*The Happiest Baby on the Block* is a witty and masterful book bursting with wisdom from start to finish. It contains some of the best and most original ideas about new babies I have ever seen. Dr. Karp entertains as he teaches, providing wonderful and innovative suggestions in a family-friendly way.”

—James McKenna, Ph.D., Chairman, Department of Anthropology, University of Notre Dame, and Director, Mother-Baby Behavioral Sleep Laboratory

“Harvey Karp is the type of pediatrician that every parent would want. His experience is beyond compare and his ability to relate to parents is impressive. *The Happiest Baby on the Block* has the perfect solutions for helping parents grow and thrive ... along with their babies.”

—Sandra Apgar Steffes, R.N., M.S., member, Board of Directors, Lamaze International

“The ‘Karp Wrap’ is a very powerful tool that can stop a baby’s cries instantly! The mother’s helpers I train say it

calms babies faster than anything else.”

—Lynn Sullivan, R.N., Director, Newborn Nursing  
Services, SM-UCLA Hospital

“Dr. Karp offers doctors, therapists, and teachers  
practical new skills and a wonderfully clear approach to  
helping parents of fussy babies.”

—Carol Blake, M.D., Director, Early Childhood Center,  
Cedar-Sinai Medical Center

“Parenting can and should be fun. This book is a great  
blend of sound science and years of experience. It is a  
toolkit for making happy babies and happy parents.”

—Lewis Leavitt, M.D., Medical Director of the Waisman  
Center on Human Development, Professor of Pediatrics,  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

“The 5 ‘S’s’ are so effective they should be taught to  
everyone with young babies!”

—Elizabeth Pantley, author of *The No-Cry Sleep Solution*

## Celebrities Praise Dr. Karp

“A must read! Dr. Karp offers insights into parenting by combining ancient and modern wisdom. Our baby boy responded to the 5 ‘S’s’ immediately!”

—Keely and Pierce Brosnan, TV  
journalist/environmentalist and actor

“I wish I had known Dr. Karp for my first two children. With the soothing, loving tips in this book, caring for my two most recent babies has been a dream.”

—Hunter Tylo, actress/founder of Hunter’s Chosen Child

“Harvey Karp would make my Big Mama proud! He is leading us back to age-old basics, back to motherwit.”

—Alfre Woodard, actress

“There is nothing quite like watching Dr. Harvey work wonders on a screaming baby. He’s not a pediatrician, he’s a magician. Every time I bring my kids in to see him, I walk out wishing he was their father.”

—Larry David, star of *Larry David: Curb Your Enthusiasm*  
and co-creator of *Seinfeld*

“Harvey Karp’s enlightened and creative approach has been a benefit not only to our children, but to my wife and me as parents.”

—Kristen and Lindsey Buckingham, photographer and  
singer/songwriter, Fleetwood Mac

“Dr. Karp was exactly the doctor to see us through new parenthood. He has the magic touch—not just with babies, but with new parents, too.”

—Robin Swicord and Nicholas Kazan, screenwriters of  
*Matilda*, *Practical Magic*, and *Reversal of Fortune*

“Dr. Karp is simply the best. Anytime our kids have a problem, he guides us with warmth, wisdom, and humor. And that helps *us* sleep better at night.”

—Janet and Jerry Zucker, director of *Airplane*, *Ghost*,  
and *Rat Race*

## Parents Praise Dr. Karp

“I’ll give you \$100 if you teach me what you just did to calm my baby.”

—Denise, Michael, Jacqueline, and Olivia

“Curtis’ crying was loud and piercing. The only thing I have found to calm him were those ‘tricks’ you teach in your office.”

—Carol, Don, Curtis, and Carter

“Our daughter cried terribly. Exhausted, I went to see Dr. Karp. After using his technique, we became believers. Incredibly, it always works for us.”

—Alise, Will, and Cameron

“We owe you our second born for teaching us ‘The Karp.’ It’s a miracle cure for colic!”

—Ana, Jeff, and Alexander

“We call it the ‘Harvey Shuffle.’ The first time I saw it I was astounded. In seconds, Ben stopped crying and my jaw was on the floor!”

—Christina, Jonah, and Ben

“My wife and I bought no less than ten baby books. But the things you showed us were not in the books.”

—Martin, Ann, and Madison

“Swaddling Theo made a huge difference. Now he is sleeping five to six hours straight at night. It even stopped his spitting up at night. We owe you.”

—Lisa, Evan, and Theo

“Dr. Karp’s method was a lifesaver. With a simple 1, 2, 3—swaddle, shhhh, swing—our baby fell asleep and we received a round of applause.”

—Laurel, Atilio, Raffaella, and Rocco

“Colic hit us like a freight train. I called Dr. Karp and within two weeks, Emma was sleeping eight to ten hours a night. Dr. Karp changed our lives!”

—Jody, Sam, and Emma

# The Happiest Baby on the Block



The New Way to Calm Crying and  
Help Your Newborn Baby  
Sleep Longer

Harvey Karp, M.D.



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THE HAPPIEST BABY ON THE BLOCK

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*Dedication*

*Acknowledgments*

This book contains advice and information relating to the care of infants. It is not intended to substitute for medical advice and should be used to supplement rather than replace the regular advice and care of your child's pediatrician. Since every child is different, you should consult your child's pediatrician on questions specific to your child.



## Introduction

### How I Rediscovered the Ancient Secrets for Calming Crying Babies

I certainly didn't realize how easy it was to calm crying babies when I began my pediatric studies in the early 1970s. During my medical-school training at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, my professors taught me that babies scream due to gas pains, so there were two valid approaches for soothing colic. First, try Grandmother's advice of holding, rocking, and pacifiers. If that failed, try medicine: *sedatives* (to push a baby into sleep), *anti-spasm medicines* (to treat stomach cramps), or *anti-gas drops* (to help get out burps).

By the late 1970s, however, these three medical approaches were called into question. Sedating babies was considered inappropriate. Doctors stopped using anti-spasm medicines after several babies treated with them lapsed into comas and died. And anti-gas drops lost their appeal when research proved them to be no more effective than water.

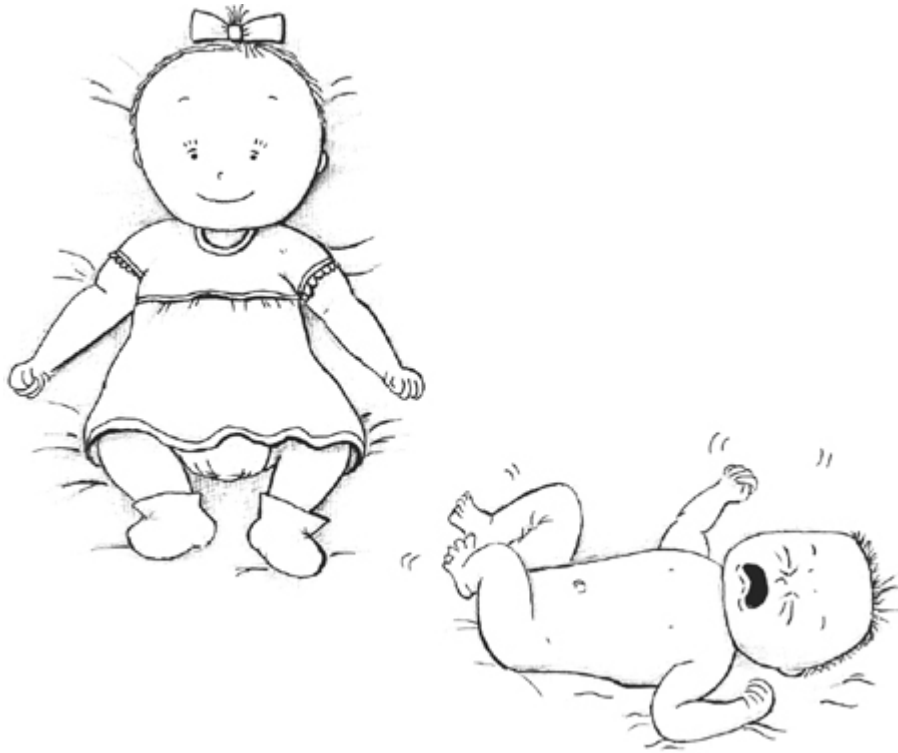
Although my medical education was excellent, I felt helpless when it came to caring for colicky newborns. As a resident, I worked for three years at Childrens Hospital of Los Angeles, one of the world's busiest pediatric hospitals. I was fully trained as a "baby doctor," yet I still couldn't help distraught parents soothe their babies' screams. In 1980, as a Fellow in Child Development at the UCLA School of Medicine, my frustration turned into

shock and alarm. As a member of the UCLA Child Abuse Team, I treated several severely injured babies whose parents had committed horrible acts of abuse after being unable to calm their infants' persistent screaming.

I became outraged that our sophisticated medical system didn't have a single effective solution for babies with this common yet terribly disturbing problem. During the two years of my fellowship, I read everything I could about colic. I was determined to unearth every clue to explain why so many children were plagued by this mysterious condition.

I soon uncovered two facts that turned my alarm into hope.

First, I learned about the profound differences between the brain of a three-month-old baby and that of a newborn. A brilliant paper published in 1977 by one of America's preeminent pediatricians, Dr. Arthur H. Parmelee, Jr., described how sophisticated and complex the brains of babies become over the first months of life. He illustrated this point by showing pictures of two babies: a fussing newborn and a smiling three-month-old (shown below). Dr. Parmelee observed that most parents-to-be dreamed of giving birth to a smiling baby like the one on the left, while in reality they ended up with a fussy "fetus-like" newborn like the one seen on the right, at least for the first few months.



These pictures powerfully demonstrated the massive developmental leap babies make during the first three months of life as well as the huge gap between how parents in our society expect new babies to look and act and their true behavior and nature.

My second pivotal discovery came when I read about child-rearing in other societies. As I explored the musty shelves of old books and journals stored at the UCLA Medical Library, I was shocked to learn that the colicky screaming that afflicted so many of my patients was *absent* in the babies of several cultures around the world!

The more I investigated this issue, the more it dawned on me that our culture, advanced in so many ways, was quite backward when it came to understanding the needs of babies. Somehow, somewhere, we had taken a wrong turn. Once I realized our ideas about babies' crying had been built upon centuries of myth and misconception, the solution to the prehistoric puzzle of why babies cry and how to soothe them suddenly

became crystal clear. Our babies are born three months too soon.

I invite you to learn how your baby experiences the world, as well as my program of extremely effective techniques used to calm thousands of my patients over the last twenty years. These techniques may seem a little odd at first, but once you get the hang of them you'll see how wonderfully simple they are. Parents around the world have successfully used these methods to soothe their babies for thousands of years ... and soon, you will, too!

*—Harvey Karp*

# PART ONE



Look Who's Squawking:  
Why Babies Cry—  
And Why Some Cry  
So Much



1



At Last There's Hope:  
An Easy Way  
to Calm Crying Babies

### **Main Points:**

- All babies cry, but most new parents have little experience soothing them
- The Basic Problem: In many ways, babies are born three months too soon
- The Calming Reflex: Nature's *Off* switch for a baby's crying
- The 5 "S's": How to turn on your baby's calming reflex
- The Cuddle Cure: Combining the 5 "S's" to help any fussy baby



***Suzanne was worried and exhausted. Her two-month-old baby, Sean, was a nonstop screamer. He could cry for hours. One afternoon her sister came to watch the baby, and Suzanne bolted to the bathroom for a hot shower and a quick "escape."***

*Forty-five minutes later she awoke, curled up in a ball on the blue tile floor, being sprayed with ice-cold water!*

*Meanwhile, half a world away in the rugged Kalahari plains of northern Botswana, Nisa gave birth to a tiny girl named Chuko. Chuko was thin and delicate but despite her dainty size, she, too, was a challenging baby who cried frequently.*

*Nisa carried Chuko in a leather sling everywhere she went. Unlike Suzanne, she never worried when Chuko cried, because like all mothers of the !Kung San tribe, she knew exactly how to calm her baby's crying—in seconds.*

---

Why did Suzanne have such trouble soothing Sean's screams?

What ancient secrets did Nisa know that helped her calm her baby so easily?

As you are about to learn, the answers to these two questions will change the way you think about babies forever! They will show you the world through your baby's eyes and, most important, they will teach you how to calm your baby's cries in minutes and help prolong her sleep.

## **Your Baby Is Born**

*When perfectly dry, his flesh sweet and pure, he is the most kissable object in nature.*

Marion Harland, *Common Sense in the Nursery*,  
1886

Congratulations! You've done a great job already! You've nurtured your baby from the moment of conception to your baby's "birth" day. Having a baby is a wonderful—and wonder-full—experience that makes you laugh, cry, and stare in amazement ... all at the same time.

Your top job as a new parent is to love your baby like crazy. After showering her with affection, your next two important jobs are to feed her and to calm her when she cries.

I can tell you from my twenty-five years as a pediatrician, parents who succeed at these two tasks feel proud, confident, on top of the world! They have the happiest babies and they feel like the best parents on the block. However, mothers and fathers who struggle with these tasks often end up feeling distraught.

Fortunately, feeding a baby is *usually* pretty straightforward. Most newborns take to sucking like they have a Ph.D. in chowing-down! Soothing a crying baby, on the other hand, can be unexpectedly challenging.

No couple expects their sweet newborn to be "difficult." Who really listens to horror stories friends and family share? We assume *our* child will be an "easy" baby. That's why so many new parents are shocked to discover how tough calming their baby's cries can be.



Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying crying is bad. In fact, it's brilliant! Leave it to nature to find such an effective way for helpless babies to get our attention. And once your baby has your attention, you probably zip down a checklist of questions and solutions:

- Is she hungry? Feed her.
- Is she wet? Change her diaper.
- Is she lonely? Pick her up.
- Is she gassy? Burp her.
- Is she cold? Bundle her up.

The trouble comes when *nothing* works.

Estimates are that one out of every five babies has repeated bouts of terrible fussiness—for *no apparent reason*. That adds up to almost one million sweet new babies born in the U.S. each year who suffer from hours of red-faced, eyes-clenched screaming.

This is why parents of unhappy babies are such heroes! A baby's scream is an incredibly heart-wrenching sound. Bone-tired and bewildered moms and dads lovingly cuddle their frantic babies for hours, trying to calm them, yet the continued crying can

corrode their confidence: “Is my baby in pain?” “Am I spoiling her?” “Does she feel abandoned?” “Am I a terrible mother?”

Confronted by this barrage, sometimes the most loving parent may find herself pushed into frustration and depression. A baby’s unrelenting shrieks can even drive desperate caregivers over the edge—into the tragedy of child abuse.

Exhausted parents are often told they must wait for their babies to “grow out of it.” Yet most of us feel that can’t be right. There must be some way to help our babies.

I’m going to show you how.

### **Help Wanted: Who Do New Parents Turn to When Their Baby Cries a Lot?**

Although a network of clinics and specialists exists to help mothers solve their infant’s feeding problems, there is little support for the parents of screaming babies. That’s unfortunate because while the urge to quiet a baby is instinctual, the ability to do it is a skill that must be learned.

Today’s parents have less experience caring for babies than any previous generation. (Amazingly, our culture requires more training to get a driver’s license than to have a baby.)

That’s not to say that inexperienced moms and dads are abandoned. On the contrary, they’re bombarded with suggestions. In my experience, America’s favorite pastime is not baseball but giving unasked-for advice to new parents. “It’s boredom.” “It’s the heat.” “Put a hat on him.” Or “It’s gas.”

It can be so confusing! Who should you believe?

In frustration and concern, parents often turn to their doctor for help. Studies show that one in six couples visit a doctor because of their baby's persistent crying. When these babies are examined and found to be healthy, most doctors have little to offer but sympathy. "I know it's hard, but be patient; it won't last forever." Advice like this often sends worried parents to look for help in baby books.

Parents of colicky babies spend hours scanning books for "the answer" to their infant's distress. Yet, often the advice can be equally confusing: "Hold your baby—but be careful not to spoil him." "Love your baby—but let him cry himself to sleep."

Even these experts confess that for *really* fussy babies, they have nothing to offer:

***Very often, you may not even be able to quiet the screaming.***

*What to Expect the First Year*, Eisenberg,  
Murkoff, and Hathaway

***The whole episode goes on at least an hour and perhaps for three or four hours.***

*Your Baby and Child*, Penelope Leach

***It's completely all right to set the baby in the bassinet while trying to drown out the noise with the running water of a hot shower.***

*The Girlfriend's Guide to Surviving the First Year of Motherhood*, Vicki Iovine

But a hot shower is cold comfort for the parents of a screaming baby.

Many exhausted parents I meet have been persuaded, against their better judgment, that they can only stand by and endure their baby's screaming. But I tell them otherwise. Unhappy babies *can* be calmed—in minutes!

## The Four Principles of Soothing Babies

In many ways, the people living in primitive cultures are backward compared to Western societies. However, in some areas their wisdom is great ... and we are the “primitive” ones. This is particularly true when it comes to soothing crying newborns.

I teased out shreds of wisdom from the past and wove them with cutting-edge modern research and some unique observations made during my years of caring for more than five thousand infants. From this, I distilled four principles that are crucial for anyone who wants to understand babies better and be skillful at comforting them and improving their sleep:

- The Missing Fourth Trimester
- The Calming Reflex
- The 5 “S’s”
- The Cuddle Cure

### **The Missing Fourth Trimester—Many Babies Cry Because They’re Born Three Months Too Soon!**

Did you ever see a baby horse or a baby cow? These newborn animals can walk, even run, on their very first day of life. In fact, they must be able to run—their survival depends upon it.

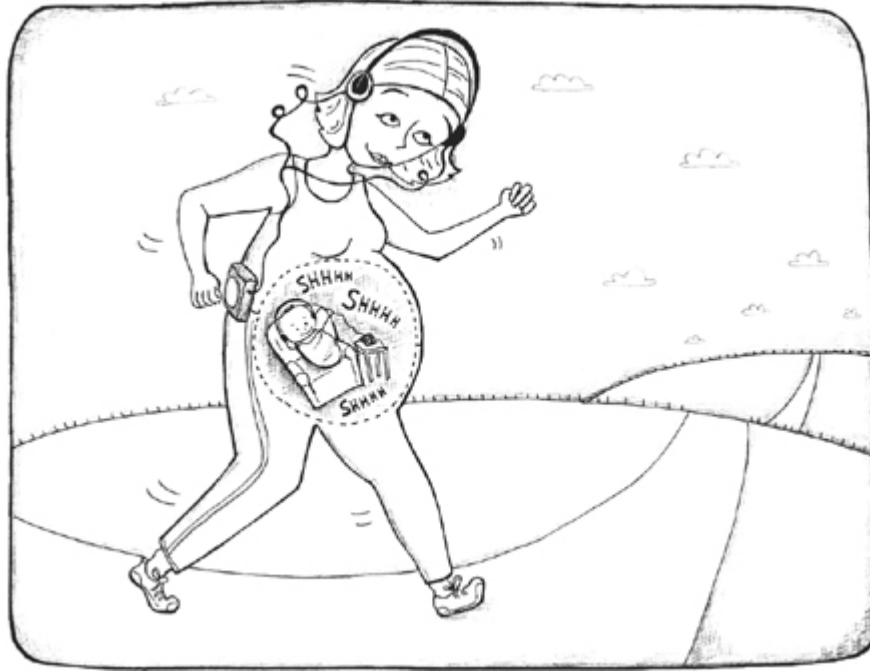
By comparison, our newborns are quite immature. They can’t run, walk, or even roll over. One British mum told me her new daughter seemed so unready for the world she and her husband affectionately nicknamed her “The Little Creature.” They’re not alone in seeing babies that way; the Spanish use the word *criatura*, meaning *creature*, to describe babies.

In many ways your new baby is more a fetus than an infant, spending most of her time sleeping and being fed. Had you delayed your delivery just three more months, your baby would have been born with the ability to smile, coo, and flirt. (Who wouldn't want *that* on their baby's first day of life!) However, I've never been able to talk a woman into keeping her infant inside for a fourth trimester ... and for good reason. It's already a tight squeeze getting a baby's head out after nine months of pregnancy; by twelve months it would be impossible.

Why are our babies so immature at birth? The reason is simple. Unlike baby horses whose survival depends on their big strong bodies, a human baby's survival depends on big smart brains. In fact, our babies' brains are so huge we have to "evict" fetuses from the womb well before they're fully ready for the world to keep their heads from getting stuck in the birth canal.

Newborns have some abilities that demonstrate their readiness to be in the world, but these notwithstanding, for the first three months, our babies are so immature they would really benefit if they could hop back inside whenever they get overwhelmed. However, since we're not kangaroos, the least we can do as loving, compassionate parents is to make our little *criaturas* feel at home by surrounding them with the comforting sensations they enjoyed twenty-four hours a day in the womb. However, in order to give babies a fourth trimester, parents need to answer one important question: What exactly was it like in there?





In your womb, your baby was packed tight into the fetal position enveloped by the warm wall of the uterus and rocked and jiggled for much of the day. She was also surrounded by a constant shushing sound a little louder than a vacuum cleaner!

For thousands of years, parents have known that mimicking conditions in the uterus comforts newborns. That's why almost every traditional baby-calming technique around the world imitates the sensations of the womb. From swaddling to swings to shushing, these methods return babies to a cuddly, rhythmic, womblike world until they are ready to coo, smile, and join the family. As helpful as this fourth-trimester experience is for calm babies, it is *essential* for fussy ones.

Most parents assume that this imitation soothes their baby simply by making her feel “back home.” Actually, these experiences trigger a profound neurological response never before recognized or reported—until today. This ancient and very powerful baby reflex is *the calming reflex*.

## **The Calming Reflex: Nature’s Brilliant “Off Switch” for Your Baby’s Crying**

This automatic reset switch stills a baby’s crying and is truly a baby’s (and parent’s) best friend. Why did nature choose imitating the uterus as the trigger for this blessed reflex? The reason may surprise you: As important as it was for our ancestors to be able to quiet their babies, it was triply important for them to be able to quiet their *fetuses!*

Just imagine what it would feel like if your fetus threw a temper tantrum inside you. Not only could pounding fists and kicking feet make you sore, they could damage the fragile placenta or rip the umbilical cord, causing a fatal hemorrhage. Perhaps even more deadly than the risk of accidental injury was the chance that a squirming baby might get stuck sideways in the uterus and be unable to slide out, thus killing herself and her mother.

I’m convinced that the survival of our fetuses, and perhaps even the survival of our species, depended on this ancient calming reflex. Over millions of years, fetuses who became entranced by the sensations inside the uterus didn’t thrash about and thus were most likely to stay alive. Our babies today are direct descendants of those “Zen” fetuses who were so easily pacified by the womb.

### **The 5 “S’s”: Five Steps to Turn On Your Baby’s Calming Reflex**

How is a vacuum cleaner like a lullaby? How is a Volvo like a flannel blanket? They all help switch on your baby’s calming reflex by imitating some quality of your womb.

Although our ancient ancestors intuitively understood how to turn off their baby's crying and turn on their baby's calming, recognition of the calming reflex itself remained completely overlooked until I identified it during the mid-1990s while studying the characteristics of hundreds of crying babies in my practice.

I was struck by the fact that many traditional baby-calming methods failed to work unless they were done *exactly right*. I realized that, similar to a doctor setting off a knee reflex with a precise whack of a little hammer, the calming reflex could only be triggered by certain very specific actions. When presented correctly, however, the sounds and feelings of the womb had such a powerful effect that they could carry an infant from tears to tranquillity, sometimes even in mid-cry.

Parents and grandparents traditionally have used five different characteristics of the womb to soothe their babies. I refer to these time-honored "ingredients" of calm as the 5 "S's":

1. Swaddling—tight wrapping
2. Side/Stomach—laying a baby on her side or stomach
3. Shushing—loud white noise
4. Swinging—rhythmic, jiggly motion
5. Sucking—sucking on anything from your nipple or finger to a pacifier

These five methods are extremely effective but only when performed *exactly right*. When done without the right technique and vigor, they do nothing. (Detailed descriptions of how to perform each "S" are in [Chapters 8 through 12.](#))

## **The Cuddle Cure: Combining the 5 "S's" into a Perfect Recipe for Your Baby's Bliss**

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to be a terrific parent, but there are some little tricks that can help you do your job better. Most infant-care books list these calming tips, but that's as unhelpful as listing the ingredients of a recipe without giving the instructions for how to combine and cook them.

Each individual "S" may be effective for soothing a mildly fussy baby. Your "easy" baby may only need to suck or to be danced around the room in order to be calmed. However, doing all five together can switch on the calming reflex so irresistibly that they soothe even the most frantic newborns. This layering of one "S" on top of another is so successful at making unhappy babies feel cozy and calm that one of my patients dubbed it "the Cuddle Cure."

If the Cuddle Cure were indeed a cake recipe made from the 5 "S's," I think it would be for a layer cake.

Swaddling is the first step of calming and the first layer in this comfort cake. Next is the Side/Stomach position. These initial "S's" prepare your baby to be calmed. Swaddling sets the stage for success by keeping her from flailing and accidentally overstimulating herself; the side or stomach position also stops the flailing, by taking away your baby's feeling that she's falling and by activating the calming reflex.

The next layer is Shhhh, followed immediately by Swinging. Both activate the calming reflex so your baby pays attention to you and the wonderful cuddling you're giving her. These get her more and more relaxed.

Last, but not least, Sucking is the icing on the cake! It works best after the other layers have calmed your baby down. It, too, triggers the calming reflex and keeps it turned on to make your baby feel deeply and profoundly at peace. (Of course, from your baby's point of view, you aren't making a cake, but she will feel like you have

popped her back inside the “oven” for a little fourth-trimester time!)



## The Cuddle Cure to the Rescue: The Story of Sean

These five principles form the most effective program for soothing agitated infants that has ever been discovered. It works on even the most challenging of babies, like Sean....

Remember Sean? He's the boy whose crying so exhausted his mother that she fell asleep in the shower.

Don and Suzanne had expected that having a new baby might sometimes feel like motoring down a bumpy road, but they never imagined it would feel like driving off a cliff! Sean was a typical colicky baby, and his parents were the typical loving, bewildered, exhausted parents of a colicky child.

Here's how Suzanne described the early days with Sean:



“When I was growing up, my mother often told me what a colicky baby I had been. Shortly after Sean was born, I knew it was payback time. My handsome, dark-haired boy was born a week early but, like a racehorse, he was ‘out of the gate’ at a gallop!

“From almost the second week of his life, Sean had fits of uncontrollable screaming for hours every day. I felt like a terrible mother as I watched him writhe in pain. Nothing worked to settle him, and usually I ended up crying right along with him.

“Equally distressing was my secret fear that Sean’s cries were the result of some injury he suffered at birth. His delivery was very difficult. After one and a half hours of hard pushing, the obstetrician yanked him out with a vacuum suction. My first memory is of Sean’s poor head looking like a black and blue banana.

“For the first month, our pediatrician advised us that Sean’s wailing was just his need to ‘blow off some steam.’ He warned that always responding to our baby could spoil him and accidentally teach him to cry even more! We thought his advice sounded logical, but leaving Sean to shriek made our baby even crazier—plus it was agonizing for us.

“Don and I read every baby book we could find. Day after day, we tried new approaches: swaddling—a failure; pacifier—useless; a change in my diet—futile; a swing—like waving to a jet thirty thousand feet overhead. We even tried a device that imitated a car’s noise and vibration. This, too, was a bust.

“Exhausted and demoralized, we returned to our doctor. He was sympathetic but reiterated that we had no option other than to endure Sean’s shrieking until he outgrew this phase. That afternoon, when Don and I got

home, we agreed that it would be unbearable to wait, both for our suffering baby and for us.

“The next morning was terrible too. At our wit’s end, we took our six-week-old baby to meet a new pediatrician. Dr. Karp asked us many questions, and once he was convinced that Sean’s crying wasn’t the sign of a serious medical condition, he taught us a technique he called the ‘Cuddle Cure.’

“The Cuddle was a very specific mix of tight wrapping, vigorous rocking, and loud shushing. Dr. Karp explained that these sensations mimicked the baby’s life in the womb. He said most babies cry because ‘They’re just not ready to be born. In a way they still need to be in the protected world of the uterus for another three months!’

“To be honest, my skeptical self thought, *This is too simple to be true*. After all, I had attempted wrapping, rocking, and white noise and ended up as squashed as a bug under a fly swatter. But after watching Dr. Karp’s technique I realized I was doing them only halfway.

“Don and I decided to try the Cuddle. As incredible as it sounds, that afternoon was the last time Sean cried uncontrollably! The Cuddle cured Sean’s crying. Whenever he began going berserk, we would do all the steps of the Cuddle, and within minutes his little body would relax and melt into our arms. We finally found the comfort Sean had been begging us for for so many weeks.” 🍼

The Cuddle worked quickly for Suzanne and Don; however, like most techniques, it may take you some practice to get the hang of it. But don’t worry: If you follow the advice in this book, step by step, you should master it within five to ten tries.

Some parents I speak with are hesitant to use the 5 “S’s.” They’ve been warned not to spoil their newborns and they fear that using the 5 “S’s” will accidentally give

their babies bad habits. Is that possible? Can young babies inadvertently be turned into brats who demand constant holding and attention?

Thankfully, the answer to that question is ... *No!* During the first three months of life (the fourth trimester), it's impossible to spoil your baby by letting her suck or stay in your arms for hours. Does that surprise you? It really shouldn't when you remember that you were lavishing her with these sensations twenty-four hours a day—up until the moment of birth. Even if you hold your baby twelve hours a day now, it's a giant reduction from *her* point of view. What you will see is that by three to four months your baby will be increasingly able to calm herself with cooing, moving around, and sucking her hands. Since she will no longer need so much of your help, you will be able to rapidly wean her off the five “S's” at that time.

## Parenting Crying Babies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

I hope you are beginning to get excited that there *are* fast and effective ways of soothing your baby when she gets fussy! My goal is to teach you the tricks that the best parents around the world have used for centuries.

The first part of the book will answer the questions:

- Why do babies cry?
- What is colic and how can you tell if your baby has it?
- Why are gas pains, anxiety, immaturity, and temperament rarely the causes of colic?
- What is the missing fourth trimester and why is it the *true* cause of colic?

The second part of the book will discuss:



- The calming reflex and how to trigger it by imitating the uterus
- The 5 “S’s” and why they must be done vigorously to be effective
- Exact instructions to help you become an expert at swaddling, side/stomach position, shushing, swinging, and sucking
- The Cuddle Cure and how you can work wonders by doing all 5 “S’s” together
- Other techniques that can help you soothe your fussy baby
- Tricks and tips to get your baby to sleep more at night
- Medical problems that can mimic colic

Once you understand your baby’s need for a fourth trimester, the 5 “S’s,” and the Cuddle, you will be able to prevent countless hours of screaming. It is my sincere hope that once this knowledge is shared, *colic* will be found only in dictionaries.

You have been blessed with one of the most amazing experiences a person can ever have—the birth of a baby. It’s an exciting ride, so strap yourself in ... and enjoy. Please don’t worry when your baby cries. Consider it an opportunity to perfect your new parenting skills as you learn how to turn your fussy infant into *the happiest baby on the block!*



### **Main Points:**

- The Crying Reflex: Your baby's brilliant attention-getting tool
- How a baby's crying can make you feel
- Do different baby cries have different meanings? Some babies scream even for little problems

At delivery, your baby's powerful wails are a welcome sign that you've given birth to a healthy child. However, if after the first week or two your infant continues to scream, his crying may become the last thing you want to hear! But we should be grateful for our babies' crying—it's one of their most wonderful abilities.

During the first few months of life, your baby will have no problem getting by without the foggiest idea of how to smile or talk, but he would be in terrible danger if he couldn't call out to you. Getting your attention is so important that your newborn can cry from the

moment his head pops out of you. This great ability is called the “crying reflex.”

## **The Crying Reflex: Nature’s Brilliant Solution for Getting a Cavewoman’s Attention!**

*A baby’s cry ... cries to be turned off.*

Peter Ostwald, *Soundmaking: The Acoustic Communication of Emotion*

My guess is that millions of years ago, a Stone Age baby accidentally was born with a perfect way for getting his mother to come to him—screaming. Even if he yelped just because he had hiccups or had scared himself, his mom appeared in seconds.

Other baby animals also need to get their mother’s attention quickly, but they would never *scream* for it. Loud crying could be fatal for a young rabbit or a monkey, because the sound might reveal his location to a hungry lion. For this reason, kittens meekly meow for help, squirrel monkeys make soft beeping sounds when they fall out of trees, and baby gorillas barely even whimper when they need their moms.

Baby humans, on the other hand, gave up such caution a long time ago. Whenever they needed their cavemom’s attention, they wailed! Perhaps such brash, demanding babies were safe because their parents were able to fight off dangerous animals. Or perhaps a powerful cry was the only sound that could carry far enough for a baby’s mom to hear him while working or chatting with friends outside the cave. Some scientists even believe that successive generations of babies began to shriek louder and louder because such noisy infants received more food and attention to keep them quiet, and thus were more likely to survive.

## Why are babies born with a cry reflex ... but not a laugh reflex?



Wouldn't it be fun if babies were born laughing? Of course it would, but there are two very good reasons why newborns can cry up a storm yet can't giggle.

First, crying is easier than laughing. It takes less coordination, because it's one continuous sound made with each breath. Laughter, on the other hand, is a series of rapid, short sounds strung together like pearls on a single breath.

And while laughter is helpful for social play when your baby is older, crying is crucial for a baby's minute-to-minute survival, from his first day of life.

We may never know exactly when or how ancient human babies began to cry, yet it's clear that the cave babies who survived and passed their genes on to us were those who could "raise a ruckus."

Your baby's shrill cry is powerful enough to yank you out of bed or hoist you off the toilet with your pants down. (Not bad for a ten-pound weakling!) However, it is a mistake to think your baby is crying because he's *trying* to call you for help. During the first few months, trying to get your attention is the furthest thing from your crying baby's mind. In fact, your baby has absolutely no idea he's even sending you a message.

When you hear your two-week-old scream, you're not getting a communication from him; rather you're *accidentally eavesdropping* on his conversation ... with himself. His cries are like agitated complaints he's muttering to himself, "Gosh, I'm hungry," or "Boy, I'm cold." Since you're right next to him, you hear his

grumbles and want to lovingly respond, “What’s the matter, sweetheart? You sound upset.”



In a few months, your baby will begin to figure out that crying makes you come. By four to six months your baby will develop a vocabulary of coos, bleats, and yells to communicate specific needs. This is when you may get the sense that your baby is beginning to make “phony” little shrieks to get you to come. But for now, don’t worry that responding to his cries will teach him bad habits. Training your baby not to be manipulative will become an important lesson during the second six months of his life. For the moment you *want* him to learn that you’ll come whenever he cries. This message of predictable, consistent love and support is *exactly* what will nurture his trust in you.

### How a Baby’s Cry Makes Us Feel

*And, still Caroline cried, and Martha’s nerves vibrated in extraordinary response, as if the child were connected to her flesh by innumerable invisible fibers.*

Doris Lessing, *A Proper Marriage*

Just as your baby is born with certain automatic, built-in reflexes (like crying) you too are equipped with many automatic and irresistible feelings about your baby. Researchers proved years ago that adults are naturally attracted to an infant's face. Your baby's heart-shaped face, upturned nose, big eyes, and full forehead give you the urge to kiss and cuddle him for hours!

You also have special instincts to help you tell whether your infant is babbling or if he needs you urgently. Not only does your brain get the message but your body does too. That's why your baby's screams can really "get under your skin." You feel your nervous system snap into "red alert" as your heart begins to race, your blood pressure soars, your palms sweat, and your stomach tightens like a fist. Studies show that a baby's piercing cry can jolt a parent's nervous system like an electric shock. As you might expect, scientists have also demonstrated that parents experiencing other stresses—such as fatigue, isolation, marital discord, financial stress, hormonal imbalance, problems with family or neighbors, or other serious strains—are especially susceptible to feeling overwhelmed by their baby's cries.

It's not just the *sound* of your baby's cry that makes you want to help him, it's how he looks too. Seeing his little fists punching at the air and his face twist in apparent pain can penetrate your heart like an arrow. Every loving fiber in your body will compel you to comfort your crying baby. This powerful biological impulse is *exactly* why it feels so wrong to wait outside the nursery door and let your baby cry it out.

Not only parents tune in to a baby's cries. Single adults and children, too, find the sound of a baby crying upsetting. But new parents, especially ones without prior infant-care experience, find their baby's crying exceptionally disturbing.

Your baby's cry may even rekindle forgotten emotional trauma from your past. You may suddenly recall memories of prior failures or humiliations, like someone who was unfair to you, or remember people who criticized and attacked you. The crying may make you feel that you are being punished for some past misdeed. For some parents, this sense of helplessness is so intolerable that it makes them turn away from their babies' screams and ignore their needs. (See [Appendix B](#) for more practical advice about how to survive these difficult days.)

Of course, your baby isn't intentionally trying to make you feel guilty or inadequate. During the first few months of life, his cries are *never, never, never* manipulative, mean, rude, or critical. Nevertheless, those feelings may bubble up inside you when your baby screams on and on.

### **“Tell Mommy What’s the Matter”: Your Baby’s Three-Word Vocabulary**

*Our tiny baby’s first word to us wasn’t Mama or Dada. It sounded more like ... well, a smoke alarm! She just blasted! It was scary because we had no idea exactly what she was trying to tell us.*

Marty and Debbie, parents of two-week-old Sarah  
Rose

When you first bring your baby home from the hospital, every fuss can sound like a problem and every cry an urgent alarm. All parents dedicate themselves to meeting their newborn's needs, but when your baby cries, can you tell exactly what he needs? Should you be able to figure out why your baby is upset from the

sound of his cry? Is the “I’m sleepy” cry of a one-month-old different from his “I’m starving” yell?

Some baby books tell parents that with careful observation they can decipher their baby’s message from the way he cries; however, forty years of studies by the world’s leading colic researchers have taught us that’s not really true.

In a 1990 University of Connecticut study, mothers listened to the audiotaped yells of two different babies, a hungry one-month-old and a newborn who was just circumcised. They were asked if the babies were hungry, sleepy, in pain, angry, startled, or wet. Only twenty-five percent correctly identified the cry of the unfed baby as sounding like hunger (forty percent thought it was an overtired cry). Only forty percent of moms identified the cries of the recently circumcised baby as a pain cry (thirty percent thought he was either startled or angry).

You might wonder if these mothers would better understand their babies’ cries if they were more experienced. However, the evidence shows that is not the case either. Researchers in Finland asked eighty experienced baby nurses to listen to the recorded sounds of babies at the moment of birth, when hungry, when in pain, and when gurgling in pleasure. Surprisingly, even these seasoned pros only correctly identified why the baby was crying about fifty percent of the time—barely better than by chance alone.

By three months your baby will learn to make many different noises, making it easier to decipher some messages from the sound of his cry alone. However, at birth, your infant’s compact brain simply doesn’t have enough room for a repertoire of grunts and whines. That’s why during the first few months, most babies only make three simple but distinct sounds: whimpering, crying, and shrieking.



**Whimpering:** This mild fussing sounds more requesting than complaining, like a call from a neighbor asking to borrow some sugar.

**Crying:** This good strong yelp demands your attention, like when your kitchen timer goes off.

**Shrieking:** This last “word” is a piercing, glass-shattering wail, as shrill and unbearable as a burglar alarm.

If asked what each sound signified, you’d probably guess that whimpering means a slight unhappiness like hunger pangs or getting sleepy; crying indicates some greater distress like being very hungry, thirsty, or cold; and shrieking signals pain, fear, anger, or irritation (if earlier cries got no response).

If your baby is an easy, relatively calm child, your guesses are probably correct. As a rule, the more intense and shrill your baby’s cry is—and the quicker it escalates to a shriek—the more likely he’s in pain or needs your help right away.

And by adding a few more visual clues to the sound he’s making, you’ll increase your accuracy. For example:

- Is your baby opening his mouth and rooting? (This could indicate hunger.)
- Is he yawning, rubbing his eyes, moving his head from side to side, or staring out with droopy eyelids? (This could indicate fatigue.)
- Does he seem to be intentionally looking away from you or starting to hiccup? (This could indicate overstimulation.)
- Is he making facial grimaces and trying to bear down? (This could indicate intestinal discomfort.)

In short, when an *easy* baby is a little upset he whimpers, like a puppy whining outside the door. Usually his protests only get louder if his cries are ignored or if he is in great distress.

The needs of *fussy* babies, on the other hand, are often impossible to decipher from the sound of their cries alone. These little ones lack the self-control to proceed patiently through their three-“word” vocabulary, especially when tired or overstimulated. They blow by whimpering and crying, and shift immediately into loud, piercing shrieks that make it impossible to tell whether or not they have an urgent problem. These babies often get so upset by their own screaming that it snowballs and they are crying because they’re crying! The gas or loud noise that started the wailin’ and flailin’ is almost forgotten.

Even when scientists use sophisticated acoustic analyzers to study the cries of fussy babies, they cannot find any differences between their shrieks of hunger, pain, overstimulation, boredom, startling, and even impatience. These intense babies blast out the same one-size-fits-all scream *regardless of what’s bothering them*.

*Pam, the mother of two high-powered little boys, Matthew and Austin, told me when her boys were babies she joked with her husband that their screams were like the blasts of a smoke alarm. She said, “When you hear a smoke alarm go off, it’s impossible to tell from the sound whether it’s signaling a minor problem—burnt toast—or a calamity—your house is burning down. Likewise, with my boys, it was impossible for us to tell from the intensity of their cries if they were very ill or merely announcing a burp.”*



Most of the time, even a baby's most terrible shrieks are merely his way of telling you he's hungry, wet, soiled, or lonely, and he will quiet once you give him what he needs. But what if your baby's yelping persists even though his diaper is dry and you're holding him? What happens if you try *everything* and he still doesn't stop screaming?

That's when parents start to wonder if their baby has COLIC.

3



The Dreaded Colic:  
A “CRYsis” for  
the Whole Family

**Main Points:**

- What is colic?
- The top ten ancient theories about colic
- The Colic Clues: Ten universal facts about colic
- Today’s top five colic theories



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***The sound of a crying baby is just about the most disturbing, demanding, shattering noise we can hear. In the baby’s crying there is no future or past, only now. There is no appeasement, no negotiations possible, no reasonableness.***

Sheila Kitzinger, *The Crying Baby*

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Waaaa ... waaaa ... waaaaaa ... WAAAAAAAAA  
AAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!! The word *infant* derives from Latin  
and means “without a voice.” However, many colicky

babies wail so powerfully that their parents think a better name for them would be *mega-fants* or *rant-fants*!

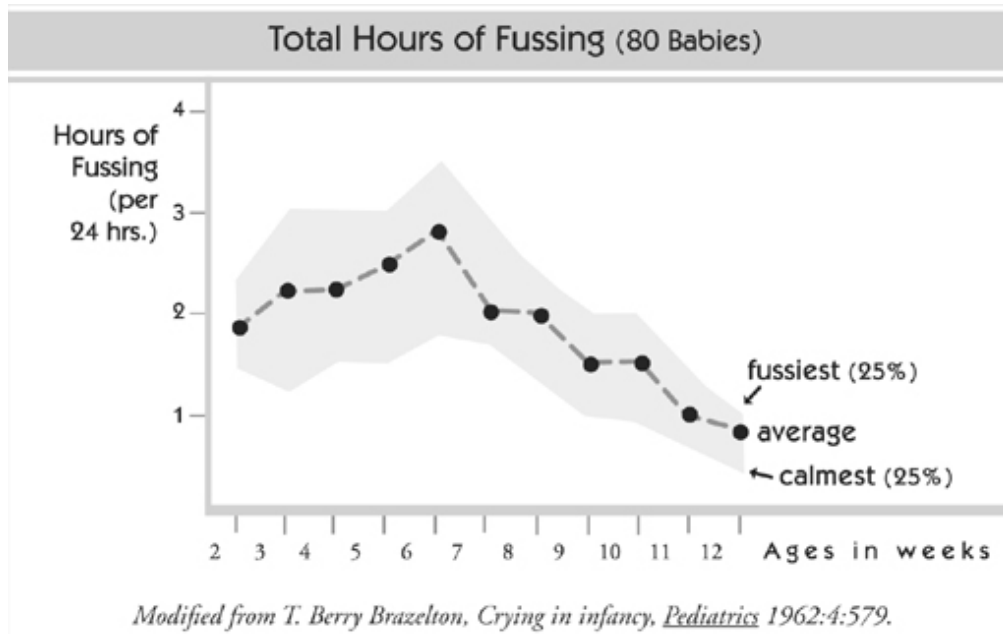
There's no doubt that colicky infants can cry louder and longer than any adult. We would drop from exhaustion after five minutes of full-out screaming, but these little cuties can go and go, with the tenacity of the Energizer bunny.

The word *colic* derives from the Greek word *kolikos*, meaning "large intestine or colon." In ancient Greece, parents believed that intestinal pain caused their babies' crying. (While a gas twinge may start a baby's screaming fit, at other times these very same babies have gas and noisy stomachs yet they don't even make a peep. More on this in [Chapter 4](#).)

All babies have short periods of crying that usually last for a few minutes, totaling about a half hour a day. These babies settle quickly once fed, picked up, or carried. However, once colicky babies start their frantic screaming, they can yell, on and off, for hours.

## How Can You Tell If Your Baby Has Colic?

In 1962, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton asked eighty-two new mothers to record how much their normal, healthy infants cried each day during their first three months of life.



The results of this study are shown in the figure below. When Dr. Brazelton did the math, he discovered that at two weeks of age, twenty-five percent of the babies cried for more than two hours each day. By six weeks, twenty-five percent cried for more than three hours each day. Reassuringly, he found that by three months almost all had recovered from their fussy period and few cried more than one hour a day. (Persistent crying tends to vanish after three months which is why some doctors refer to it as “three-month” colic.)

When a baby is brought to me because of crying fits, I first ask about the parents’ family history and the baby’s birth, feeding habits, and general behavior. Next I examine the baby to make sure she’s healthy and thriving. Once I’m sure that the baby is well, I consider if her crying pattern fits the “Rule of Threes,” the formal medical definition of colic first formulated by Dr. Morris Wessel, a private pediatrician from Connecticut.

The “Rule of Threes” states that a baby has colic if she cries at least: three hours a day ... three days a week ... three weeks in a row.

Some doctors call babies colicky even if they don’t fit the “Rule of Threes” but still frequently scream

uncontrollably for no obvious reason.

Some parents in my practice also think that the “Rule of Threes” should be revised. They say the true definition of colic is when a baby cries so much her poor mom needs three nannies, three margaritas, and ... six hands! (Okay, there’s an exception to every rule.)

Parents often ask me if there’s a way to predict which babies will have colic. While many doctors have tried to find a pattern to this problem, no consistent association has been found between colic and a baby’s gender, prematurity, birth order, or their parents’ age, income, or education. Colic can happen to anybody’s baby. It is truly an equal-opportunity parental nightmare!

## What Really Causes Colic?

Nine times out of ten, parents of colicky babies believe that their infants are suffering from some kind of pain. This would seem to be a reasonable guess, since colicky babies:

- are not relieved by the comforts of feeding and holding
- often writhe and grunt
- may start and stop their screaming very abruptly
- have a shrill cry that resembles the sound they make when they’re in pain (like after getting a shot)

Pain was what was on Sherry’s mind when she brought her baby in to see me for a consultation about his incessant crying.

***Charlie, a robust two-month-old, had a normal examination. This surprised his mother who was convinced that his daily***

*frenzies must be the result of pain. When I asked her how she could be so sure, Sherry sheepishly admitted that she'd accidentally hit Charlie's head with the telephone receiver. She said, "When that happened, I realized that his cry after getting whacked sounded exactly the same as his normal afternoon screamfest. I thought, That proves it, he's been in pain this whole time."*



Was Sherry right? Was Charlie's crying caused by pain? Or had she somehow misread the situation? As you can imagine, since time immemorial, parents of crying babies have been analyzing their child's shrieks, trying to come up with an explanation for why their contented little infant at times suddenly "morphs" into one of the unhappiest babies on the block.

### **The "Evil Eye" (and Other Theories): How Our Ancestors Explained Colic**

*Before I got married I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children and no theories.*

John Wilmot

It wasn't so long ago that people believed leeches could cure diseases and babies were born blind. Likewise, our ancestors made many guesses about why some infants cried so much. Deciphering a Stone Age baby's cry may well have been one of the first multiple-choice questions in history:

**Your cave baby is crying because:**



- a. She's hungry.
- b. She's cold.
- c. She needs a fresh loincloth.
- d. A witch cast a spell on her.

Over the centuries, wild theories have abounded about the cause of prolonged crying. Here are a few:

### **The Top Ten Ancient Theories of the Cause of Colicky Crying**

1. Someone who dislikes the mother gave the baby the "evil eye."
2. The baby caught a draft.
3. The baby's spirit is unhappy because her father denied the baby was his.
4. The baby is possessed by the devil.
5. The baby is communicating with the spirits of unborn babies.
6. The daytime is for adults to make noise, and at night it's the baby's turn.
7. The baby's crying is a punishment for Adam and Eve's original sin.
8. The mother's milk is too thin.
9. The mother's milk is too rich.
10. A trauma during pregnancy made the baby fearful.

Even Shakespeare tossed in his two cents about why babies cry. In *King Lear* he guessed: *When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools.* Babies are amazing, but I'm afraid Shakespeare was giving them more credit than they deserve.

## The Myth of “Blowing Off Steam”

*Crying is good for the lungs the way  
bleeding is good for the veins!*

Lee Salk

Parents have long noticed that fussy infants eventually cry themselves to sleep. Some experts have guessed that these babies *need* to scream to exercise their lungs or unwind from the day’s thrills before they surrender to sleep.

I strongly disagree. The idea that screaming is good for babies is illogical from both a biological and evolutionary point of view. First, the lungs of calm babies are as healthy and strong as the lungs of colicky babies. Second, colicky prehistoric infants might well have put themselves in danger. Their screaming could have attracted enemies to their family’s hiding place. And it might have enraged their Neanderthal parents, leading to abandonment, abuse, and even infanticide.

Now, I freely admit ...

Yes ... babies can get wound up by a full day’s excitement.

Yes ... some babies ignore their parents’ best attempts to calm them.

Yes ... screaming babies eventually conk out from sheer exhaustion.

But your baby is not a little pressure cooker that needs to “blow off steam” before cooling down. Letting your baby cry it out makes as little sense as closing your ears to your screeching car alarm while you wait for the battery to die.

At this point, you may be thinking, “But *I* often feel better after I have a good cry.” Of course that’s true;

however, while adults may sob for minutes, colicky babies can wail for hours!

I believe that most parents who let their babies shriek until they collapse do this only because they feel desperate and exhausted. It's a last resort that goes against every parental instinct. Can it stop the crying? Yes. However, the real question is whether or not this climate of inconsistency—sometimes you answer her cry and sometimes you don't—is what you want to teach your baby to expect from you. Most parents answer that question with a resounding no.

*All* baby experts agree that our children do best when we are *consistent* in our responses. You know how frustrating it can be when some days you can calm your baby yet other days nothing works. Well, that's how your baby feels when her cry in the morning brings a prompt reward of touching and warm milk yet in the afternoon it's ignored.

Is it *ever* okay to let your baby yell? I don't believe it's a tragedy if your little one cries for ten minutes while you are in the bathroom or preparing dinner. The loving and cuddling you've been giving her all day easily outweighs that short-lived frustration. But fussy infants are not like toddlers. If your two-year-old screams because she wants to yank your earrings, you may have to let her cry so she can learn that when you say, "No!" you mean it. The time will come when lessons of discipline will become important, even lifesaving. But you're jumping the gun if you think you need to teach discipline to your two-month-old!

For the first few months, you should soothe your baby whenever she yells. Infants rarely cry unless they're upset about something, and it's our challenge and duty to figure out what they need and how to give it to them.

## The Colic Clues—Ten Universal Facts About Colic

In order to understand what causes colic, we first must agree on what it is. Researchers analyzing babies from all around the world have discovered ten fundamental traits of colic and colicky babies:

- 1. Colicky crying usually starts at two weeks, peaks at six weeks, and ends by three to four months of age.*
- 2. Premies are no more likely to have colic than full-term babies. (And their colic doesn't start until they are about two weeks past their due date.)*
- 3. Colicky babies have twisted faces and piercing wails, like a person in pain. Often, their cries come in waves (like cramps) and stop abruptly.*
- 4. Their screams frequently begin during or just after a feeding.*
- 5. They often double up, grunt, strain, and seem relieved by passing gas or pooping.*
- 6. Colic is often much worse in the evening (the “witching hour”).*
- 7. Colic is as likely to occur with a couple's fifth baby as with their first.*
- 8. Colicky crying often improves with rocking, holding, shhhing, and gentle abdominal pressure.*
- 9. Babies are healthy and happy between crying bouts.*

***10. In many cultures around the world, babies never get colic.***

Once scientists determined the colic clues, they compared them to the popular colic theories to determine which, if any, explained them best. The researchers immediately excluded many of the crazy old ideas and what remained are today's top five colic theories:

1. *Tiny Tummy Troubles*—babies suffer from severe discomfort caused by simple digestive problems (such as gas, constipation, cramps).
2. *Big Tummy Troubles*—babies suffer severe pain from true intestinal illness (such as food intolerance or stomach acid reflux).
3. *Maternal Anxiety*—babies wail because of anxiety they pick up from their mothers.
4. *Brain Immaturity*—immaturity of a baby's nervous system causes her to get overwhelmed and scream.
5. *Challenging Temperament*—a baby's intense or sensitive temperament makes her shriek even in response to minor upsets.

Each of these theories has its group of followers, but is any one of them the true cause of colic? Can any one of these theories explain all ten of the universal characteristics of colic?

4



The Top Five Theories  
of Colic and Why  
They Aren't Right

**Main Points:**

- Gas, constipation and overactive intestines:  
Why these Tiny Tummy Troubles are not the cause of severe crying
- Food sensitivities and stomach acid reflux:  
Why these Big Tummy Troubles are rarely the cause of persistent crying
- Why maternal anxiety isn't the cause of colic
- The ways in which a baby's brain is immature, and why that can't be the entire explanation for uncontrollable crying
- What is meant by challenging temperament and why it fails to explain why babies get colic

**Theory #1: Do Tiny Tummy Troubles Cause Colic?**

For thousands of years, many parents have had a “gut feeling” that their infants were crying from bad stomach pain. The three tummy-twisting problems that became the prime suspects of causing colic were intestinal “gas”; pooping problems; and “overactive” intestines.

### **Burping with the Best of Them**



Babies often gulp down air during their feedings. Here are tips to help your baby swallow less air and to burp up what does get in:

1. Don't lay your baby flat during a feeding.  
(Imagine how hard it would be for you to drink lying down, without swallowing a lot of air.)
2. If your baby is a noisy eater, stop and burp him frequently during the meal.
3. Before burping your baby, sit him in your right hand, with your left hand cupped under his chin. Then bounce him up and down a few times. This gets the bubbles to float to the top of the stomach for easy burping. (Don't worry, it won't make him spit up.)
4. The best burping position: Sit down with your baby on your lap, with his chin resting comfortably in your cupped hand. (I never burp babies over my shoulder, because their spit-up goes right down my back.) Next, lean him forward so he's doubled over a little. Give his back ten to twenty firm thumps. Babies' stomachs are like glasses of soda, with little “bubbles” stuck to the sides. So thump your baby like a drum to jiggle these free.



Let's examine each individually and then I will explain why none of these nuisances is the real cause of colic.

### **Do Babies Cry from Intestinal “Gas” ... or Is That Just a Lot of Hot Air?**

Most infants have gas—often. I'm sure you've witnessed virtuoso performances of burping, tooting, and grunting several times a day. Many parents are convinced this intestinal grumbling causes their baby's cries.

Parents who think colic is a gas problem have two powerful allies: grandmas and doctors. For generations, grandmothers have advised new moms to treat their baby's colic by avoiding gassy foods, burping them well, and feeding them sips of tummy-soothing teas. For decades, doctors have suggested that mothers alter their diet or their child's formula, or give burping drops (simethicone) to reduce a baby's intestinal gas.

However, with all due respect to grandmothers and doctors, fussy newborns have no more gas in their intestines than calm babies. In 1954, Dr. Ronald



Illingworth, England's preeminent pediatrician, compared the stomach X rays of normal babies with colicky babies and found *no* difference in the amount of gas the calm and cranky babies had at their peaks of crying. In addition, repeated scientific experiments have shown that simethicone burping drops (Mylicon and Phazyme) are no more helpful for crying babies than plain water. It turns out that the gas in your baby's intestine comes mostly from digested food, not from swallowed air.

## **Pooping Problems: Can Constipation Trigger Colicky Crying?**

Some parents worry that constipation is causing their baby's colic. Babies struggling to poop can look like they're in a wrestling match. However, constipation really means hard poop, and only a few, fussy, formula-fed babies suffer from that. Most infants who groan and twist usually pass soft or even runny stools.

If grunting babies aren't constipated, why are they straining so hard?

1. To poop, an infant has to simultaneously tighten his stomach and relax his anus. This can be hard for a young baby to do. Many accidentally clench both at the same time and try to force their poop through a closed anus.
2. They're lying flat on their backs. Just think of the trouble you'd have trying to poop in that position!

### **Black Tar to Scrambled Eggs: What Are Normal Baby Poops Like?**



Few new parents are prepared for how weird baby poops are. For starters, there's the almost extraterrestrial first poop—meconium. (Robin Williams described its tarry consistency as a cross between Velcro and toxic waste!) Within days, meconium's green-black color changes to light green and then to bright, mustard yellow with a seedy texture. (The seeds are miniature milk curds.)

In breast-fed babies, poops then turn into runny scrambled eggs that squirt out four to twelve times a day. Over the next month or two, the poop gradually becomes thicker, like oatmeal, and may only come out once a day or less. (The longest period I've ever seen a healthy, breast-fed baby go without a stool has been twenty-one days. However, if your baby is skipping more than three days without a stool, call your pediatrician to make sure he's okay.)

For bottle-fed babies, poop may be loose, claylike, or hard in the first weeks. The particular formula a baby drinks can affect this consistency. Some infants get constipated from cow's milk formula, while others get stopped up by soy. A few are even sensitive to whether the formula is made from powder or concentrate.

Babies grunt and frown when they poop because they're working so hard to overcome these two challenges, *not* because they're in pain! (For more on infant constipation, see [Chapter 14](#).)

### **“Overactive” Intestines—Crying, Cramps, and the Gastro-colic Reflex**

Does your baby cry and double up shortly after you start a feeding? This twisting and grunting may look like indigestion, but it's usually just an overreaction to a

*normal* intestinal reflex called the “gastro-colic reflex” (literally, the stomach-colon reflex).

This valuable reflex is the stomach’s way of telling the colon: “Time to get rid of the poop and make room for the new food that was just eaten!” If you’ve noticed that your baby poops during or after eating, this is why.

### **How Your Baby’s Tummy Works**



A baby’s digestive system is like a long conveyor belt. At one end, milk is loaded into the mouth five to eight times a day. It is quickly delivered to the stomach, and then is slowly carried through the intestines, where it is digested and absorbed. Whatever milk isn’t absorbed gets turned into poop and is temporarily stored in the colon.

When the next meal begins, the stomach telegraphs a message to the lower intestines, commanding them to squeeze. The squeezing pushes the poop out, making room for the next load of food. This message from the stomach to the colon is called the gastro-colic reflex.

Most infants are unaware when this reflex is happening. Others feel a mild spasm after a big feeding or if they’re frazzled at day’s end. But for a few babies, this squeezing of the intestine feels like a punch in the belly! These infants writhe as if in terrible pain.

As you might imagine, the gastro-colic reflex can be even more uncomfortable if your baby is constipated and his colon must strain to push out firm poop. However, most babies who cry from this reflex have soft, pasty poops. They cry because they are overly sensitive to this weird sensation.

## The Reasons Why Tiny Tummy Troubles Cannot Be the True Cause of Colic

*It's not what we don't know that gets us into the most trouble, it's what we know ... that just ain't so!*

Josh Billings, *Everybody's Friend*, 1874

Despite the fact that many people think gas causes colic, it and the other Tiny Tummy Troubles (TTT's) don't explain this terrible crying because:

- Most colicky babies burp and pass wind many times a day without a whimper.
- Adults double up when they have stomachaches, but babies snap into this fetal position *whenever* they are upset, regardless of the cause.
- Many babies shriek even when they only are experiencing a minor discomfort.

### Anti-Spasm Medicines: Soothing Crying Babies into a Stupor



From the 1950s to the 1980s, doctors armed parents with millions of prescriptions of anti-cramp medicine. Some doctors used Donnatal (a mix of anti-cramp medicine plus phenobarbitol) while others preferred Levisin (hyocyamine). Both are cramp-relieving and sedating, and both are still occasionally prescribed by doctors today.

However, of all the anti-spasm drugs recommended for colic, Bentyl was by far and away the most popular. In 1984, 74 million doses of it were sold in Britain alone. But Bentyl turned out to

be the most dangerous of all the tummy drugs. In 1985, doctors were horrified to discover that a number of colicky babies being treated with it suffered convulsions, coma—even death.

In retrospect, it's likely that anti-cramp medicines work *not* because of any tummy effect, but because they induce sedation as an incidental side effect.

The TTT's also fail to explain five of the ten universal characteristics of colic and colicky babies:

- ***Colicky crying usually starts at two weeks, peaks at six weeks, and ends by three to four months of age.*** Neither gas nor the gastro-colic reflex fit this clue because both are present from birth (before colic starts) and continue long past three months (when colic is over).
- ***Colic in preemies doesn't start until two weeks after their due date.*** Preemies have lots of gas and a vigorous gastro-colic reflex. If these sensations truly caused colic, crying in preemies would start immediately, not be delayed for months.
- ***Colic is often much worse in the evening.*** Babies poop and have stomach rumblings twenty-four hours a day, so if they caused colic, crying would be as common in the morning as it is at night.
- ***Colicky crying often improves with rocking, wrapping, shhhing, and tummy pressure.*** It doesn't make any sense that rocking, wrapping, or shhhing could stop bad stomach pain.
- ***There are many cultures around the world where babies never get colic.*** All babies around the world experience TTT's. So if they were the basis of colic, why would there

be cultures where prolonged crying is virtually nonexistent?

## **Theory #2: Do Big Tummy Troubles Cause Colic?**

Over the past thirty years, scientists have discovered several new problems that cause stomach pain in adults. I call these conditions “Big Tummy Troubles” because they are actual medical illnesses, not merely burps and hiccups.

As each new illness was reported, pediatricians carefully considered if it might occur in infants and explain the inconsolable crying that plagues so many of our babies. Two of these Big Tummy Troubles have been scrutinized as possible keys to the mystery of colic: food sensitivities and stomach acid reflux.

### **Food Sensitivity—Warning! Some Foods May Be Hazardous to Your Baby’s Smile**

If you are breast-feeding, you may have been counseled to avoid foods that are too hot, too cold, too strong, too weak, as well as to steer clear of spices, dairy products, acidic fruit and “gassy” vegetables.

Likewise, mothers of colicky, bottle-fed babies are often advised to switch their child’s formula to remove an ingredient that may cause fussiness.

Over the years, experts have considered three ways a baby’s diet might trigger uncontrollable crying: indigestion, allergies, and caffeine-type stimulation.

## **Indigestion: Are Garlic and Onions Risky or the Spices of Life?**

Passing up garlic, onions, and beans seems reasonable to most people. These foods can make *us* gassy. But if gassy foods are hard on a baby's tummy, why can breast-feeding moms in Mexico eat *frijoles* (beans) and those in Korea munch *kim chee* (garlic-pickled cabbage) without their babies ever letting out a peep?

Nevertheless, I do think it's reasonable for the mother of an irritable baby to avoid "problem" foods (citrus, strawberries, tomatoes, beans, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, peppers, onion, garlic) for a few days to see if her baby cries less. However, in my experience, only a handful of infants improve when these foods are eliminated. Studies even show that babies love tasting a smorgasbord of flavors. So don't be surprised if your little one sucks on your breast *more* heartily after you've had a plate of lasagna loaded with garlic!

## **Food Allergies: Why Couldn't Babies with Allergies Just Sneeze Instead of Scream?**

Allergies are part of our immune system, protecting us from unfamiliar proteins (like inhaled pollen or cat dander) that try to enter our bodies.

As a rule, if you have an allergic reaction you'll sneeze, because the fight between your body and the allergens typically takes place in your nose. With infants, however, the battleground between their bodies' immune system and the foreign protein is usually in the intestines. Your baby's intestine is not yet fully developed. Her immature intestinal lining allows large, allergy-triggering molecules to enter her bloodstream like flies zooming through a torn screen door. Over the first year of life, your baby's intestinal lining gradually

becomes a much better barrier to these protein intruders.

For many years, doctors believed babies could be allergic to their own mother's milk. In 1983, Swedish scientists proved this impossible. They demonstrated that babies whose colic improved when they were taken off their mother's milk were sensitive *not* to their mom's milk itself but to traces of cow's milk that had floated across the lining of the mother's intestines and snuck into her milk.

Please don't be overly concerned about your diet troubling your child. As a rule, babies rarely develop allergies to the foods their moms eat. The two biggest exceptions to that rule, however, are cow's milk, the proverbial eight-hundred-pound gorilla of baby allergies, and soy, coming in a not-too-distant second place (about ten percent of babies who are milk allergic are soy allergic as well).

I tell my patients it should come as no surprise that some babies develop an allergic reaction to cow's milk. After all, this food is lovingly made by cows for their own babies, and it was never intended to feed our hungry tots.

Cow's milk protein starts passing into your breast milk within minutes of drinking a glass. It reaches its peak level about eight to twelve hours later and it's out of your milk in twenty-four to thirty-six hours. Fortunately, most babies have no problem tolerating this tiny bit of milk protein. However, sensitive babies begin reacting to it within two to thirty-six hours of consuming it.

Milk-allergic babies may suffer from a number of bothersome symptoms besides severe crying. I have cared for infants whose milk allergy gave them skin rashes, nose congestion, wheezing, vomiting, and watery stools. The intestines of some of my patients have gotten so irritated by allergies that they produced strings of



bloody mucous that could be seen mixed in with their stools. Although blood in your baby's diaper will raise your heart rate, it is usually no more ominous than finding blood in your mucous when you blow your nose. Be sure to contact your baby's doctor, however, to discuss the problem.

### **Stimulant Food: Is Your Baby on a Caffeine Jag?**

Some babies are supersensitive. They jump when the phone rings and cry when they smell strong perfume. It should come as no surprise that some babies also get hyper from caffeine (coffee, tea, cola, or chocolate) or from stimulant medicines (diet pills, decongestants, and certain Chinese herbs) in their mom's milk.

While many babies are unfazed when their mothers drink one or two cups of coffee, even that small amount of caffeine can rev a sensitive baby up into the "red zone." The caffeine collects in a woman's breast milk over four to six hours and can make a baby irritable within an hour of being eaten.

### **Stomach Acid Reflux: Do Colicky Babies Cry from "Heartburn"?**

Pediatricians have also examined stomach acid reflux (also known as Gastro-Esophageal Reflux, or GER) as a possible colic cause. This condition—where acidic stomach juice squirts up toward the mouth, irritating everything it touches—is a proven cause of heartburn in adults.

Now, for most babies, a little reflux is nothing new. We just call it by a different name: "spit-up." Since the muscle that keeps the stomach contents from moving "upstream" is weak in most babies, a bit of your baby's

last meal can easily sneak back out when she burps or grunts, especially if she was overfed or swallowed air.

Most newborns don't spit up much, but some babies "urp" up prodigious amounts of their milk. Fortunately, most of these babies don't suffer any ill effects from all this regurgitation. The greatest problem caused by their vomiting is often milk stains on your sofa and clothes.

On the other hand, infants with severe GER are plagued with copious amounts of vomiting, poor weight gain, and occasional burning pain. (In some babies, stomach acid travels just partially up the esophagus, causing heartburn *without* vomiting.)

When should you suspect reflux as the cause of your baby's unhappiness? Look for these telltale signs:

- She vomits more than five times a day and more than an ounce each time.
- Her crying occurs with most meals, during the day *and* night.
- She often wails right after a burp or a spit-up.
- The bouts of crying are no better by the time she's three months old.
- She may have episodes of back arching, hoarseness, wheezing, choking, and/or excessive and even painful hiccuping.

### **Big Tummy Troubles Strike Out as the Major Cause of Colic**

Food sensitivity and acid reflux can make some babies scream, but do the Big Tummy Troubles (BTT's) explain most cases of colic or just a small number of ultrafussy babies?

In my experience, five to ten percent of very fussy infants cry due to food sensitivity from cow's milk or soy, and one to three percent of them cry from the pain of acid reflux. That notwithstanding, Big Tummy

Troubles (BTT's) are *not* the cause of colic for the majority of fussy infants:

- If food allergies caused colic, a mother would only have to change her baby's formula or her diet and, *poof*, the crying would stop. But this rarely helps.
- If allergies caused colic, formula-fed babies should be especially fussy because they eat hundreds of times more cow's milk protein than do breast-fed babies. Yet colic is equally common in both groups.
- Doctors in Melbourne, Australia, examined twenty-four babies under three months of age who were so irritable they had to be hospitalized. All were checked for acid reflux; only one baby had it.
- Most babies with severe reflux have *no* pain. A review of 219 young babies sent to a hospital clinic because of severe reflux found that thirty-three percent had severe vomiting, thirty percent were not gaining weight, but very few had excessive crying.

The BTT's also fail to explain five of the ten universal characteristics of colic and colicky babies:

- ***Colicky crying usually starts at two weeks, peaks at six weeks, and ends by three to four months of age.*** Newborns are continually exposed to spit-up and allergens in their diet. If the BTT's caused colic, crying would start right away and continue well past three months. (Babies with cow's milk allergy have problems that last for at least six to twelve months, and serious reflux usually causes heartburn complaints for nine months or more.)

- ***Colic in preemies doesn't start until two weeks after their due date.*** A preemie born two months early rarely shows colic before she's two and a half months old, despite her daily exposure to spit-up and allergenic proteins.
- ***Colic is often much worse in the evening.*** If the BTT's caused colic, crying would occur at any time of the day, because babies eat the same food—and spit it up—from morning to night.
- ***Colicky crying often improves with rocking, holding, shhhing, and tummy pressure.*** Why would these actions soothe inflamed intestines or heartburn? Indeed, rocking and pressure might even squirt *more* acid up from the stomach, worsening reflux pain.
- ***There are many cultures around the world where babies never get colic.*** All babies, regardless of where they live, occasionally spit up and drink breast milk containing tiny samplings from their mommy's last meal. Yet, despite this, infants in some cultures around the world *never* suffer from colic.

### Theory #3: Does Maternal Anxiety Cause Colic?

Any mother who has felt fear and anxiety surrounding the birth of her new baby might wonder if these disquieting feelings could affect her newborn. This was Trina's concern....

***With her ruby lips and lush, black hair, Tatiana was exquisite. But her delicacy in form was balanced by a strong and feisty temperament. She reflected her parents'***

*passionate personalities, and Trina and Mirko could not have been more thrilled. However, as the weeks went by, they became more and more frustrated as Tatiana's feistiness turned into prolonged periods of screaming.*

*Trina called one afternoon after her four-week-old daughter had been particularly cranky. She confided, "I'm a very sensitive and intuitive person. Is it possible that Tatiana is too? Is it possible she's upset because of all the stress I'm under?"*



*It seems that the joy Trina and Mirko had felt after Tatiana's birth was tempered by Trina's painful recovery from a cesarean section and then the destruction of their possessions from a flood in the apartment above theirs, days after they brought Tatiana home.*

*"The nest we created for our baby collapsed like a house of cards and we had to move into our friend's living room. When Tatiana developed colic at three weeks of age, I couldn't help but think her screams stemmed from all the anxiety she felt from me during this terribly upsetting time."*

The birth of an infant brings with it such a wonderful but weighty responsibility that it's a rare parent who doesn't feel some anxiety and self-doubt. Many new mothers confide in me that they feel overwhelmed because:

- ***Caring for their baby is unexpectedly stressful.***

No matter how much you thought that you were prepared for your new baby, it still may hit you like a ton of bricks.

- ***They have little baby experience.***

Most of us have had very few opportunities to care for small babies. That's why our generation may well be the least experienced ... in history!

- ***They feel like everybody is criticizing them.***

New parents are very vulnerable to everyone's advice and criticisms. "Pick her up!" "Don't pick her up!" "Feed on demand!" "Feed on a schedule!" Getting peppered by all these comments can whittle down your confidence and magnify your self-doubts.

- ***The responsibility falls predominantly upon their shoulders.***

Mothers feel a pressure to know what they're doing because they are the ones who are expected to be able to soothe their baby when no one else can.

## **A New Mom's Feelings of Inadequacy**

***Aye, aye, aaaaaye! Am I really ready for this?***

Mothering a baby is a magnificent experience, but it's neither automatic nor instinctive. Unless you've spent lots of time baby-sitting or helping with younger siblings, don't be surprised if your new baby makes you feel you need six arms—like a Hindu deity. For most women, mothering their newborn is the toughest job they've ever had!

After talking to thousands of new mothers, I've made an "Aye, Aye, Aye" list of the top ten stresses that can undermine a new mom's self-confidence—and make even a goddess start to crumble:

1. Intense fatigue
2. Inexperience
3. Isolation from loving family and friends
4. Insufficient isolation from intrusive family and friends
5. Inconsolable crying (the baby's, that is)
6. Irritating arguments with your spouse
7. Instant loss of job income and gratification
8. Insecurity about your body
9. Instability of your hormones
10. Indelible barf stains on every piece of clothing you own

Of course, these problems pale when compared to the vivid joy and feeling of purpose your baby brings into your life. However, new mothers enter a vulnerable psychological space after giving birth, and fatigue and fear can even further distort your perceptions. You're in the midst of one of life's most intense experiences and, particularly if you have a colicky baby, waves of anxiety and depression may repeatedly wash over you during these initial months. (For more on postpartum depression, see [Appendix B](#).)

Fortunately, the pressures you feel today will soon melt into a warm love that will probably be more powerful and profound than any other you have ever felt. In the meantime, please be tolerant of yourself, your husband, and, especially, your baby.

## A Mom's Anxiety "Ain't" the Answer for Colic

*Colicky infants are born, not made.*

Dr. Martin Stein, *Encounters with Children*

It's common for mothers of irritable babies to feel jealous and self-critical when they see other moms with easy-to-calm infants. Those feelings can cast a shadow over a woman's confidence and make her wonder if her anxiety causes her baby's crying.

Fortunately, during the first few months of life babies aren't able to tell when their mothers are distressed and worried. Remember, *babies are just babies!* They are not born with the ability to read their mother's feelings as if they were messages written on her forehead in lipstick. These little prehistoric creatures even have trouble ... burping. So don't worry about your baby being affected by your anxiety.

Also, new parents sometimes mistakenly assume their newborns are nervous because their hands tremble, their chins quiver, and they startle at sudden sounds or movements. However, those reactions are normal signs of a newborn's undeveloped nervous system and automatically disappear after about three months.

In my experience, however, there are a few ways a mother's anxiety about her fussy infant could unintentionally nudge her baby into more crying:

- Anxiety might lessen the mother's breast-milk supply or interfere with her milk letdown, thus frustrating a hungry baby. (See [Chapter 14](#) to remedy these feeding problems.)
- A mother may be so distracted and depressed that she's emotionally unavailable to comfort her crying infant.



- An anxious mother may be afraid to handle her baby as vigorously as is necessary to calm the screaming. (See the discussion about “Vigor” in [Chapter 7](#).)
- Nervous moms tend to jump impatiently from one calming method to another. They can get so lost in their anxiety they don’t notice they’re upsetting their babies even more.

However, when you carefully study the issue of maternal anxiety, it’s clear that it can’t be making a million of our babies cry for hours every day. The nervous-mommy theory fails to explain three colic characteristics:

- ***Colic in preemies starts about two weeks past their due date.*** If a mother’s anxiety caused her baby’s colic, crying would occur earlier and more often in preemies. After all, these fragile babies can turn even calm parents into nervous wrecks.
- ***Colicky babies seem to be in pain.*** Even if your baby could sense your anxiety, why would she cry as if she had pain?
- ***Colic is as likely to occur with a couple’s fifth baby as with their first.*** This is the most powerful argument against a connection between anxiety and colic. Since experienced parents are more confident, their fifth baby should be less prone to colic than their first, but that just isn’t the case.

Trina didn’t need to worry that her stress had invaded Tatiana’s tender psyche. In reality, the opposite is usually the case. Your baby’s wail can trigger red alert in *your* nervous system, making *you* feel tense and anxious!

## **Theory #4: Is a Baby's Immature Brain the Cause of Colic?**

During medical school, I was taught colic was an intestinal problem. Soon thereafter, that theory was pushed aside by the concept of brain immaturity. As we discovered more about our babies' nervous systems, we came to believe colic resulted from their immature brains getting overstimulated by all the new experiences babies encountered after birth. It's no wonder this theory became popular because, let's face it, babies are so ... immature!

Babies have the coordination of drunken sailors and the quick wits of, well, newborns. But what *exactly* is immature in your baby's brain, and how might that predispose him to uncontrollable crying?

### **Mental Abilities Your Baby Was Born With**

Imagine you're taking a very long trip but can only bring one suitcase with you. Now imagine that your suitcase is tiny. In a funny way, that's the situation your baby was in as he was preparing for birth. He could only fit into his small brain the most basic abilities he would need to live outside the protection of your womb.

If you could have helped him pack, what abilities would you have considered important for him to be born with? Walking? Smiling? Saying "I love you, Mommy"?

Over millions of years, Mother Nature picked four indispensable survival tools to fit into our babies' apple-size brains:

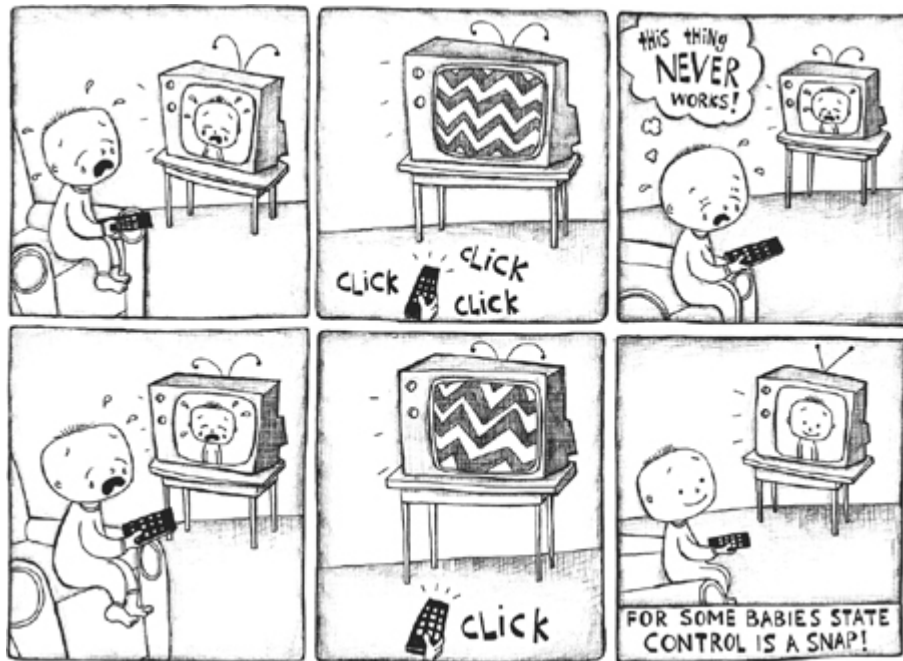
1. *Life-support controls*—the ability to maintain blood pressure, breathing, etc.

2. *Reflexes*—dozens of important automatic behaviors that help newborns sneeze, suck, swallow, cry, and more.
3. *Limited control of muscles and senses*—once babies can breathe and eat, these very limited abilities allow them to touch, taste, look around, and interact with the world.
4. *State control*—after babies start interacting with their families and their exciting new world, state control helps them turn their attention on (to watch and learn) and off (to recover and sleep).

Of all of these abilities, state control is the most important in determining whether or not he gets colic.

### **State Control: Your Baby's Ability to Tune the World In ... or Shut It Out**

When doctors talk about your baby's state, we're not discussing whether you live in Ohio or Florida. State describes your baby's level of wakefulness or sleep—in other words, his state of alertness. States range from deep sleep to light sleep to fussiness to full-out screaming. Right in the middle is perhaps the most magical state of all: quiet alertness. It's easy to tell when your baby is quietly alert: his eyes will be open and bright and his face peacefully relaxed as he surveys the sights around him.



Maintaining a state is one of the earliest jobs your baby's brain must accomplish. His ability to stop his crying, keep awake, or stay asleep is called his "state control." I like to think of state control as your baby's TV remote, which allows him to "keep a channel on" when something is interesting, to "change channels" when he gets bored, and to shut the "TV" off if it starts upsetting him or it's time to go to bed.

Many young infants have excellent state control. These "I can do it myself" babies focus intensely on something for a while then pull away whenever they want; they easily shift between sleeping, alertness, and crying. These self-calming babies are especially good at protecting themselves from getting overstimulated. When the world gets too chaotic, some stare into space, some rhythmically suck their lower lip, and others turn their heads as if to say, "You excite me sooo much, I just have to look away to catch my breath!"

You may also notice your baby settling himself by using an attention off-switch called "habituation." It is one of your baby's best tools for shielding himself from getting too much stimulation. Like a circuit breaker that cuts the electrical flow when the wires overload,

habituation allows your baby to shut off his attention when his brain gets overloaded.

Habituation explains the extraordinary “sleep anywhere-anytime-despite-the-noise” ability that infants have. (It’s also the tool baby boys use to help them sleep despite the pain of circumcision.)

You’ll notice that your newborn follows a simple plan during his first few weeks of life: eating and sleeping! Then, as he acclimates to being out of your womb, he’ll spend increasing time in quiet alertness. Unfortunately, many young babies can’t handle the additional excitement that comes with this alertness. These babies are *poor* self-calmers with immature state control. They have trouble shutting off their alertness, so their circuits often overload. After a few weeks, as they begin to wake up to the world, their state control starts to get overwhelmed and fail.

These babies look exhausted but their eyes keep staring out, unable to close, as if held open by toothpicks. It’s as if their remote control malfunctioned, stranding them on a channel showing a loud, upsetting movie.

One exasperated mom told me her colicky three-month-old, Owen, cried for several hours every day. He clearly needed to sleep, but he wouldn’t close his eyes. She said, “I keep trying to get him off *The Crying Channel* and help him find the *Sleep Station* again.”

When your little baby is locked into screaming, please don’t despair. Much better state control will be coming to rescue you both in a few months. In the meantime, the second part of this book will teach you exactly how to soothe him when he’s having a meltdown.

**“Help Me ... The World Is Too Big!”  
How *Overstimulation* Causes Crying**

***Avoid overstimulation with toys, lights,  
and colors; this fatigues the baby's senses.***

Richard Lovell, *Essays on Practical Education*, 1789

Considering how exciting the world is, it's a wonder that all babies don't get overstimulated! Fortunately, most are great at shutting out the world when they need to. However, if your baby has poor state control, even a low activity level may push him into frantic crying. He may begin to sob because of a tiny upset, like a burp or loud noise, but then get so wound up—by his own yelling—that he's soon raging out of control.

These babies cry because they get overstimulated and then stuck in “cry mode.” If we could translate their shrieks into English, we'd hear something like “Please ... help me ... the world is too big!”

**“Help Me ... I'm Stuck in a Closet!”  
How *Understimulation* Causes Crying**

***Your baby is not crying to make you pick  
him up, but because you put him down in  
the first place.***

Penelope Leach, *Your Baby and Child*

Our culture believes in the strange myth that a baby wants to be left in a quiet, dark room. But what is this stillness like for your new baby? Imagine you've been working in a noisy, hectic office for nine months. One morning you come to work and find yourself alone—no chatter, no ringing phones, no commotion. Soon, the stillness gets on your nerves. You begin pacing and muttering, until you lose it and scream, “Get me out of here!”

This scene is similar to the way babies experience the world when they come home from the hospital. Although *our* image of the perfect nursery is one where

our little angel sleeps in serene quiet, to a newborn that feels a bit like being stuck in a closet.

As strange as it sounds, your baby doesn't want—or need—peace and quiet. What he yearns for are the pulsating rhythms that constantly surrounded him in his womb world. In fact, the understimulation and stillness of our homes can drive a sensitive newborn every bit as nuts as chaotic overstimulation can.

Does understimulation mean babies cry because they're bored? No. Unlike older children and adults, babies don't find monotonous repetition boring. (That's why your baby is happy drinking milk day after day.) Rather, they find the *absence* of monotonous repetition hard to tolerate. Their cries ask for a return to the constant, hypnotizing stimulation of the womb. Fussy babies often take three months before they become mature enough to cope with the world without this rhythmic reassurance.

Either understimulation or overstimulation can be terribly unsettling to young infants; however, even worse is to experience both at the same time. When an immature baby is subjected to chaos in the absence of calming, rhythmic sensations, it can drive him past his point of tolerance!

### **Is Immaturity the Long-Sought Cause of Colic? Close, but No Cigar!**

Brain immaturity is a large piece of the colic puzzle. But this theory can't be the whole truth because it fails to explain two crucial colic clues:

- ***Preemies are no more likely to have colic than full-term babies.*** If brain immaturity were the underlying cause of a baby's screaming, preemies, with their superimmature brains, would be the fussiest

of all babies. Yet these tiny babies never cry without a clear reason, and they stop promptly once their need is met.

- ***There are many cultures around the world where babies never get colic.*** This fact proves that brain immaturity cannot be the sole basis of persistent crying. There is no biological reason why the brains of infants in some cultures would be so much more mature than those in others.

### **Theory #5: Does Challenging Temperament Cause Colic?**

*A few years ago, I spoke at a Lamaze class. During the talk, a pregnant woman named Ronnie told the class about her plan to have an “easy” child. She said, “I have two friends with young children. Angela has twin two-year-olds who scream and fight like little savages, but Lateisha’s child is an angel. I don’t want to make the same mistakes Angela did; I want my baby to be like Lateisha’s little princess!”*

Anyone who has been lucky enough to spend time around infants knows that some babies are as gentle as a merry-go-round while others are as wild as a roller coaster! What makes some children so volatile and challenging? Was Ronnie right? Is an error committed by their parents, or are some babies just natural-born screamers?

### **Nature Versus Nurture: What Determines Your Baby’s Personality?**



There's an old story that as a boy handed his father a report card of all F's, he lowered his head and asked quietly, "Father, do you think my trouble is my heredity ... or my upbringing?"

For generations, people have debated what predicts a child's temperament. Is it determined by his hereditary gifts (nature) or is personality gradually molded by one's upbringing (nurture)?

A thousand years ago, baby experts believed temperament was transferred to babies in the milk they were fed. That's why ancient experts warned parents never to give their baby milk from an animal or from a wet nurse with a weak mind, poor scruples, or a crazy family.

Today it is widely accepted that many personality traits are direct genetic hand-me-downs from our parents. For this reason, shy parents usually have shy children, and passionate parents tend to have babies who are little chili peppers.



***Andrea was the spirited baby of Zoran, a former race-car driver, and Yelena, a mile-a-minute research psychiatrist. A real handful from the moment she was born, by two months of age Andrea shrieked her complaints almost twenty-four hours a day. As Zoran noted, "She's as tough as nails, but what else would you expect? Two Dobermans just don't give birth to a cocker spaniel!"***

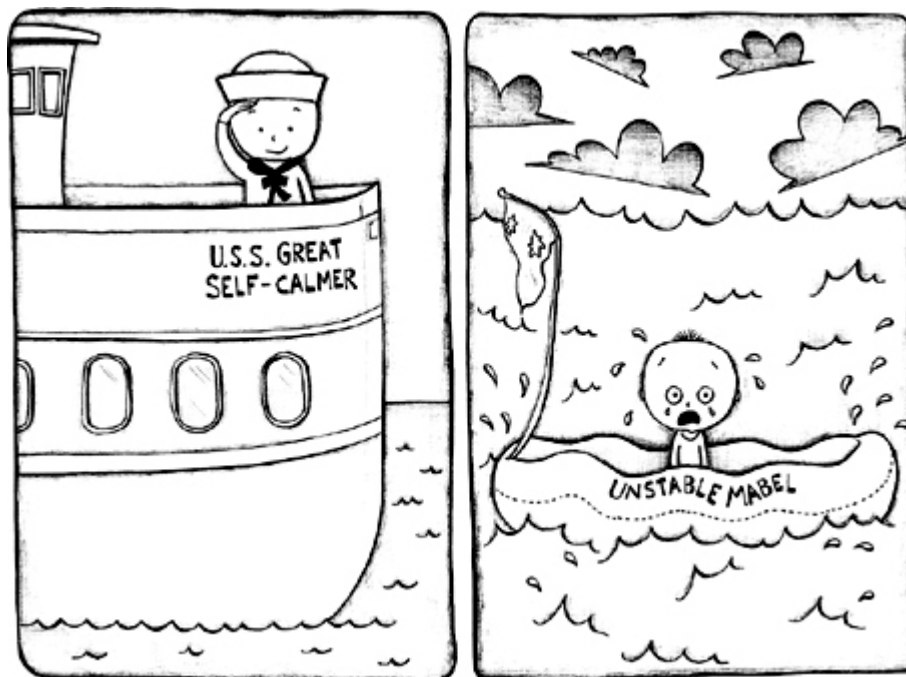
Let's take a closer look at temperament and see why, even though it may contribute to colic, it's not the main cause.

## Temperament: The Sea Your Child Sails On

*People are wrong when they think that quiet babies are good and fussy babies are bad. The truth is that some gracious and softhearted babies fuss a lot because they can't handle the turbulence of the world around them.*

Renée, mother of Marie-Claire, Esmé, and  
Didier

Your baby is like a boat and her temperament the sea she sails on. If her boat is stable (a good self-calming ability), and the sea is smooth (she has a calm temperament), she will sail through infancy. However, if the boat is unstable (a poor self-calming ability), or the sea is rocky (she has a challenging temperament), she's in danger of getting tossed about. Once children get older and their self-calming ability becomes stable, the turbulence of their passions is no longer such an overpowering experience. But for young babies, a very intense temperament may be more than they can handle.



Luckily, most babies are mild-tempered and easy to calm, like sweet little lambs. But challenging babies are more like a mix of skittish cat and bucking bronco. These excessively sensitive and/or intense babies engage in a daily struggle to keep their balance during their first months of life.

### **Easy-Tempered Babies—“Mary Had a Little Lamb ...”**

Mild and mellow from the first moments of life, rather than scream at birth, an easy baby might shyly fuss, as if to say, “Please Mummy, it’s a teensy bit too bright in here!”

Sabrina was one such undemanding baby:

*Sabrina’s dark lashes framed eyes the color of the sky. She was extremely alert, watching the world with the peaceful gaze of an old Zen master. Sabrina slept beautifully and hardly ever cried. Even when she was hungry, she rarely made a noise louder than a whimper to get her parents’ attention.*

Easy-tempered babies have terrific state control and are great self-calmers. They are easygoing little “surfer dudes” who have no trouble taking all the craziness of the world in stride.

However, babies who are very sensitive or intense—or, Heaven help you, both—and who have poor self-calming skills may not be able to keep from screaming as the world’s strange mixture of action and stillness toss them around like boats in a storm.

### **Infants with a Challenging Temperament— Little Babies with Big Personalities**

*Lizzy and her twin sister Jennifer were like two peas in a pod, both super-sensitive to noise and sudden movements. When unhappy, their faces flushed and cries flew out of their mouths with deafening force.*

*However, while Jenny was usually able to quiet her own crying, Lizzy's screams pulled her like a team of wild horses. Once she got rolling, she had no ability to rein herself in!*

*Lizzy's mother, Cheryl, tried to regain control of her frenzied daughter with pacifiers, wrapping, and constant holding, but nothing helped. "For the first three months, I walked around every day not knowing when the 'train wreck' would occur."*

Babies like Lizzy are tough. During the first few months of life, their personalities can be too big for them to handle. That's why parents often dub these babies with funny names to remind themselves not to take life too seriously. For example, Amanda's parents nicknamed her "Demanda," Natalie Rose's parents called her "Fussy Gassy Gussy," and Lachlan's parents referred to him as "General Fuss-ter."

Two types of temperament can be particularly challenging for new parents: sensitive and intense.

## **Sensitive Babies: Perceptive Infants Who Can Be as Fragile as Crystal**

Of course, we all know that some people are much more sensitive than others. One person can sleep with the TV on while another is annoyed by any little sound. Some newborns also show signs of being extra sensitive,

such as jumping when the telephone rings, grimacing at the taste of lanolin on your nipple, or turning her head to the smell of your breast.

Sensitive babies are wide-eyed and super-alert; their reactions to the world are as transparent and pure as crystal. But like crystal, sensitive infants are often fragile and require extra care. They are so open to everything around them they can easily become overloaded. That's why these babies have such a hard time settling themselves when they're left to cry it out. In other words, they can go bonkers from *being* bonkers!

If your newborn has a sensitive temperament, she may occasionally look away from you during her feeding or playtime. This is called "gaze aversion." Gaze aversion occurs when you get a little too close to your baby's eyes. Imagine a ten-foot face suddenly coming right in front of *your* nose. You, too, might need to look away or pull back a bit and check it out from a more comfortable distance! Don't mistake this for a sign that she doesn't like you or want to look at you. Just move back a foot or two and allow her to have slightly more space between her eyes and your face.

### **Intense Babies: A Cross Between Passionate ... and Explosive**

Throughout your baby's normal waking cycles, he's bound to experience tiny flashes of frustration, annoyance, and discomfort. Calm babies handle these with hardly a fuss, but intense babies handle these *intensely*. It's as if the "sparks" of everyday distress fall onto the "dynamite" of their volatile temperament, and "*Kapow!*" they explode. When babies lose control like that, they may get so carried away that they can't stop screaming even when they're given exactly what they want.

This intense crying was what Jackie experienced when she tried to feed her hungry—and passionate—baby. Two-month-old Jeffrey often began his feedings like this:



*“He would let out a shriek that sounded like, ‘Feed me or I’m gonna die!’ I would leap off the sofa, take out my breast, and insert it into his cavernous mouth. However, rather than gratefully taking it, he would often shake his head from side to side and wail around my dripping boob as if he were blind and didn’t even know it was there. At times I worried that he thought my breast was a hand trying to silence him rather than my loving attempt to come to his rescue.*

*“Fortunately, I had already figured out that Jeffrey couldn’t stop himself from reacting that way. So, despite his protests, I kept offering him my breast until he realized what I was trying to do. Eventually, he would latch on and start suckling. And then, lo and behold, he’d eat as if I hadn’t fed him for months.”*

Jackie was smart. She realized Jeffrey wasn’t intentionally ignoring her gift of food; he was just a little bitty baby trying to deal with his great big personality. Like a rookie cowboy on a rodeo bull, he was trying so hard to hold on that he didn’t notice she was right there next to him, ready to help.

**Does a Baby’s Temperament Last a Lifetime?**

As babies grow up, they don't get less intense or sensitive, but they do develop other skills to help themselves control their temperaments and better cope with the world. By three months they begin to smile, coo, roll, grab, and chew. And shortly thereafter they add the extraordinarily effective self-calming techniques of laughter, mouthing objects, and moving about.

### **What's Your Baby's Temperament?**



Even on the first days of your baby's life, you can get glimpses of his budding temperament. The answers to these questions may help you determine if your child's temperament is more placid or passionate:

1. Do bright lights, wet diapers, or cold air make your baby lightly whimper or full-out scream?
2. When you lay him down on his back, do his arms usually rest serenely at his sides or flail about?
3. Does he startle easily at loud noises and sudden movements?
4. When he's hungry, does he slowly get fussier and fussier or does he accelerate immediately into strong wailing?
5. When he's eating, is he like a little wine taster (calmly taking sips) or an all-you-can-eater (slurping the milk down with speedy precision)?
6. Once he works himself into a vigorous cry, how hard is it for you to get his attention? How long does it take to get him to settle back down?

These hints can't perfectly predict your child's lifelong temperament, but they *can* help you begin the exciting journey of getting to know and respect his uniqueness.

With time infants develop enough control over their immature bodies to allow them to direct the same zest that used to spill out into their shrieks into giggles and belly laughs. Passionate infants often turn into kids who are the biggest laughers and most talkative members of the family. (“Hey, Mom, look! *Look!* It’s incredible!”) And sensitive infants often grow into compassionate and perceptive children. (“No, Mom, it’s not purple. It’s *lavender.*”)

So if you have a challenging baby, don't lose heart. These kids often become the sweetest and most enthusiastic children on the block!

## **Is Temperament the True Cause of Colic? Probably Not.**

Is a baby's temperament the key factor that pushes him into inconsolable crying? No. This reasonable theory fails because it doesn't explain three of the universal colic clues:

- ***Colicky crying usually starts at two weeks, peaks at six weeks, and ends by three to four months of age.*** Since temperament is present at birth and lasts a lifetime, colic caused by a challenging temperament should begin at birth and persist—or even worsen—after the fourth month of life. It doesn't.
- ***Preemies are no more likely to have colic than full-term babies. (And it starts about two weeks past their due date.)*** One would expect an immature preemie with a sensitive



and/or intense personality to be *more* prone to colic than a mature full-term baby. Similarly, one would expect his colic to begin right away, not weeks to months later.

- ***There are many cultures around the world where babies never get colic.*** Temperament can't be the cause of colic because in many cultures colic is nonexistent among their most intense and passionate infants.

### **Goodness of Fit—What happens when two cocker spaniels give birth to a Doberman?**



Since temperament is largely an inherited trait, a baby's personality almost always reflects his parents'. However, just as brown-eyed parents may wind up with a blue-eyed child, mellow parents may unexpectedly give birth to a T. rex baby who makes them run for the hills!

Parents sometimes have difficulty handling a baby whose temperament differs dramatically from their own. They may hold their sensitive baby too roughly or their intense baby too gently. These parents need to learn their baby's unique temperament and nurture him exactly the way that suits him the best.

So if one million U.S. babies aren't crying because of gas, acid reflux, maternal anxiety, brain immaturity, or inborn fussiness, what *is* the true cause of colic? As you will see in the next chapter, the only theory that fully explains the mystery of colic is ... the missing fourth trimester.

5



The True Cause of Colic:  
The Missing  
Fourth Trimester

**Main Points:**

- The First Three Trimesters: Your baby's happy life in the womb
- The Great Eviction: Why babies are so immature at birth
- Why your baby wants (and needs) a fourth trimester
- A "Womb with a View": A parent's experience of the fourth trimester
- The Great American Myth: Young babies can be spoiled
- The connection between the fourth trimester and other colic theories
- Ten reasons why the missing fourth trimester is the true cause of colic



*Once upon a time, in a faraway land, four blind wise men were asked to describe the*

*true nature of an elephant. Each took a turn touching the beast. One by one, they spoke.*

*“This animal is long and curved like a spear,” said the first blind man after grabbing a tusk. The next, clutching the giant’s leg, raised his voice. “I disagree! This animal is thick and upright—like a tree.” As they began to argue, the next man touched the ear and compared it to a giant leaf. Finally, the last man, wrapped up in the elephant’s trunk, declared triumphantly that they were all wrong—the animal was like a big, fat snake.*

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## **What Is the Fourth Trimester and How Did It Become Missing?**

In this story, each man described a *part* of the elephant. Yet, he was so sure his view was the whole truth, he didn’t consider the possibility that there was another explanation that could account for all the different observations.

Similarly, wise men and women trying to solve the mystery of colic have focused on single bits of truth. Some heard grunting and thought gas was the culprit. Others saw a grimace and thought it was pain. Still others noticed that cuddling helped and assumed the infants were spoiled.

In recent years, colic has been blamed on pain, anxiety, immaturity, and temperament. Yet, while each is a piece of the puzzle, colic can only be understood by viewing all the pieces together. Only then does it become clear that the popular colic theories are linked

by one previously overlooked concept: the missing fourth trimester.

Your baby's nine months—or three trimesters—inside you is a time of unbelievably complex development. Nevertheless, it takes most babies *an additional* three months to “wake up” and become active partners in the relationship. This time between birth and the end of your baby's third month is what I call your baby's fourth trimester.

Now let's see what a baby's life is like before they're born, why they must come into the world before they're fully mature, and the ways great parents soothe their babies by imitating the womb for the first three months of their baby's life.

### **The First Three Trimesters: Your Fetus's Happy Life in Your Womb**

Did you think your baby was ready to be born after your nine months of pregnancy? God knows *you* were ready! But in many ways, your baby wasn't. Newborns can't smile, coo, or even suck their fingers. At birth, they're really still fetuses and for the next three months they want little more than to be carried, cuddled, and made to feel like they're still within the womb.

However, in order to mimic the sensations he enjoyed so much in your uterus, you need to know what it was like in there. Let's backtrack to the time when your fetus was still in the womb and see life through his eyes. Imagine you can look inside your pregnant uterus. What do you see? Just inside the muscular walls, silky membranes waft in a pool of tropical amniotic waters. Over there is your pulsating placenta; like a twenty-four-hour diner, it serves your fetus a constant feast of food and oxygen.

At the center, in the place of honor, is your precious baby. He's protected from hunger, germs, cold winds, mean animals, and rambunctious siblings by the velvet-soft walls of your womb. He looks part-astronaut—part-merman as he floats weightlessly in the golden fluid. Over these nine months, your fetus develops at lightning speed. His brain adds two hundred fifty thousand nerve cells a minute, and his body grows one billion times in weight and infinitely in complexity.

Let's zoom in on your baby's last month of life inside you. It's getting really tight in there. Like a little yoga expert, your fetus is nestled in, folded and secure. However, contrary to popular myth his cozy room is neither quiet nor still. It's jiggly (imagine your baby bouncing around when you hustle down the stairs) and loud (the blood whooshes through your arteries, creating a rhythmic din noisier than a vacuum cleaner).

Amazingly, all this commotion doesn't upset him. Rather, he finds it soothing. That's why unborn babies stay calm during the day but become restless in the still of the night. It's an ideal life in there—so why do babies pack up and pop out after just nine months, when they're still so immature?

## **The Great Eviction: Speculations on Why Our Babies Can't Stay in the Womb for a Fourth Trimester**

*Upon thee I was cast out from the womb.*

Psalms 22:10

During the past century, archaeologists have pieced together a clearer picture of how humans evolved over the past five million years. They have studied such issues as why we switched from knuckle-walking to running upright and when we began using language and

tools. However, what has not been fully appreciated until now is that over millions of years evolutionary changes gradually forced our ancestral mothers to deliver babies who were more and more immature. I believe that eventually, prehistoric human mothers had to *evict* their newborns three months early because their brains got so big!

In the very distant past, our ancestors likely had tiny-headed babies who didn't need to be evicted early from the womb. However, a few million years ago, our babies began going down a new branch of the evolutionary tree—the branch of supersmart people with big-brained babies. Pregnant mothers began stuffing new talents into their unborn babies' brains, filling them up like Christmas stockings. Eventually, their heads must have gotten so large that they began to get stuck during birth.

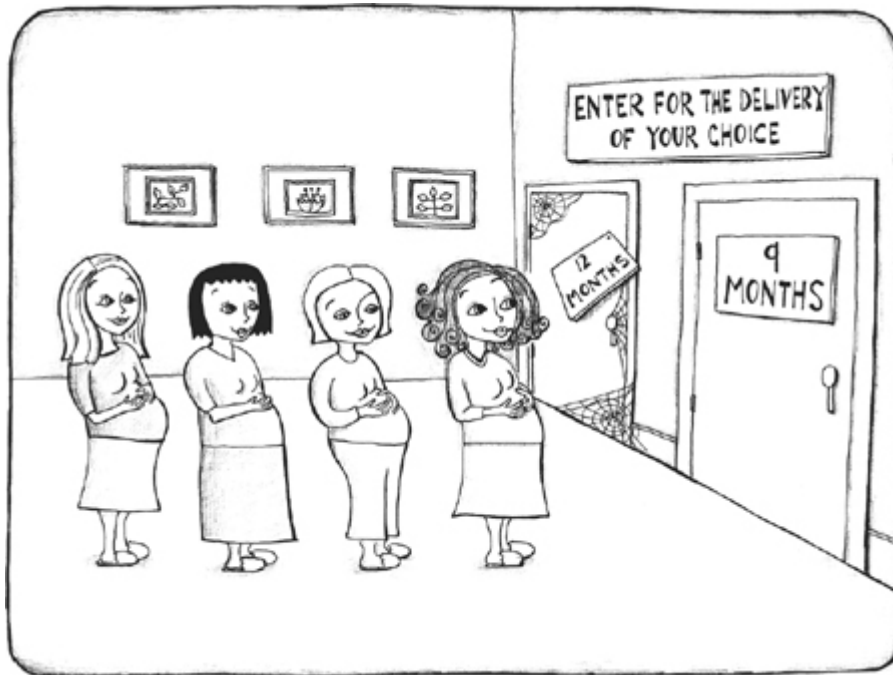
Perhaps that would have ended the evolution of our big brains, but four adaptations occurred that allowed our babies' brains to continue growing:

1. Our fetuses began to develop no-frills brains, containing only the most basic reflexes and skills needed to survive after birth (like sucking, pooping, and keeping the heart beating).
2. An ultrasleek head design slowly evolved to keep the big brain from getting wedged in the birth canal. On the outside it had slippery skin, squishable ears, and a tiny chin and nose. On the inside it had a compressible brain and a soft skull that could elongate and form itself into a narrower, easier to deliver cone shape.
3. Their big heads began to rotate as they exited the womb. (You've probably noticed it's easier to get a tight cork out of a bottle if you twist it as you pull it out.)

These three modifications helped tremendously. However, the crowning change that allowed the

continued growth of our babies' brains was the fourth change—"eviction."

4. I believe that over hundreds of thousands of years, big-brained babies were less likely to get stuck in the birth canal—and more likely to survive—if they were born a little prematurely. In other words, if they were evicted.



Today, mothers give birth to their babies about three months before they're fully mature in order to guarantee a safe delivery.

However, as any mother can tell you, even with all these adaptations, giving birth is still a very tight squeeze. At eleven and a half centimeters across, our fetuses' heads have to compress quite a bit to get pushed through a ten centimeter, fully dilated cervix. No wonder midwives call the cervix at delivery the "ring of fire"!

Childbirth has always been a hazardous business occasionally putting both children and mothers in mortal peril. That's why, through the ages, many societies have honored childbirth as a heroic act. The Aztecs believed women who died giving birth entered

the highest level of heaven, alongside courageous warriors who lost their lives in battle.

Imagine giving birth to a baby half the height or weight of an adult. Of course, a three-foot-long, eighty-pound newborn would be ridiculous. Now imagine giving birth to a baby with a head half the size of an adult's. That sounds even more absurd, but the fact is that such a head would be *small* for a new baby. At birth, our babies' noggins are almost two-thirds as big around as an adult head. (Ouch!)



Early eviction lessened that risk and was made possible by the ability of prehistoric parents to protect their immature babies. Thanks to their upright posture and highly developed manual dexterity, early humans could walk while carrying their infants to keep them warm and cuddled. And our ancestors used their hands for more than holding. They created warm clothing and slinglike carriers that mimicked the security of the womb.

The hard work of imitating the uterus was the price our Stone Age relatives accepted in exchange for having safer early deliveries. However, in recent centuries, many parents have tried to wiggle out of this commitment to their babies.

They still wanted their babies to have big smart brains and be born early, but they didn't want to feed them so frequently or carry them around all day. Some misguided experts even insisted that newborns should be expected to sleep through the night and calm their own crying. Like kangaroos refusing their babies' entrance to the pouch, parents who subscribed to these theories denied what mothers and fathers for hundreds



of thousands of years had promised to give their new infants.

## Why Your Baby Wants (and Needs) a Fourth Trimester

*The baby, assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin, and intestines at once, feels it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion.*

William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1890

When you bring your soft, dimpled newborn home from the hospital, you may think your peaceful nursery is perfectly suited for his cherubic body and temperament, but that's not how your baby sees it. To him, it's a disorienting world—part Las Vegas casino, part dark closet!

His senses are bombarded by new experiences. From outside, he's assaulted by a jumble of lights, colors, and textures. From inside, he's flooded with waves of powerful new feelings like gas, hunger, and thirst. Yet, at the same time, the stillness of the room envelops him like a closet, devoid of the rhythms that were his constant comfort and companion for the past nine months. Imagine how strange the quiet of a hospital room must be to your baby after the loud, quadraphonic shhhh of the womb. No wonder babies look around as if they're thinking, *This just can't be real!*

Most infants can deal with these changes without a hitch. However, some babies can't. They need to be held, rocked, and suckled for large chunks of the day. These sensations duplicate the womb and form the basis of every infant-soothing method ever invented. This fourth-trimester experience calms babies *not* because they're spoiled and *not* because it tricks them into thinking they're back home, but because it triggers a

powerful response inside our babies' brains that turns off their crying—the calming reflex.

The fourth trimester is the birthday present babies really hope their parents will give them.

### **A “Womb with a View”: A Parent’s Experience of the Fourth Trimester**

*When the baby comes out, the true umbilical cord is cut forever ... yet the baby is still, in that second, a fetus ... just a fetus one second older.*

Peter Farb, *Humankind*

What an unforgettable moment the first time you see and touch your new baby. His sweet smell, open gaze, and downy soft skin capture your heart. But newborns can also be intimidating. Their floppy necks, irregular breathing, and tiny tremors make them seem so helpless.

This vulnerability is why I believe that a fourth-trimester period of imitating the womb is exactly what new babies need.

This need was probably obvious to you when your baby’s sobs melted away the moment he was placed on your chest. Your ears and his cry will now become a virtual umbilical cord, an attachment, like an invisible bungee cord that stretches to allow you to walk around the house—until a sharp yelp yanks you back to his side.

*“When Stuart came out of me, he didn’t seem ready to be in the world,” said Mary, a mother in my practice. “He required almost constant holding and rocking to keep him content. My husband, Phil, and I joked that he was like a*

*squishy cupcake that needed to go back in the oven for a little more baking.”*



In effect, what Mary and Phil realized was that Stuart needed a few more months of “womb service.” But it’s not so easy being a walking uterus! Bewildered new moms often observe that they’re still in their pajamas at five P.M. Within days of delivery, you’ll discover that it takes all day long to accomplish what your uncomplaining uterus did twenty-four hours a day for the past nine months.

From your baby’s point of view, being in your arms for twelve hours a day is a disappointment, if not a rip-off. If he could talk, your infant would probably state with pouty disdain, “Hey, what’s the big deal? You used to hold me twenty-four hours a day and feed me every single second!”

Unfortunately, many parents in our culture have been convinced that it’s wrong to cuddle their babies so much. They have been misled into believing that their main job is to teach and educate their newborn. They treat their young child more like a brain to train than a spirit they are privileged to nurture. Other cultures consider an infant’s needs differently. In Bali, babies are never allowed to sleep alone and they barely leave the arms of an adult for the first hundred and five days! The parents bury the placenta and nourish the burial spot with daily offerings of rice and vegetables. On the hundred and fifth day, a holy ceremony welcomes babies as new members of the human race; up until that point they still belong to the gods. In this ritual, babies receive their first sip of water, and an egg is rubbed on their arms and legs to give them vitality and strength. Only then are their feet finally allowed to touch Mother Earth.

It's no coincidence that in cultures like Bali, where colic is virtually nonexistent, parents give babies much more of a fourth-trimester experience than we do.

## **The Great American Myth: Young Babies Can Be Spoiled**

*Hide not thine ear to my cry.*

Lamentations 3:56

There are at least two things all parents know for sure:

1. There are a lot of spoiled kids out there.
2. You don't want your child to become one of them.

We all want to raise respectful children, and some experts warn us that being too attentive to our baby's cries will accidentally teach them to be manipulative. Can promptly answering your newborn's cries with holding, rocking, and sucking start a bad habit? Can cuddling your baby backfire on you?

Fortunately, the answers to these two questions are ... no and no. It's impossible to spoil your baby during the first four months of life. Remember, he experienced a dramatic drop-off in holding time as soon as he was born. One mother told me, "I imagine new babies feel like someone who enters a detox program and has to go cold turkey from snuggling. No wonder they cry!"

Today's mothers and fathers aren't the only ones who have worried about turning their children into whining brats. In the early twentieth century, American parents were told not to mollycoddle their babies for fear of turning them into undisciplined little nuisances. The U.S. Children's Bureau issued a stern warning to a mother not to carry her infant too much, lest he become

“a spoiled, fussy baby, and a household tyrant whose continual demands make a slave of a mother.”

In 1972, however, Sylvia Bell and Mary Ainsworth of Johns Hopkins University shook those old ideas about spoiling to their very foundations. They found that babies whose mothers responded quickly to their cries during the first months of life *did not* become spoiled. On the contrary, infants whose needs were met rapidly and with tenderness fussed less and were more poised and patient when tested at one year of age! As Ainsworth and Bell proved—and most parents know in their hearts—the more you love and cuddle your little baby, the more confident and resilient he becomes.

Despite this evidence, many new parents still have nagging doubts about whether they’re holding their babies too much. Although our natural parental instinct is to calm our baby as quickly as possible, the repeated warning, “Don’t spoil your baby,” has been drummed into our heads so much it makes us question ourselves.

Now, I admit it’s easy to feel manipulated when your baby wakes up and screams every time you gently lower him into the crib. But letting him cry is no more likely to teach him to be independent than leaving him in a dirty diaper is likely to toughen his skin. (It’s reassuring to know that traditionally many Native American parents held their babies all day and suckled them all night and still those babies grew up to be brave, respectful, and self-sufficient.)

Don’t misunderstand me. I’m not arguing against establishing a flexible feeding/sleeping schedule for your baby. (See the discussion of scheduling in [Chapter 15](#).) Some babies and families find scheduling very helpful. However, trying to mold passionate babies who have irregular sleeping and eating patterns into a fixed schedule usually leads to frustration for everyone.

As the Bible says, “To everything there is a season.” I believe disciplining is a very important parental task—but not with young infants. The beginning of the fourth month is the earliest time concerns about accidentally spoiling your baby become an issue. However, before four months, you have a job that is *one hundred times* more important than preventing spoiling; your job is nurturing your baby’s confidence in you and the world.

Building our child’s faith is one of parenting’s greatest privileges and responsibilities. I’m convinced that a rapid and sympathetic response to our baby’s cries is the foundation of strong family values, not the undermining of them. When your loving arms cuddle your baby or warm milk satisfies him, you’re telling him, “Don’t worry. I’ll always be there when you need me.” This begins your baby’s trust in you and becomes the bedrock of his faith in those closest to him.

Please treasure these amazing first months with your sweet, kissable baby. There will be plenty of time later on for training and disciplining, but now is the time for cuddling. Enjoy this time because, as any experienced parent will tell you, it will be over faster than you could imagine.

## **The Missing Fourth Trimester: The True Basis of Colic**

*There’s no place like home.*

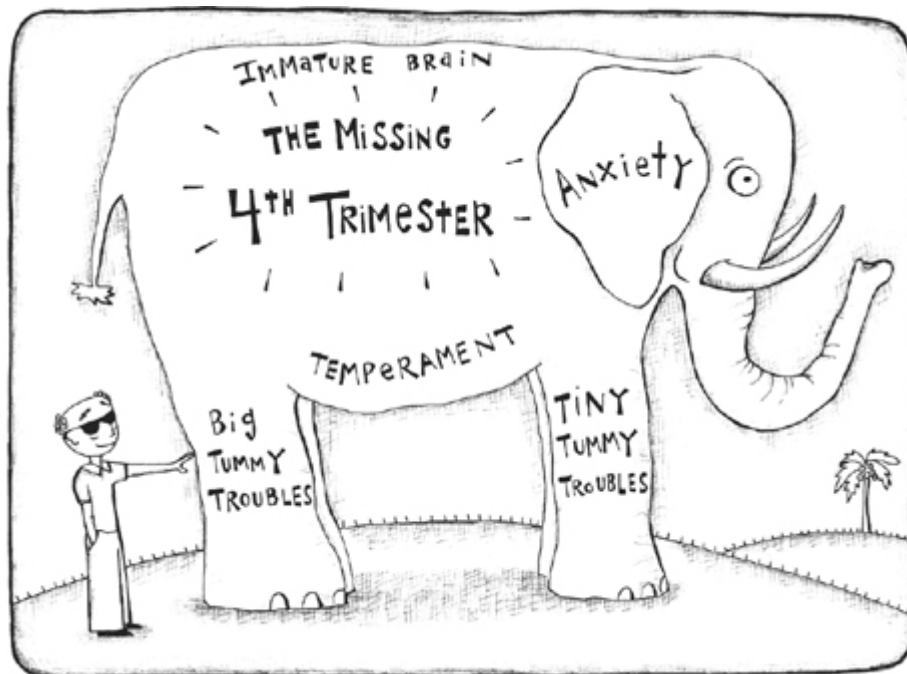
Dorothy, *The Wizard of Oz*

After centuries of myths and confusion, I am convinced that the true basis of colic is simply that fussy babies need the sensations of the womb to help stay calm.

You might ask, “If all babies get evicted early and need a fourth trimester, why don’t they all get colic?”

The reason is simple: Most babies can handle being born too soon because they have mild temperaments and good self-calming abilities. Thus, despite being exposed to waves of overstimulation and understimulation, they can soothe themselves.

Colicky babies, on the other hand, have big trouble with self-calming. They live through the same experiences as calm babies, but rather than taking them in stride, they overreact dramatically. These infants desperately need the sensations of the womb to help them turn on their calming reflex.



### **The Colic Elephant: A Blend of the Fourth Trimester and Other Colic Theories**

As we've discussed, experts have blamed colic on tummy troubles, anxiety, immaturity, and temperament. But, like the blind men and the elephant, these experts perceived only parts of the problem and overlooked the all-important common link—the missing fourth trimester.

The missing fourth trimester makes babies vulnerable to the unstable qualities of their individual natures (brain immaturity and challenging temperament) and to small daily upsets.

This is how I believe all the colic theories relate to one another:

**1. Brain Immaturity**—This inborn characteristic can greatly increase a baby's need for a fourth trimester. Fussy infants have such poor state control and self-calming ability that even small amounts of over- or understimulation can set off a chain reaction of escalating flailing and loud cries.

**2. Temperament**—A baby whose nature is extremely sensitive and/or intense often overreacts to small disturbances and needs a great deal of help turning on the calming reflex.

**3. Big Tummy Troubles**—Pain from food allergies or acid reflux can occasionally make a baby frantic. But these problems are much more distressing in babies whose self-calming ability is immature or who have challenging temperaments.

**4. Tiny Tummy Troubles**—Constipation and gas can spark discomfort that provokes crying in babies with brain immaturity and/or a challenging temperament.

**5. Maternal Anxiety**—Fussy babies sometimes cry more when their anxious mothers handle them too gently or jump chaotically from one ineffective soothing attempt to another.

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## Putting the Theory of Fourth Trimester to the Test

*There's a reason behind everything in nature.*

Aristotle



For a colic theory to be proven correct it must fit all ten colic clues. After long and exhaustive study, I have found the only theory that explains all ten and solves the centuries-old mystery of colic is the concept of the missing fourth trimester:

***1. Colicky crying usually starts at two weeks, peaks at six weeks, and ends by three to four months of age.***

For the first two weeks of life, newborns have little alert time. This helps keep them from getting over- or understimulated and thus delays the onset of colic.

After two weeks, babies start staying alert for longer periods. Mellow babies can easily handle the stimulation this increased alertness exposes them to. However, babies who are poor self-calmers or who have challenging temperaments may begin to get overwhelmed. Thus the crying starts.

By six weeks, these vulnerable babies are very alert and very overstimulated, yet they still have poor state control. They launch into bouts of screaming that can be soothed only by masterful imitations of the womb.

By three to four months, colic disappears. Now babies are skilled at cooing, laughing, sucking their fingers, and other self-calming tricks. They are mature enough to deal with the world without the constant holding, rocking, and shushing of the fourth trimester. At last, they are ready to be born!

***2. Premies are no more likely to have colic than full-term babies. (And their colic doesn't start until they are about two weeks past their due date.)***

Preemies are good sleepers, even in noisy intensive-care units. Their immature brains have mastered the sleep state, but not the complex state of alertness. This near absence of alert time fools preemies into thinking they're still in the womb. They don't notice they're missing the fourth trimester until they're past their due date and become more awake and alert.

***3. Colicky babies have twisted faces and piercing wails. Often, their cries come in waves (like cramps) and stop abruptly.***

Your baby's colicky cries may sound identical to the wails he makes when he's in pain. However, many babies overreact to trivial experiences (loud noises, burps, etc.) with pain-like screams. They're like smoke alarms that go off even though only a little piece of toast burned.

The fact that these shrieks can be quieted by car rides or breast-feeding proves these babies aren't in agony. What they're really suffering from is the loss of their fourth trimester.

***4. Their screams frequently begin during or just after a feeding.***

Babies who cry during or right after meals are usually overreacting to their gastro-colic reflex, the intestinal squeezing that occurs when the stomach fills with food. Most babies have no problem with this reflex, but for colicky babies, at the end of the day (and at the end of their patience), this sensation may be the last straw that launches them into hysterics.

That this distress vanishes after three months (while the gastro-colic reflex is still going strong) further supports the notion that this

crampy feeling triggers screaming only in babies who need the calming sensations of the fourth trimester.

***5. They often double up, grunt, strain, and seem relieved by passing gas or pooping.***

All babies experience intestinal gas; however, this sensation triggers screaming only in infants with sensitive and/or intense temperaments. Even those babies usually stop crying when rescued by the calming rhythms of the womb.

***6. Colic is often much worse in the evening (the “witching hour”).***

Just as some harried moms crumble at the end of their toddlers’ birthday parties, some young babies unravel after a full day’s roller-coaster ride of activity. Without the fourth trimester to settle them down, these vulnerable infants bubble over each evening like pots of hot pudding.

***7. Colic is as likely to occur with a couple’s fifth baby as with their first.***

Each new baby represents a reshuffling of their parents’ personal deck of genetic traits. That’s why a couple’s first four babies may be calm and easy to keep happy, while their fifth may inherit traits like sensitivity or poor state control that make him fall apart unless he’s held and rocked all day.

These colicky babies require the sanctuary of the fourth trimester to help them cope until they’re mature enough to soothe themselves.

***8. Colicky crying often improves with rocking, holding, shhhing, and gentle abdominal pressure.***

This clue is compelling proof that the true cause of uncontrollable crying in babies is their

need for a few more months in the uterus. That's because each of these calming tricks imitates the womb, and after three months they're no longer required.

***9. Babies are healthy and happy between crying bouts.***

If the only reason babies have colic is because they're born too soon, it's logical to expect immature infants to be healthy and happy until something pushes them over the edge.

***10. In many cultures around the world, babies never get colic.***

The babies of the villagers of Bali, the bushmen of Botswana, and the Manali tribesmen of the Himalayan foothills all share one trait: these babies never suffer from persistent crying. When anthropologists study "colic-free" cultures, they find that the mothers in those societies closely follow the fourth-trimester plan. Women hold their infants almost twenty-four hours a day, feed them frequently, and constantly rock and jiggle them. For several months, these moms give their babies an almost constant imitation of the womb.

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Only the missing fourth trimester explains *all* the colic clues. However, if soothing a screaming baby is just a matter of imitating the womb with some wrapping and rocking, why do these approaches so often fail to calm colicky kids? The reason is quite simple: Parents in our culture are rarely taught how to do them correctly.

Thankfully, it's not too late to learn, and in the next part of this book, I will share with you detailed

descriptions of the world's most effective methods for  
calming crying babies.

## PART TWO



Learning the Ancient Art  
of Soothing a Baby

6



The Woman Who Mistook  
Her Baby for a Horse:  
Modern Parents  
Who Forgot About the  
Fourth Trimester

**Main Points:**

- Unlike newborn horses, our babies are not up and running on the first day of life; they need a fourth trimester to finish getting ready for the world
- The striking differences between four-day-old and four-month-old babies
- Ancient lessons you can learn from some mothers whose children never get colic



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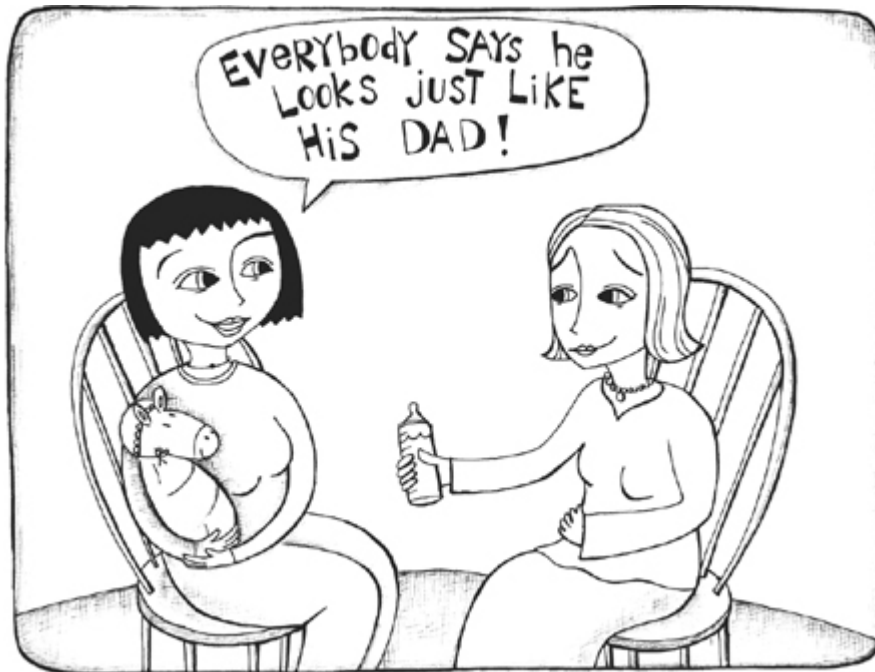
***That which was done is that which shall  
be done; and there is no new thing under  
the sun.***

**Ecclesiastes 1:9**

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Picture a crisp December day, gleaming like a jewel. Yesterday your life changed with the birth of a beautiful baby boy. Now, as the nurse wheels his bassinet into

your room, your son lifts his fragile head, slowly turns to face you, and flashes a big grin! Then he vaults into your arms and, with a laugh that makes your heart melt, proclaims, “You’re the best mom in the whole world!”



Of course, no one expects their baby to walk and talk right after birth. However, many modern parents are unprepared for how dependent and vulnerable newborns truly are. They expect their babies to be more mature, sort of like baby horses! Within minutes of birth, newborn horses can stand, walk, and even run. A baby horse’s survival depends on these crucial abilities to keep away from hungry predators. By comparison, our new babies are still immature little fetuses.

### **The Surprising Truth: The Differences Between Four-Day-Old and Four-Month-Old Babies**

*After the first month, I wanted some recognition that my twin girls could distinguish me from the woman down the block. When Audrey was two months old,*

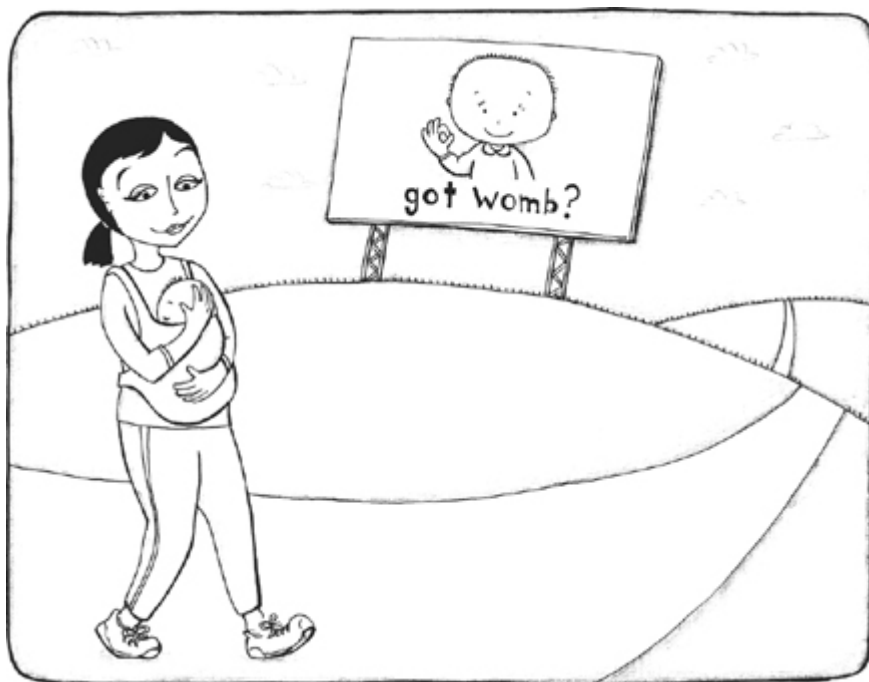


*she peed on me, then suddenly smiled. I know it sounds crazy but I was ecstatic!*

Debra, mother of Audrey and Sophia

When I teach prenatal classes I often ask the parents-to-be to describe the differences between four-day-old and four-month-old babies. Those without much baby experience usually answer that a four-month-old is like a newborn, except bigger and more alert.

In fact, there are *gigantic* differences between these two ages. As extraordinary as newborns are, their ability to interact with the world is extremely limited. While a four-day-old can't even coo or turn around to see who's speaking, a four-month-old's delicious smile and glowing eyes reach out like a personal invitation to join her on her amazing life journey.



As noted earlier, baby horses depend on brawn for their survival, so their developed bodies are as big as they can possibly be when they pop out of their mothers' wombs. By contrast, our babies' survival depends on their brains. For that reason, at birth, their heads are as big as they could possibly be and not get stuck. Then amazingly, during the first three months, a

baby's brain balloons an additional twenty percent in size. Accompanying that growth is an explosive advance in her brain's speed, organization, and complexity. No wonder parents notice their babies suddenly "wake up" as the fourth trimester draws to a close.

Our ancient relatives realized how immature their babies were at birth. Over the centuries, they discovered that the most effective way of caring for newborns during the early months of infancy was by imitating their previous home—the uterus!

### ***Sensory Abilities***

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#### **Four-Day-Old Babies**

- Can focus only on objects eight to twelve inches away.
- Love looking at light/dark contrasts and designs.

#### **Four-Month-Old Babies**

- Easily focus on large objects across a room.
- Can turn their head to find where a sound comes from.

### ***Social Abilities***

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#### **Four-Day-Old Babies**

- More attracted to the sound of the human voice than to music or noise. Can recognize their mother's voice from the muffled sounds they heard in the womb.
- Prefer looking at a person's face rather than an object. May be able to imitate facial expressions like a mom opening her mouth or sticking out her tongue.

#### **Four-Month-Old Babies**

- Patiently wait for you to stop talking before they take a turn in the conversation by releasing a symphony of coos, grunts, and giggles.
- Enamored with their parents' faces and brighten visibly when they enter the room. Smile and coo to make their parents smile and may become upset when ignored.

### ***Motor Abilities***

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#### **Four-Day-Old Babies**

- Often get crossed eyes. Can follow only slowly moving objects and have very jerky eye movements.
- Hard for them to get their fingers to their mouths and *very* hard for them to keep them there for more than thirty seconds.

#### **Four-Month-Old Babies**

- No longer get crossed eyes. Can now follow objects swiftly and smoothly as they move around the room.
- Much more able to reach out and touch objects. Easily get their fingers to their mouths and keep them there for many minutes.

### ***Physiological Characteristics***

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#### **Four-Day-Old Babies**

- Hands and feet are blue much of the time.
- Bodies occasionally get jolted by hiccups, jittery tremors, and irregular breathing.
- Have little ability to control body movements.

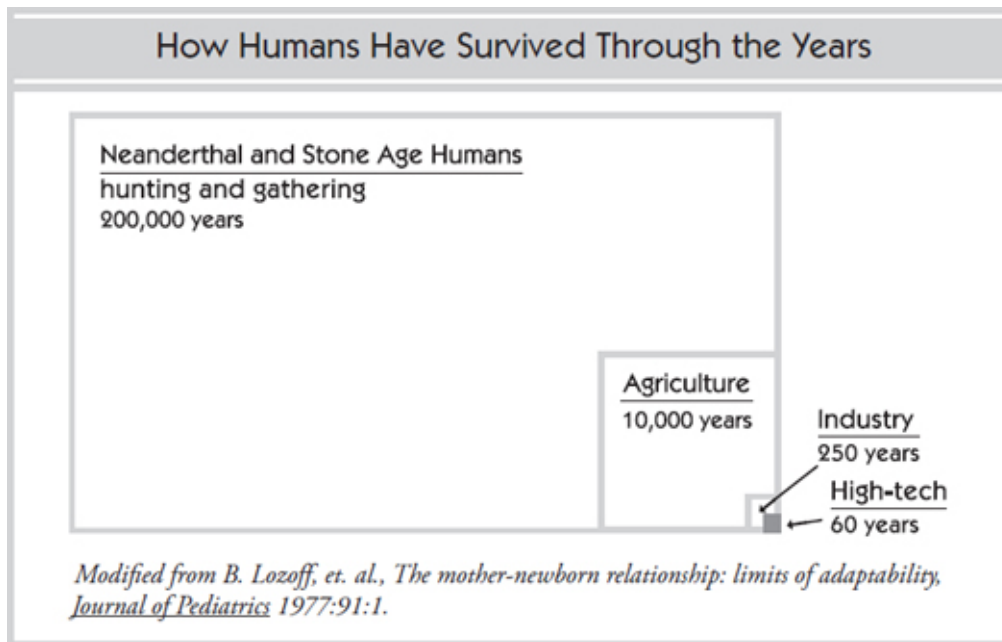
#### **Four-Month-Old Babies**

- No longer get blue hands and feet unless cold.
- Rarely hiccup, never tremor, and breathing is smooth and regular.
- Much better at controlling body movements. Can roll over, spin around, and lift head high off the mattress.

### **Out with the New, In with the Old: Rediscovering the Stone Age Wisdom of Imitating the Fourth Trimester**

Do you remember how in *Star Wars* Luke Skywalker achieved victory by using the long forgotten powers of the Force? Well, over the last fifty years, our society has also advanced by returning to ancient wisdom such as getting more exercise, protecting the environment, and eating food grown with less pesticides. Technology is a blessing, but today we are relearning the value of living in harmony with nature; it's just common sense!

That's why there's logic in examining the past to understand ourselves better. Although our clothes and music are contemporary, our biology is clearly prehistoric, and that's especially true for babies.



In the diagram above, we occupy the tiny bottom right corner, the technological age of man. Yet our babies are far from high-tech. In most respects, they haven't changed a hair in the past thirty thousand years! That's why, although most of us would never survive if suddenly sent back to the Stone Age, our infants would feel right at home. Babies expect to be born into a cave family, and they expect us to be as experienced at handling them as our Stone Age cousins were. Unfortunately, most of us are a little rusty—if not completely in the dark—when it comes to those prehistoric parenting tips. What valuable baby-care tricks could you learn if an experienced cave mother lived next door to you?

While we can't go back in time, we can get an idea of some calming techniques cave moms might have used by looking through a virtual "window" to the past, the study of primitive tribes living around the world today.

Please don't be fooled by the word *primitive*. Although it conjures up images of backward people, over the past eighty years research has shown that many so-called primitive peoples possess wisdom of the natural world about which we are ignorant. Some know the medicinal

power of rare plants, some know how to find water in the desert—and some even know how to prevent colic!

## Past Perfect: Lessons from the !Kung San

For hundreds if not thousands of years, the !Kung San (or African bushmen) have lived in isolation on the plains of the Kalahari Desert. Over the past forty years, however, the !Kung have graciously allowed scientists to observe their lives, including how they care for babies.

I've read reports of their newborn care with great interest because !Kung infants hardly ever cry. It's not that they never cry—it's that they never CRY! (And I know you understand that distinction.) While !Kung infants get upset as often as our babies do, their parents are so skilled at soothing them that the average fussy bout lasts only sixteen seconds, and more than ninety percent of their crying jags end in under a minute.

What's their secret? What ancient wisdom do the !Kung know that our culture has forgotten? I believe three facts account for much of this tribe's stunning success:

- !Kung mothers hold their babies almost twenty-four hours a day.
- !Kung mothers breast-feed their babies around the clock.
- !Kung parents usually respond to their babies' cries within ten seconds.

!Kung mothers carry their babies all day long in a leather sling and sleep next to them at night. This closeness makes it easy to soothe any fussiness the instant it starts.

In addition to holding and cuddling, the !Kung calm their babies by giving them quick little feedings on the

breast—up to one hundred times a day! We in the West might think such snacking would spoil a baby, but that's not the case. Despite the lavish and immediate attention paid to their crying, !Kung children grow up to be happy, independent, and self-sufficient.

Now, don't worry. I'm not suggesting we adopt all the !Kung ways; they clearly don't fit our busy lives. However, I am suggesting that we study these highly successful parents to learn which of their solutions could be easily adopted by Western moms and dads.

I believe the biggest secret the !Kung know is that all their baby soothing methods share a common thread: They imitate the uterus and provide babies the comfort of the fourth trimester.

Compared to our infants, !Kung babies may be deprived of many material possessions, but compared to the !Kung, our babies are deprived of an important "maternal" possession—long hours of being in our arms. While !Kung mothers are with their infants almost nonstop, studies in the United States show that we leave our young babies alone for up to sixteen hours a day. I'm afraid that for many newborns, this abrupt transfer from cozy womb to empty room ends up making them terribly upset.

For the first few months of life, we need to treat our babies the way our ancient ancestors treated theirs thousands of years ago, with the reassuring rhythms of the fourth trimester. In other words, we should no longer mistake our newborns for little horses. Rather, we should treat them like little kangaroos! Kangaroos "know" their babies need a few more months of TLC before they're ready to get hoppin', so they welcome them into the pouch the moment they're born. Likewise, we need to offer our sweet newborns "pouches" of prolonged holding, rocking, shushing, and warmth. If you do this you'll be amazed. Once you master the skill

of imitating the womb, you'll be able to do *exactly* what !Kung moms do: settle your baby's cries in minutes!

## **Science and the Fourth Trimester: Research Points the Way ... Back**

Imitating the womb to calm colic isn't the only ancient wisdom that has been ignored by our culture. Over the past fifty years, researchers have carefully proved the benefits of another prehistoric skill, breast-feeding, which was rescued from the brink.

### **Breast-Feeding Makes a Comeback**

Within days of your baby's birth, your breast milk appears, as if by magic. It's exactly what the doctor, and your baby, ordered. This sweet, nutritious, easy-to-digest food gives your newborn an almost constant flow of nourishment, just like she had inside the womb.

Early in the 1900s, after millions of years of being developed to perfection, mother's milk was suddenly abandoned in many parts of the world. It was nudged aside by mass-produced artificial formula that was promoted as equally healthful and more hygienic than mother's milk. Many women were convinced that scientists knew better than nature. They fed their babies formula, mistakenly believing that the product of a chemist was better than the old-fashioned product of their own breasts.

Mothers asked their doctors for medicine to dry up their breast milk and to recommend their favorite commercial formula. By the 1950s, breast-feeding became so rare in America that the women who tried it were considered radical or eccentric.



Moms who still wanted to breast-feed often failed because they had no personal experience and little professional guidance. As unbelievable as it sounds, within two generations our culture almost lost this basic human ability that had sustained our species for millions of years! Fortunately, many committed women (and men) were appalled by this lack of support. Through their great efforts, groups like La Leche League were launched and specialists were trained to help new mothers rediscover this wonderful skill.

In recent years, public interest in breast-feeding has dramatically rebounded, spurred by an avalanche of research revealing the shortcomings of formula and the benefits of breast milk. Scientific studies show that breast milk helps build babies' brains, boosts their immunity, protects them against diabetes, and lowers a woman's risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Today, breast milk is so universally accepted as the preferred food for babies that even formula companies recommend women use their product only if they can't breast-feed.

I'm thankful we have excellent artificial formulas to feed babies who are unable to feed at their mother's breast. However, all medical groups agree, if you can do it, "breast is best" for feeding your baby.

7



Your Baby's *Off* Switch  
for Crying: The Calming  
Reflex and the 5 "S's"

**Main Points:**

- What reflexes are, and the many built-in behaviors and skills all babies are born with
- The Calming Reflex: Your baby's *Off* switch for crying
- The 5 "S's": How to turn on your baby's calming reflex
- Vigor: The essential tip for calming your little cave baby
- Three reasons your baby may take time to respond to the 5 "S's"

Most people who have taken care of a fussy infant wonder at some point: "Wouldn't it be great if babies came with a secret button to turn off their crying?"

Now don't laugh, it's not such a wild idea. Since babies wail as loud as car alarms, shouldn't there also be a way to turn their "alarm" off?

Well, the good news is, there is! I call this *Off* switch the calming reflex, and, as you will soon learn, it works almost as quickly as the car-alarm reset button on your key chain. But first, let's review what reflexes are and how they work.

## **Reflexes: Incredible Things Your Baby Knows How to Do Automatically**

Reflexes are your body's way of reacting automatically, such as blinking before something hits you in the eye or shooting out your arms when you're knocked off balance. Like a good buddy, reflexes reassure the brain: "Don't even think about it. I'll handle everything."

All reflexes have the following characteristics:

- *They are reliable.* Every time the doctor hits your knee to test your reflex, your foot jumps out. It can be done five hundred times in a row and always works.
- *They are automatic.* Reflexes work even when you're asleep.
- *They require a very specific triggering action.* The knee reflex is automatic and reliable *only* when it's done in exactly the right way. It won't work if your knee is hit too softly or an inch too high or low.

Could you imagine having to teach your baby how to suck or poop? Thankfully you don't have to, because these and more than seventy other automatic reflexes are packed away in your newborn's compact brain.

Most of these reflexes help your baby during the first months after birth. The rest are either fetal reflexes (useful only during his life inside you), leftover reflexes

(valuable to our ancestors millions of years ago, but now just passed from generation to generation, like our intestinal appendix), or mystery reflexes (whose purposes are unknown).

Here's a list of some common reflexes you'll probably see your baby performing:

- 1. Keeping-safe reflexes:** These protective reflexes help prevent accidental injury. (Most are so important they continue to work in adults.)

**Crying**—Crying, the “mother” of all baby safety reflexes, can be triggered by any sudden distress and is extraordinarily effective at getting your attention.

**Sneezing**—Your newborn's sneeze usually isn't a sign of a cold; rather, it's a response to irritating dust and mucus his body is trying to rid from the nose.

- 2. Getting-a-meal reflexes:** Even though no food ever passed your fetus's lips, from the moment of birth he was ready to receive and enjoy your milk.

**Rooting**—When you touch your baby's cheek or lips, his face will turn toward the touch and his mouth will open and then shut. This reflex helps your baby locate and grasp your nipple, even in the dark. But don't worry if you stroke your baby's cheek and he doesn't respond. This is a smart reflex: It's not there until he's hungry. That's why the rooting reflex is a great way for you to tell if your baby is crying because he wants to eat. If you touch his mouth and he doesn't root, he probably is not crying for food.

**Sucking**—Your baby practiced this complex reflex even before birth. Many

parents have ultrasound photos of their little cuties sucking their thumbs, weeks before delivery.

- 3. Fetal and leftover reflexes:** These reflexes either help our fetuses before they are born or were useful only to our distant animal ancestors.

**Step**—Holding your baby upright, let the sole of one foot press onto a flat surface. In a few seconds, that leg will straighten and the other will bend. This reflex helps babies move around a little during the last months of pregnancy, thus helping to prevent pressure sores and getting the fetus into position for delivery.

**Grasping**—If you press your finger into the base of your baby's toes or fingers, he will grab on tightly, even when he's sleeping. This reflex is critically important for newborn apes! It helps them cling to their mother's fur while she's moving through the jungle. (Be careful. It works on dads with hairy chests too!)

**The Moro reflex**—This extremely important leftover reflex protected our ancient relatives carrying their babies through the trees. It's the "I'm falling" reflex activated the second your baby gets startled (by a jolt, loud noise, or a dream).

The Moro reflex makes your baby's arms shoot out and around, as if he's trying to grab hold of you. This venerable response probably kept countless baby monkeys from falling out of their mother's arms. (Adults who fall asleep in a chair and whose heads suddenly drop back may also experience this reflex.)

As your baby matures his newborn reflexes will gradually get packed away and forgotten, like tattered old teddy bears. However, at the beginning of life, these invaluable responses are some of the best baby gifts a mother could ever hope for.

There is one more built-in, newborn response that parents in my practice think is the most wonderful reflex of all: the calming reflex.

### **The Calming Reflex: Nature's Automatic Shut-off Switch for a Baby's Crying**

I believe once our ancestors began living in villages and cities, they forgot that, since the Stone Age, babies were almost constantly jiggled and wiggled as their moms walked up and down the mountains. Sadly, many babies deprived of these comforting movements began to startle and cry at every disturbance. I'm afraid that in order to explain that crying, modern parents began to mistakenly think that babies were so fragile they could only tolerate *quiet* sounds and *gentle* motion.

This new attitude undermined their confidence in triggering the calming reflex, because as you are about to learn it *can be activated only by vigorous actions*—especially in very fussy babies. Gradually, this ancient calming tool was forgotten.

As you will recall, reflexes require specific triggers. The triggers for your baby's calming reflex are the sensations he felt in the uterus. It is my belief that this precious reflex came about *not* as a way of soothing upset infants but rather as a way of soothing upset *fetuses!*

This vital response saved countless numbers of mothers and unborn babies by keeping fetuses entranced

so that they wouldn't thrash around and kink their umbilical cords or get wedged into a position that made delivery impossible. How brilliant of Mother Nature to design this critical, lifesaving response to be automatically activated by the sensations fetuses are naturally surrounded by.

Not only are the rhythms of the uterus profoundly calming to babies, they're also comforting to adults. Think of how you're affected by hearing the ocean, rocking in a hammock, and cuddling in a warm bed. However, while we merely enjoy these sensations, our babies *need* them—and fussy babies need them desperately.

So if you've tried feeding, burping, and diaper changing and your baby is still yelling himself hoarse, it's time to try soothing him this "old" new way.

### **The Top Ten Ways You Can Imitate the Uterus**

1. Holding
2. Dancing
3. Rocking
4. Wrapping
5. White noise or singing
6. Car rides
7. Walks outside
8. Feeding
9. Pacifiers
10. Swings

This list includes just a few of the dozens of ways clever parents have invented to calm their infants. But what you know now is something that no mom or dad throughout history realized, that these tricks relax

newborns by switching on the ancient reflex that kept them in a protective, lifesaving trance when they were fetuses.

The most popular baby calming methods can be grouped into five basic categories: Swaddling, Side/Stomach position, Shhhing sounds, Swinging, and Sucking. I call these the 5 “S’s”; they are the qualities of the uterus that help activate the calming reflex. However, like all reflexes, even these great techniques only switch on the calming reflex if they’re done correctly.

### **The 5 “S’s”: Five Steps to Activate Your Baby’s Calming Reflex**

*There should be a law requiring that the 5 S’s be stamped onto every infant ID band in the hospital. For our frantic baby, they worked in seconds!*

Nancy, mother of two-month-old Natalie

In the early 1900s, baby experts taught new parents to do the following when their infant cried: 1) feed them, 2) burp them, 3) change the diaper, and 4) check for an open safety pin. Authorities proclaimed that when these didn’t work, babies had colic and there was nothing else a parent could do. Today, most doctors give similar recommendations.

But for parents of a frantic newborn, the nothing-you-can-do-but-wait advice is intolerable. *Few impulses are as powerful as a mother’s desire to calm her crying baby. This instinct is as ancient as parenting itself.* Yet, the frustrating reality is while parents instinctively *want* to calm their babies, knowing *how* to do it is anything but instinctive. It’s a skill. Luckily, it’s a skill that is fairly easy to learn.



Peter, a high-powered attorney, is the father of Emily and Ted. When his kids were born, Pete and his wife, Judy, had very little baby experience. So, after the birth of each child, I sat down and reviewed the concepts of the fourth trimester and the 5 “S’s.” Several years later, Peter wrote:



*It has been more than ten years since I was taught the 5 “S’s” as a way to quiet my crying babies. Even today, I like to share them with clients who bring their infants into my office. It’s great fun to see the amazed looks when a large, lumbering male like me happily collects their distraught baby and calms the delicate creature in seconds—with a vigorous swaddle, side, swing, shush, and suck. These simple techniques give any parent a true sense of accomplishment!*

The 5 “S’s” are the only tools you’ll need to soothe your fussy infant.

### **1. Swaddling: A Feeling of Pure “Wrap”ture**

Tight swaddling is the cornerstone of calming, the essential first step in soothing your fussy baby and keeping him soothed. That’s why traditional cultures from Turkey to Tulsa (the Native Americans, that is) use swaddling to keep their babies happy.

Wrapping makes your baby feel magically returned to the womb and satisfies his longing for the continuous touching and tight fit of your uterus. This “S” doesn’t actually trigger the calming reflex but it keeps your baby from flailing and helps him pay attention to the other “S’s,” which *do* activate the reflex.

Many irritable babies resist wrapping. However, it's a mistake to think this resistance means that your baby needs his hands free. Nothing could be further from the truth! Fussy young babies lack the coordination to control their arm flailing, so if their arms are unwrapped they may make themselves even more upset.

Here's how one grandmother learned the ancient tradition of swaddling and passed it along:

*My youngest sister was born when I was nearly ten years old. I remember my mother teaching me how to swaddle her snugly in a warm blanket. That year, mothering and bundling began for me, and they have continued, without interruption, into my sixtieth year!*

*When my grandchildren began to arrive, I faithfully taught my kids to wrap their babies very tightly in receiving blankets. My passion for swaddling often led to some good-humored discussion: "Watch out for Bubby and her bundling!" Yet somehow it always seemed to help.*



*The babies in our family, although beautiful, talented, and brilliant, share a fussy, high-maintenance profile, if only for the first two or three months. But swaddling has always been a big help. I can't tell you how many times I've seen it*

*change their faces from a scowl to serenity.*

Barbara, “Bubby” of Olivia, Thomas, Michael,  
Molly, and Sawyer

## **2. *Side/Stomach: Your Baby’s Feel-Good Position***

Swaddling stops your baby’s uncontrolled arm and leg acrobatics that can lead into frenzied crying. In a similar fashion, the side/stomach position stops an equally upsetting but invisible type of stimulation—the panicky feeling of falling!

Being dropped was such a serious threat to our ancient relatives that their babies developed a special alarm—the Moro reflex—that went off the moment they felt they were falling out of their mother’s arms.

Most babies are content to be on their backs if they’re in a good mood. However, when your baby is crying, putting him on his back may make him feel like he’s in a free fall. That in turn can set off his Moro, which starts him thrashing and screaming.

The side or stomach positions soothe your screaming newborn by instantly shutting off the Moro. That’s why these are the perfect feel-good positions for fussy babies. When it comes to putting your small one to sleep, however, the back is the safest position for all babies. Unless your doctor instructs you otherwise, *no baby should ever be put to sleep on his stomach.* (More on this in [Chapter 9](#).)

## **3. *Shhhing: Your Baby’s Favorite Soothing Sound***

Believe it or not, a loud, harsh shushing sound is music to your baby's ears. Shhhing comforts him by mimicking the whooshing noise of blood flowing through your arteries. This rough humming surrounded your baby every moment during his nine months inside you. That's why it is an essential part of the fourth trimester.

Many new parents mistakenly believe their babies prefer the gentle tinkling sounds of a brook or the distant hush of the wind. It seems counterintuitive that our tender infants would like such a loud noise; certainly we wouldn't. Yet babies love it! That's why many books recommend the use of roaring appliances to settle screaming infants.

I have never met a cranky baby who got overstimulated by the racket from these devices. On the contrary, the louder babies cry, the louder the shhhing has to be in order to calm them.



***In a rush to get out of the house, Marjan put off feeding her hungry baby for a few minutes while she went into the bathroom and finished getting ready to leave. Two-week-old Bebe didn't care for this plan, and she wailed impatiently for food. However, after a few minutes Bebe suddenly quieted. Marjan panicked, was her tiny baby okay? When Marjan opened the bathroom door, she was relieved to see that her daughter was fine. Then she realized***

*that Bebe had stilled the very instant she turned on the hair dryer.*

Marjan shared this exciting discovery with her parents, but they were not supportive. They warned her it was dangerous to use the hair dryer to calm an infant: “It’s so loud it will make her go crazy!”

Despite their concerns, Marjan used her new “trick” with 100% success whenever her baby was crying (but only when her family was not around).

#### ***4. Swinging: Rock-a-Bye Baby***

Lying on a soft, motionless bed may appeal to you, but to your baby—fresh out of the womb—it’s disorienting and unnatural. Newborns are like sailors who come to dry land after nine months at sea; the sudden stillness can drive them bananas. That’s why rhythmic, monotonous, jiggly movement—what I call swinging—is one of the most common methods parents have always used to calm their babies. Swinging usually must be vigorous at first to get your baby to stop screaming, and then it can be reduced to a gentler motion to *keep* him calm.

In ancient times and in today’s traditional cultures, babies are constantly jiggled and bounced. Many third-world parents use cradles or hammocks to keep their babies content, and they “wear” their infants in slings to give the soothing feeling of motion with every step and breath. Even in our culture, many tired parents use bouncy seats, car rides, and walks around the block to try to help their unhappy babies find some peace.

*Mark, Emma, and their two kids were visiting Los Angeles from London. While I was examining four-*

*year-old Rose, little Mary, their two-month-old baby, startled out of a deep sleep and immediately began to wail. Without missing a beat, Mark scooped her up so she sat securely in his arms. He began swinging her from side to side as if she were a circus performer and he the trapeze. Within twenty seconds, her eyes glazed over, her body melted into his chest, and we were able to finish our conversation as if Mary had never cried at all.*



### **5. Sucking: The Icing on the Cake**

Once your cranky baby starts to settle down from the swaddle, side position, shushing, and swinging, he's ready for the fifth glorious "S": sucking. Sucking is the icing on the cake of calming. It takes a baby who is beginning to quiet and lulls him into a deep and profound state of tranquillity.

Obviously, it's hard for your baby to scream with a pacifier in his mouth, but that's not why sucking is so soothing. Sucking has its effect deep within your baby's nervous system. It triggers his calming reflex and releases natural chemicals within his brain, which leads in minutes to a rich and satisfying level of relaxation.

Some parents offer their infants bottles and pacifiers to suck on, but the all-time number-one sucking toy in the world is a mother's nipple. As was previously mentioned, mothers in some cultures help keep their babies calm by

offering them the breast up to one hundred times a day.



***Hannah thought her first son, Felix, was almost addicted to the pacifier. “He insisted on using it for years. So when my second child was born, I vowed to try not to use it. But once again it became an invaluable calming tool. Harmon was so miserable without it, and so content with it, that I couldn’t bring myself to deny him that simple pleasure.”***

In summary, the first two “S’s”—swaddling and side/stomach—start the calming process by muffling your baby’s flailing movements, shutting off the Moro reflex and getting him to pay attention to what you’re doing as you begin to activate the calming reflex. The third and fourth “S’s”—shhhing and swinging—break into the crying cycle by powerfully triggering the calming reflex and soothing your baby’s nervous system. The fifth “S”—sucking—keeps the calming reflex turned on and allows your baby to guide himself to a profound level of relaxation.

The 5 “S’s” are fantastic tools, but as with any tools, your skill in using them will increase with practice. Since the calming reflex works only when triggered in precisely the right way, you’ll find that mastering these ancient techniques is one of the first important tasks of parenthood.

Interestingly, not only do parents get better with practice, so do babies. Many parents notice that after a few weeks of swaddling their babies straighten their arms and begin to calm the instant they’re placed on the blanket. It’s as if they’re saying, “Hey, I remember this! I really like it!”

You might read about the 5 “S’s” and think, “So what’s new? Those soothing techniques have been known for centuries.” And you would be partly right. The methods themselves are not new; however, what is new are two essential concepts for making the old techniques really effective—vigor and combining. In [Chapter 13](#), you will learn how to perfectly combine the 5 “S’s” in the “Cuddle” Cure, but now I would like to share with you one of the least understood and most important elements of calming a screaming baby ... the need for *vigor*.

### **Vigor: The Essential Tip for Calming Your Frantic Little Cave Baby**

Many of our ideas about what babies need are based on a misunderstanding about their fragility. Of course, babies *are* quite fragile in many ways. They choke very easily and have weak immune systems. For this reason, being told to do *anything* vigorously may seem as counterintuitive to you as being told that adding a slimy, raw egg to a cake will make it delicious ... yet, it’s every bit as true!

That’s because, in many other ways, your newborn is a tough little “cave” baby. He can snooze at the noisiest parties and scream at the top of his lungs much longer than you or I could. Parents are often amazed at how forcefully nurses handle babies when they bathe and burp them. Even breast-feeding may feel pushy when you first learn how. Yet experienced moms know they *must* be assertive when latching their baby on the breast or else they’ll end up with sore nipples and a frustrated baby.

One mom in my practice, a psychologist, realized how impossible it was to gently guide her baby from screaming to serenity:





*“Because of my professional training, I’m very good at remaining calm and reasonable even in the face of frantic and angry outbursts. I expected that this mild demeanor would also help me guide my one-month-old, Helene, out of her primitive screaming fits. What a joke! This little brawler needed me to take control like police subduing a rowdy mob.”*

Parents often mistakenly believe that their job is to lead their unhappy baby into calmness by responding to his wails with soft whispers and gentle rocking. While that’s a very reasonable, civilized approach, it rarely calms an infant in the middle of a meltdown.



*Jessica tried to calm her frantic six-week-old by wrapping him up, turning on a tape recording of the vacuum, and putting him in the swing. But it backfired. Like a little Houdini, Jonathan freed himself from the swaddle in minutes and wailed longer and louder than ever. I suggested that Jessica try tightening the wrapping and turning on the real vacuum, not a tape. Jonathan’s screaming bouts shortened from hours to minutes!*

Most first-time parents don’t feel instantly comfortable with their fussy baby’s need for vigor. Let’s face it, as a parent you’re given so much contradictory advice. One minute, you’re warned to handle your baby gently and the next you’re told to deposit your shrieking child into a buzzing bouncy seat beside a roaring

vacuum cleaner. Yet experienced baby “wranglers” know the more frantically a baby is crying the tighter his swaddling, the louder the shushing, and the more jiggy the swinging must be, *or else they simply won’t work.*

The fastest way to succeed in stopping your baby’s cycle of crying is to *meet his level of intensity.* Only after your screaming baby pauses for a few moments can you gradually slow your motion, soften your shushing, and guide him down from his frenzy to a soft landing.

The best colic-calmers say that soothing an infant is like dancing with him—*but they always let the baby lead!* These talented people pay close attention to the vigor of their infant’s crying and mirror it with the vigor of their 5 “S’s.” If crying is frantic, the rocking and shushing are as spirited as a jitterbug. As cries turn into sobs, the response shifts to the fluid pace of a waltz. And once the baby slips into serenity, their actions slide into the gentle to-and-fro of a slow dance. Of course, any return to screaming is immediately met with renewed vigor and a bouncy tempo.

### **Three Reasons Your Baby May Have a Delayed Response to the 5 “S’s”**

You’ll be able to soothe your baby quickly once you become skillful at using the 5 “S’s.” However, the first few times you use these methods you may notice something peculiar: Your baby may ignore you or even cry louder.

This is normal, so please don’t worry. His brain may be having a little trouble getting your new message:



*Augie was dozing angelically when I arrived at his hospital room to examine him. However, the moment I unwrapped him and the cool air touched his skin, he began to howl. I quieted him with some intense rocking and shushing, but as soon as I stopped and began probing his soft, marshmallow belly, he began to cry again. Were my hands too cold? Did I hurt him? No, he just hadn't fully recovered from his prior upset, and my touch rekindled his protests.*

*Augie bellowed and flailed, then suddenly he became stone silent. I looked down to see him staring out into space as if he were trying to ignore me. The calm was only momentary, however. In seconds, his frantic cry cycled through him once more.*

*I snared his hands and held them to his chest. Then I leaned over his struggling body, rocked him, and simultaneously made a harsh shhhh sound in his ear. Within seconds, Augie was again completely at ease.*

*Five seconds later, however, his cry surfaced one last time, like an exhausted boxer trying to get up off the mat. After just a few more seconds of vigorous shushing and rocking, Augie finally gave in and his little body relaxed for good.*

As you can see, even if your “S’s” are perfect, you may have to patiently wait a few minutes for your crying baby to fully respond. Three particular traits of an infant’s nervous system can fool you into thinking the 5 “S’s” aren’t working:

## **1. Baby brains have a hard time shifting gears.**

If *you* think your baby is screaming loudly, you should hear what's going on inside *his* head! Chaos so distracts and overloads your newborn's immature brain that he has a difficult time escaping his frenzy to pay attention to you. It's like when your good buddy is in a fight. You try to pull him out of it, but he struggles against you to keep slugging away. It's not until later, when he finally calms down, that he admits, "Thanks, you're a real friend. I just couldn't stop myself."

So expect your baby to resist the 5 "S's" until he calms down enough to realize that your shushing and jiggling are *exactly* what he needs from you.

## **2. Baby brains are very s-l-o-w.**

When your baby is four months old, his eyes will quickly track you as you move around the room, but for now his brain is a little too undeveloped to do that. During these early months of life, it takes a couple of seconds for messages from his eyes ("I just saw mom move!") to travel to the part of his brain that gives out the commands ("Okay, so follow her!").

This dragged-out response time is even more pronounced in colicky babies. All the tumult going on inside their heads overwhelms their brains, making their processing time even slower.

## **3. Baby brains get into cycles of crying.**

When your crying newborn does start responding to the 5 "S's," he may only settle for a minute before he bursts into crying all over again. That's because your baby's distress from crying is still cycling through his nervous system like a strong aftershock following his just ended "baby earthquake."

Your baby may need you to continue the 5 "S's" for five to ten minutes—or more—after he calms down. That's how long it may take for his upset to finish

cycling through him and for the calming reflex to finally guide him into sleep.

These cycles can be confusing. They make it seem as if your baby has experienced a jolt of pain, but that's rarely the case. Instead, what's occurring is like what happens when you catch a fish. The fish struggles, gives up for a few moments, then suddenly fights again. With persistence you'll find that the 5 "S's" help your baby's cycles of crying gradually diminish and melt into a blissful peace.

*Calming baby Frances reminded Suzanne of her job as a teacher. "It's like quieting a classroom of yelling five-year-olds. At first you raise your voice a little to get their attention. Then, as they begin to settle, kids who are still revved up from before have occasional outbursts. Gradually, the excitement cycles down and all the kids become still and focused."*



The next six chapters will teach you exactly how to switch your baby's crying reflex off and his calming reflex on. Once you have mastered these skills, crying will no longer be a cause of frustration. In fact, as odd as it sounds, you may even start appreciating your baby's wails as a great opportunity for you to help him feel loved—and to help you feel like a terrific parent.

8



The 1st “S”:  
Swaddling—A Feeling  
of Pure “Wrap”ture

### **Main Points:**

- Swaddling is the cornerstone of calming. It gives nurturing touch, stops flailing, and focuses your baby’s attention
- Swaddling by itself may not halt crying, rather it prepares babies for the other “S’s” that *do* switch crying off
- The reasons our ancestors stopped swaddling centuries ago
- Six unnecessary concerns today’s parents have about swaddling
- The perfect baby swaddle: The DUDU wrap

As my office was about to close one evening, Alex’s mother called, in tears. Betsy said Alex had been having bouts of pain for more than two weeks. Here’s how Betsy described it.

***“When Alex was six weeks old, she began having terrible gas pains. At night she would wake up screaming almost***

*hourly. I watched my diet, in case something I was eating was giving her gas. But that didn't alleviate her crying at all."*



Betsy asked me for some anti-gas medicine to help Alex with what she assumed were stomach cramps. She was surprised when I focused on how to calm her rather than curing the gas. I taught Betsy about the calming reflex and showed her how to swaddle, shhhh, and swing Alex to help her fall asleep. But, Betsy remained skeptical.



*"I didn't use Dr. Karp's technique the first night. Swaddling Alex tight didn't feel natural. I was afraid she would be uncomfortable or have difficulty breathing. And I still believed the main issue was gas. That night Alex's 'pain' seemed severe, and I decided I would follow Dr. Karp's advice in the morning.*

*"The next day I swaddled Alex from morning till night, and surprisingly she seemed much more comfortable. At bedtime, even before I had finished wrapping her, Alex fell asleep—and she slept for seven hours. I could hear her stomach rumbling and knew that she was still having gas, but it was no longer waking her up.*

*"Tight bundling helped Alex become a much better sleeper. By the time she was four months old she slept well without needing any swaddling."*

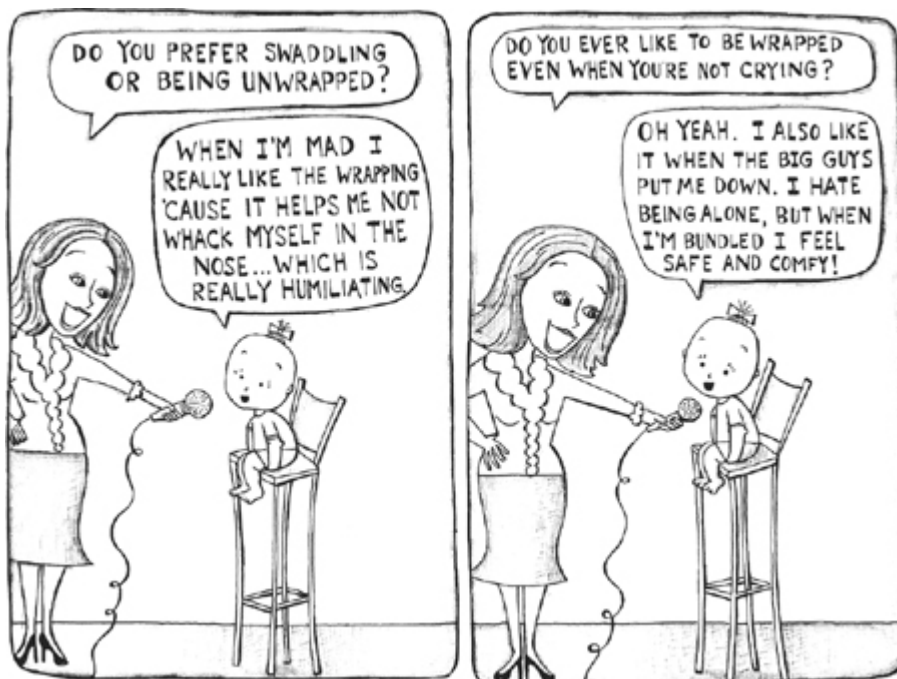
## Swaddling: The Cornerstone of Calming

As Betsy discovered with Alex, soothing an irritable infant is one hundred times easier when her hands are snuggled straight at her sides. Why does this work so well? Here are three ways swaddling benefits fussy babies:

### 1. *The Sweet Touch of Swaddling*

Skin is the body's largest organ, and touch is the most calming of our senses. Swaddling envelops your baby's body with a continuous soft caress.

Every mother knows how delicious the touch of her baby's soft skin feels against her own, but for your baby, touch is more than a nice sensation—it's as lifesaving as milk! Babies given milk but never held or touched often wither and die. Of course, swaddling isn't as rich an experience for your baby as being cuddled, but it's a good substitute for those times she is not in your arms.





## ***2. Swaddling Keeps Your Baby from Spiraling Out of Control***

Not only does swaddling feel cozy, it also keeps your baby from whacking herself and inadvertently getting more upset. (You may have noticed how much calmer your baby is when she is “wrapped” in your arms.) Before birth, your uterus kept your baby’s arms from spinning like a windmill. After her “eviction,” this restriction disappears. Without the womb walls to prevent flailing, your baby’s small upsets can quickly switch on her Moro reflex (the falling reflex) and start her thrashing and crying.

## ***3. Wrapping Helps Your Baby Pay Attention to What You’re Doing to Calm Her***

When your baby is crying, she experiences a sensation similar to ten radios playing in her head—at the same time. Each jerk and startle shoots another alarm message to her brain, and together those signals make such a racket that your crying infant may hardly notice you’re there!

Your little screamer desperately needs you to tell her, “That’s it, I’m taking over now.” And that’s exactly what swaddling does. By restraining your baby’s movements, you turn off most of the distracting “radio stations” so she can tune in and focus on all the wonderful things you’re doing to soothe her. Wrapping also prevents new twitches from igniting the crying all over again.

## The Great Surprise About Swaddling



The biggest myth parents have about wrapping is that it's supposed to quiet their fussy baby. *Wrong!* Swaddling by itself doesn't turn on the calming reflex.

This point often confuses inexperienced parents. In fact, many new moms and dads lose patience with bundling because initially it makes their babies scream louder not less!

So why is swaddling the first step of calming? Because it prepares your baby for the soothing steps you will do next that *will* trigger her calming reflex.

Think of it this way: What's the first thing a mother does when her hungry toddler clamors for food? Set the table to serve the meal. Yet doing that often makes her scream louder, as if she's yelling, "Hey, just dump the spaghetti on the table!" Of course, *you* know she needs utensils and a plate before she can enjoy her delicious meal, so you buzz through your preparations despite her protests.

In essence, swaddling "sets the table" for the feast of calming you're about to serve. It's the critical step of preparation before the actual shhhing and jiggling begin. So don't worry if your baby struggles more right after you've wrapped her snugly. Once you begin "feeding" her the other 4 "S's," you'll satisfy her needs completely.

## Once upon a Time: How Parents Have Used Swaddling in Other Times and Cultures

*I banish from you all tears, birthmarks, flaws, and the troubles of bed-wetting. Love your paternal and maternal uncles. Do not betray your origins. Be intelligent, learned, and discreet. Respect yourself, be brave.*

Ritual instructions spoken when swaddling a baby by the Berber people of Algeria, Béatrice Fontanel and Claire d'Harcourt, *Babies Celebrated*

*After Elena emigrated from Russia to Los Angeles, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl named Olga. As I examined Olga, I described to her proud mother all of her daughter's wonderful abilities. Elena concentrated intensely as I spoke, struggling to understand my words.*

*When I placed her precious infant on a blanket to demonstrate swaddling, she smiled. Gently touching my arm, she said with a Slavic accent, "Doctor, you don't have to show me dat. In my willage we wrap dem and put BELT around. It holds dem wery good!"*



For tens of thousands of years, mothers living in cool climates have swaddled their babies. While those in very hot climates hardly ever swaddle, they do hold their infants in their arms or in slings almost twenty-four

hours a day. Parents all over the globe wrap their infants because:

- *It's safe*—Babies are less likely to suddenly wiggle out of their parent's arms.
- *It's easy*—Babies can be strapped on a parent's back or slung on their hips.
- *It's calming*—Babies get less upset because they can't flail about.

### Great Swaddling Moments in History



- History has recorded that Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Jesus were all swaddled as babies.
- In Tibet, babies have always been swaddled tightly in blankets. Traditionally, the wrapping was secured with rope and the baby was tied to the side of a yak to be carried as the family hiked through the valleys.
- On the high plains of Algeria, babies were swaddled to protect them from drafts and evil spirits.
- During the Middle Ages, European parents kept their babies immobilized in a tight, bulky swaddle for the first four to nine months.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics insignia features a swaddled fifteenth-century Italian baby.
- Many Native American tribes carried their papoose—young baby—tightly packaged and slung onto their backs. (The 2000 U.S. one-dollar coin displays an image of the Native

American guide Sacajawea with her tiny baby snugly bundled on her back.)

These parents envelop their babies in blankets and then usually secure the wrapping with strings and belts. And now, our nation has also rediscovered that babies like being wrapped as snug as a bug in a rug. In most U.S. hospitals, new moms are taught how to swaddle their babies, and I've even seen nurses use a little masking tape to keep the blanket from opening.

## **Swaddling Gets Unraveled: How Our Ancestors Did the *Wrong* Thing for All the *Right* Reasons**

Even in the Middle Ages, the top fashion ideas originated in Paris. However, about three hundred years ago, these trendsetters goofed when they declared, “*Le swaddling is passé.*”

Before the 1700s, all Europeans wrapped their babies. Swaddling made babies easy to carry and kept them warm and quiet. Parents also believed wrapping prevented their infants from accidentally plucking out their own eyes or dislocating their arms.

Then two revolutionary trends became popular: science and democracy. As wonderful as these movements were, they led to two unfortunate misunderstandings that contributed to the abandonment of swaddling:

*Science makes mistake #1:* In the 1700s scientists proved that unwrapped infants *never* plucked out their eyes or dislocated their arms. From these observations they wrongly assumed that swaddling was a waste of time.

*Democracy makes mistake #2:* In the years leading up to the Declaration of Independence, our founding fathers (and mothers) wanted their children to live in freedom, but this attitude led them to reject swaddling as a form of “baby prison.”

Within one hundred years, the combined pressures of science and democracy convinced most parents in the Western world to stop swaddling. While these great thinkers were right that unwrapped babies didn’t hurt themselves and that adults would feel enslaved by such tight bindings, they were absolutely wrong to recommend parents stop bundling their infants. They didn’t realize that swaddling had continued throughout the centuries because it truly helped babies stay happier. As parents stopped wrapping their newborns, the unexpected happened: The number of babies suffering from uncontrollable crying dramatically *increased!*

In their eagerness to stop this tidal wave of colic, scientists made yet another colossal mistake. They concluded that babies were crying because of pain, and encouraged parents to give their shrieking infants the two most effective anesthetics of the time—gin and opium. Of course, as soon as the serious side effects of those colic treatments were realized, they fell out of favor.

### **A Parent’s Hesitations—Six Unnecessary Wrapping Worries**

In the U.S. today, many parents and grandparents still hesitate to swaddle their babies. They worry that tight wrapping may deprive their babies of some unwritten constitutional right. But I’m afraid they are confusing the right to *bear* arms with the right to *flail* arms.

Through the years, I have asked many parents to tell me their secret prejudices against swaddling. Here are their six most common concerns:

***1. Swaddling seems primitive and old-fashioned.***

Well, it is. But what's wrong with primitive and old-fashioned? Eating and sex are both primitive and old-fashioned, and who wants to abandon them? Besides, swaddling may be a prehistoric practice, but it really works.

***2. Babies might be uncomfortable with their arms tightly down at their sides.***

Many new parents think their crying babies want their arms up. If that was why these infants cried, calming them would be a snap: Just never wrap them! Of course, as you've probably noticed, releasing your baby's arms usually only makes her scream even more.

It is true that your baby's arms have tightened into the bent-arm position by the end of your pregnancy. And, as a result, if you place them at her sides, they tend to *boing* right back up, like curly hair pulled straight then released. However, the arms-down position is not at all uncomfortable, which is why babies sleep extra-long when they're bundled that way.

***3. Wrapping may make a baby feel trapped.***

Personally, I would hate to be swaddled. Without revealing too much about my married life, let me say that the first thing my wife and I do when we get into bed is

untuck the blanket and give our feet some breathing room.

Of course, most of us would hate living in a womb. However, it's a mistake to think our babies want the same things we do. She's not struggling against the wrapping because she hates it. She looks like she wants her hands free, but the opposite is true. Newborns love being confined, and when they're frantic and out of control they need your help to restrain their frantic arms and legs.

***4. Babies will get spoiled or dependent on swaddling.***

Fortunately, this worry is totally unfounded. Holding your baby twelve hours a day is not an overindulgence; it's a fifty percent cutback from what she got in your womb! Once your baby is four months old she'll be able to push up, roll over, and grab, and she no longer will need to be wrapped. Until then, swaddling can be a great comfort.

***5. Wrapping frustrates an infant's attempts to suck her fingers.***

It was easy for your baby to suck her fingers before she was born: The walls of your uterus kept her hands right next to her face. After birth, however, it's much harder for her to get her fingers in that position. Even though she tries, they often jerk away as if yanked on by some practical joker. (Pacifiers were invented exactly because babies have such a hard time keeping their hands in their mouths.)



Please, don't misunderstand me, it's fine to let your infant have her hands out so she can suck on her fingers—as long as *she's happy*. Unfortunately, most babies aren't able to keep their hands there, especially when upset. So rather than calming a baby, loose hands usually fly by their owner's mouth, frustrating her and increasing her screams!

It will take three to four months for your baby to coordinate her lips, tongue, shoulder, and arm—all at the same time—to keep her fingers in her mouth. However, once your baby is able to manage all that, swaddling becomes unnecessary (although it may still help her sleep longer).

***6. Tight bundling might interfere with a baby's ability to learn about the world.***

Of course, your baby does need her hands unwrapped sometimes so she can get some practice using them. However, when she's crying your job isn't teaching, it's calming. In fact, even when your infant is calm, bundling may actually *help* her learn about the world, because she can pay attention better when her arms aren't constantly in motion.

## **It's Time for Swaddling to Make a Comeback**

For centuries, parents have been hesitant about swaddling their babies. Critics have claimed swaddling was just a fad—and some continue to do so:

***About ten years ago, I visited a nursery for newborns in northern Italy. I shared***

*with the nursery director the concept of the missing fourth trimester and my belief that the time had come for a worldwide “renaissance of wrapping.”*

*The director listened politely, but his face wore an amazed and amused expression. After I finished my impassioned speech, he patted my shoulder in a grandfatherly way and said discreetly, “We haven’t done that in Italy for generations. We believe that babies must have their hands free to encourage their muscle development.”*



*At that moment, his secretary summoned him to take a phone call. No sooner had he left the room than a nurse shyly came up to me and whispered, “You know, Il Directore likes to keep the babies unwrapped, but as soon as he leaves for the day, we always bundle them all back up again!” She winked at me, adding, “They really are happier that way.”*

## Learning How to Swaddle—Step by Step

**Y**ou probably already know that the number-one way to calm your fussy baby is to pick her up and hold her tightly in your arms. That’s exactly what swaddling does, except it has the extra benefit of

**giving you a few minutes to cook a meal or go to the bathroom!**

Swaddling is easy to do, but it does require precise technique and some practice. Many books recommend wrapping, but they rarely teach how to do it, which is problematic because incorrect swaddling can make your baby's crying worse.

Here's everything you need to know to become the happiest (and best) swaddler on the block. Don't worry if it feels weird at first; after five to ten tries swaddling will become as automatic for you as changing a diaper.

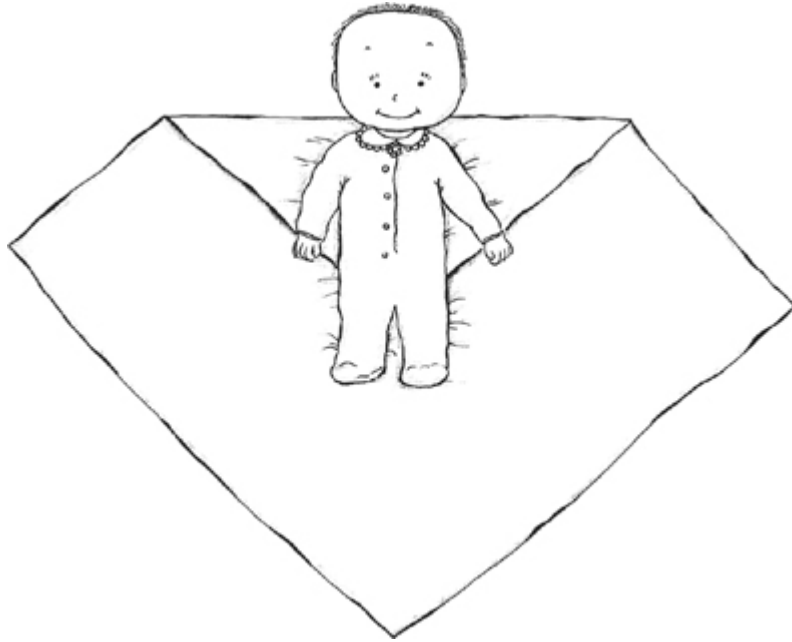
There are as many ways to swaddle babies as there are to fold napkins for a dinner party. But one method that a wonderful midwife taught me many years ago is clearly the best. I call it the DUDU wrap (pronounced "doo doo," standing for Down-Up-Down-Up).



### **Getting Started**

You'll need a large *square* blanket. These are easier to use than rectangular blankets because their symmetry allows for an even, balanced wrap. Blanket fabric is your choice. Some like flannel, while others prefer stretchy, waffle-type fabrics. (You may find it's easiest to learn to wrap if you first practice it on a doll or when your baby is calm.)

1) Place the blanket on your bed and position it like a diamond, with a point at the top.



2) Fold the top corner down so the top point touches the center of the blanket.

3) Place your baby on the blanket so her neck lies on the top edge.

4) Hold your baby's right arm down straight at her side. If she resists, be patient. The arm will straighten after a moment or two of gentle pressure.



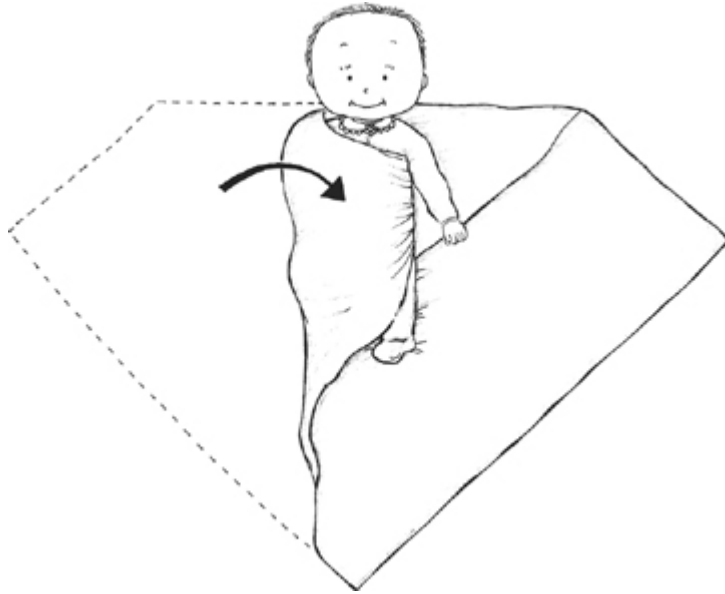
You now have your baby in the starting position for the DUDU wrap. An easy way to remember what to do next is to sing this little song as you do it:

DOWN ... tuck ... snug

UP ... tuck ... snug

DOWN ... a smidge ... hold

UP ... across ... snug



1) **DOWN** Just as swaddling is the cornerstone of calming, this first DOWN is the cornerstone of swaddling. This must be done well or the wrap will unravel.

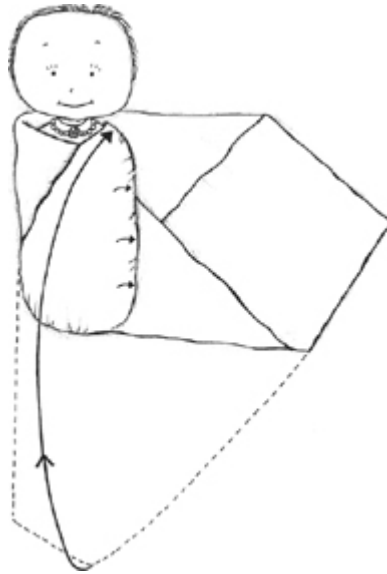
As you hold your baby's right arm straight against her side, grab the blanket three to four inches from her right shoulder and pull it *very* tightly down and across her body. (It should look like half of a V-neck sweater.)

**Tuck**—*Keeping the blanket taut, finish pulling it all the way down and tuck it under her left buttock and lower back. This anchors the wrap.*

**Snug**—*Hold the blanket against her left hip (with your left hand), grab the blanket right next to her left shoulder and tug it very, very snug. This will remove any slack around your baby's right arm and stretch the fabric tight.*

After this first "DOWN ... tuck ... snug," her right arm should be held so securely against her side that she can't bend it up, even if you let go of the blanket. (More on the critical importance of straight arms on [this page](#).)

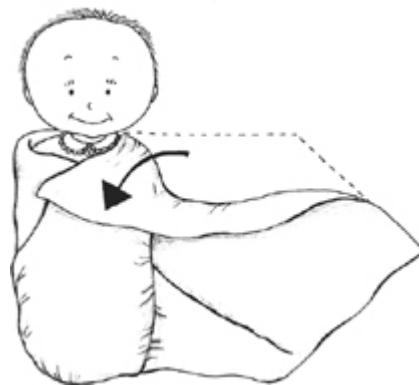
*Please* don't be surprised or lose confidence if your baby suddenly cries louder when you pull the blanket tight. You're not hurting her! Her cry means she's still out of control and unaware that she's just seconds away from happiness.



2) **UP** Now straighten her left arm against her side and bring the bottom corner straight up to cover her arm. The bottom blanket corner should reach just over her left shoulder. It's okay if her legs are bent (that's how they were in the womb), but be sure her arms are straight. If her arms are bent, she'll wiggle out of the wrap as fast as you can say, "Oops, she did it again!" And she'll cry even more.

**Tuck**—*Hold her covered left arm against her body, and tuck the blanket edge under it.*

**Snug**—*While your left hand holds her left arm down, use your right hand to grab the blanket three inches from her left shoulder and snug it (stretch it as much as possible). This again removes any slack from around her arms.*



3) **DOWN** Still holding the blanket very taut, three inches from her left shoulder, pull the blanket *down* a

smidge.

**A smidge**—*This DOWN should bring only a tiny bit of fabric over her shoulder to her upper chest, like the second half of the V-neck sweater. (Don't bring this fold all the way down to your baby's feet. Remember, it's just a smidge.)*

**Hold**—*Hold that tiny smidge of blanket against her breastbone with your left hand, like you are holding down a ribbon while making a bow.*



4) **UP** Keeping that smidge in place, grab the last free blanket corner with your right hand and pull it straight out to your right. This will remove every last bit of stretch and slack from the wrap. Then, without releasing the tension, lift that corner in one smooth motion, up and across her body.

**Across**—*Bring it tightly across her waist and then all around her body like a belt. The “belt” should go right over her forearms, holding them down against her sides.*

**Snug**—*Finish the DUDU wrap by snugging the “belt” tightly to remove any slack. If the wrap is tight (and your blanket is big enough), the end of the “belt” will reach around her body and back to the front, where you can tuck it into the beginning of the “belt.” This last snug must be tight to keep the whole swaddle from popping open. Loose blankets are a breathing hazard.*

The ancient tradition of bundling babies isn't a fad. It's the *end* of a fad—an anti-swaddling fad! Televisions and computers may become forgotten novelties a thousand years from today, but swaddling is as old as

the trees and it's time for it to become part of our babies' lives once again.

## **Ironing Out the Wrinkles: Fixing the Most Common Swaddling Mistakes**

Swaddling is simple, but watch for these common mistakes:

- ***Wrapping too loosely***

The key to wrapping is to keep it snug ... snug ... snug. Make sure you snug the blanket, removing slack with every step of the DUDU. Loose blankets can smother a baby.

*Denise discovered the tightness of the wrap was the secret ingredient for her six-week-old son. "Our running joke was we swaddled Augie so tightly we were scared his eyes would pop out! But swaddling helped him enormously, and tight was exactly the way he needed it to be!"*

- ***Swaddling a baby with bent arms***

Even with tight swaddling, it's easy for your crying baby to wiggle her hands out if she was wrapped with her arms bent. While it's true that new babies are comforted by having their bodies flexed into the fetal position, and preemies do best with bent arms at least until they reach their due date, babies swaddled with their arms down still have lots of flexion in their legs, fingers, and neck to keep them happy.

*Swaddling helped Ted and Shele's two-month-old daughter, Dylan, sleep through the night. To keep her arms straight, Ted tucked*



*Dylan's hands under the waistband of her tiny sweatpants before wrapping her. He said, "I have to do this because every time she gets her arms bent, she pops them out and gets even madder."*

- ***Letting the blanket touch your baby's cheek***

If your baby is hungry and the blanket touches her cheek, it may fool her into thinking it's your breast, accidentally setting off the powerful rooting reflex and making her cry out of confusion and frustration. To keep the blanket off the face, make it look more like a V-neck sweater.

- ***Allowing the finished swaddle to pop back open***

You never want your baby to be in bed with loose blankets that may get wrapped around her face. So, always use a blanket that is big enough to wrap all the way around and tuck it in tightly to make sure it doesn't pop open.

*Ken and Kristie said, "Whenever Henry sneaks out of his blanket, he cries as if to say, 'What have you done for me lately?' We've found that securing the wrap with duct tape gives us an extra forty-five minutes of sleep between feedings!"*

## **Dads—The Swaddlers Supreme**



*I was surprised! I thought my baby girl, Valerie, wouldn't like to be wrapped, but once swaddled, she calmed within seconds. I even taught a guy in the barbershop how to do it.*

Pedro, father of Valerie

If women are from Venus and men are from Mars, then mothers are from Cuddleland and fathers are from Jiggland! That is to say, men usually handle children much more vigorously than women do. We throw our older kids on the bed, have pillow fights, and hoist them into the air above our heads—but what about tiny babies? How do men handle them?

At first, we are often more intimidated by infants than our wives are; babies seem so tiny and fragile. When we *do* carry our little ones around, we often hot-potato them back to our wives the moment they cry.

Swaddling, however, is a great way for dads to build confidence. Fathers often have a natural talent for doing the tight wrapping. In my experience, their strength, vigor, and dexterity make them swaddlers supreme!

Mark said, “I can wrap Eli pretty easily. But my wife, Fran, has a hard time swaddling him. I think she’s too timid to do it tightly enough.”

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## The Whys About the “S’s”: Questions Parents Ask About Swaddling

### ***1. When should I start wrapping my baby?***

Babies can be swaddled as soon as they’re born. It makes them feel cozy and warm, like they’re “back home.”

### ***2. Are there babies who don’t need to be swaddled?***

Many calm babies do well with no swaddling at all. But the fussier your baby is, the more she’ll need it. Tight bundling is so successful at soothing infants that some even have to be

unswaddled in order to wake them up for their feedings.

### ***3. Can swaddling help a baby sleep?***

Yes! Even easy babies who don't need wrapping to keep calm often sleep more when swaddled. Bundling keeps them from startling themselves awake. But make sure the wrapping is tight. It's not safe to put babies in bed with loose blankets.

***When Wendy and Brent swaddled Brandon, their two-month-old increased his night sleeping from a four-hour stretch to five to seven hours!***

### ***4. If a baby has never been swaddled, when is it too late to start?***

You can start wrapping your baby at any time during her first three months. But be patient. You may have to practice a few times before she gets used to it. Try swaddling when she's already sleepy and in her most receptive frame of mind.

### ***5. When is a baby too old for swaddling?***

The age for weaning off swaddling varies from baby to baby. Many parents think they should stop after a few weeks or when their baby resists wrapping. But that's actually when bundling becomes the *most* valuable.

To decide if your infant no longer needs to be wrapped, try this: After she reaches two to three months of age, swaddle her with one arm out. If she gets fussier, she's telling you to continue wrapping for a few more weeks. However, if she stays happy without the swaddling, she doesn't need it anymore.

With few exceptions, babies are ready to be weaned off wrapping by three to four months of age, although some sleep better wrapped—even up to one year of age. (For more on using swaddling to prolong sleep, see [Chapter 15](#).)

*Twins Ari and Grace benefited from swaddling until they were eight months old. Unwrapped they would wake every three hours, but bundled they slept for a glorious ten hours.*

**6. How many hours a day should a baby be wrapped?**

All babies need some time to stretch, be bathed, and get a massage. But you'll probably notice your baby is calmer if she's swaddled twelve to twenty hours a day to start with. (Remember, as a fetus, she was snuggled twenty-four hours a day.) After one to two months, you can reduce the wrap time according to how calm she is without it.

**7. How can I tell if I'm swaddling my baby too tightly?**

In traditional cultures, parents swaddle their babies tightly because loose wraps invariably pop back open. Although some Americans worry about snug swaddling, I've never heard of it being done too tightly. On the other hand, I've worked with hundreds of parents whose bundling failed because it was done too loosely. That's because no matter how snugly you do it initially, your baby's wiggling will loosen the blanket a little.

However, for your peace of mind, here's an easy way for you to make sure your wrapping is not too tight: Slide your hand between the blanket and your baby's chest. It should feel as

snug as sneaking your hand between your pregnant belly and your pant's elastic waistband—at the end of your ninth month.

***8. How can I tell if my baby is overheated or overwrapped?***

Hillary thought her new son, Rob, needed the room temperature to be the same tropical 98.6°F he loved inside her body! But, she was taking the idea of the fourth trimester a bit too far. In 1994, doctors at UCLA tested babies to see if they could get overheated by heavy bundling. They put thirty-six babies (two to fourteen weeks old) in a room heated to about 74°F and wrapped them in terry coveralls, a cap, a receiving blanket, *and* a thermal blanket. Unexpectedly, their study showed the babies' skin got warmer but their rectal temperatures barely increased.

Preemies often need incubators to keep them toasty, but full-term babies just need a little clothing, a blanket, and a 65–70°F room. If the temperature in your home is warmer than that, just skip some clothing and wrap your baby in only her diaper in a light cotton blanket. (Parents living in warm climates often put cornstarch powder on their babies' skin to absorb sweat and prevent rashes.)

It's easy to check if your baby is overheated—feel her ears and fingers. If they're hot, red, and sweaty, she's overwrapped. However, if they're only slightly warm and she's not sweaty, her temperature is probably perfect.

***9. How can I tell when my baby needs to be swaddled and when she needs to eat?***

Your baby will give you several hints when she's hungry:

- When you touch her lips, her mouth will open like a baby bird waiting for food from the mother bird.
- She'll only suck on a pacifier for a minute or two before getting frustrated with it.
- If given the breast or bottle, she'll suck and swallow vigorously.

Please don't worry that swaddling might make your baby forget to eat. It may help calm a baby who's mildly hungry, but it won't satisfy one who's famished.

***10. My baby often seems jumpy and nervous. Will swaddling help this?***

Some babies can sleep through a hurricane, yet others startle every time the phone rings. These babies aren't nervous; they're just sensitive. Swaddling helps by muffling their startle reactions and keeping them from upsetting themselves.

***11. Is there any risk to putting my baby to sleep wrapped in a blanket?***

As mentioned earlier, doctors recommend that babies not sleep with loose bedding, such as pillows, soft toys, etc. Only use a blanket that is securely wrapped around your baby.

***12. Shouldn't we be teaching our children to be free and not bound up?***

Freedom is wonderful, but as we all know, with freedom comes responsibility. If a baby can calm herself, she has earned the right to be unwrapped. However, many newborns can't handle the great big world. They still need a few more months of cozy swaddling to keep from thrashing about uncontrollably.

**13. What happens if my baby gets an itch when her arms are swaddled?**

Luckily, this is never a problem. Young babies don't get clear messages from their bodies, so they don't get an itchy feeling. Babies also have short attention spans. Unlike adults who go wild when they can't reach an itch, infants never give it a second "thought." (Besides, they couldn't really control their bodies well enough to scratch themselves even if they did get an itch.)

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**A Parent's Perspective: Testimonials from the Trenches**

*Swaddling helps the little one know where she is. Without it she has no sense of where her body ends and the universe begins.*

Al, father of Marie-Claire, Esmé, and Didier

The vast majority of new babies stay calmer and sleep longer when they are swaddled. Here are some of their stories:



*The day after Marie-Claire was born, she was crying. Not one of those newborn squeals that makes you go, "Ahhhh," but rather a really powerful bellow. I was shocked that a one-day-old could make such a sound!*

*Just then Dr. Karp came into our room. He casually walked over to the*

*bassinet, picked our baby up, and wrapped her like a burrito. Then he put her on his lap with her feet toward his belly and her head at his knees and bending his face toward her ears, he made a loud “shhhh” noise. The swaddling and white noise worked together so well that she stopped crying almost instantly.*

*My husband and I were astonished. It was unlike anything we had ever witnessed. So we learned how to swaddle our baby tight, tight, tight in a receiving blanket, and she was the happiest, most content baby on the planet!*

*After she was three months old, people would often look askance when we wrapped her, as if we were resorting to barbaric measures. When curious onlookers asked, “Why have you wrapped your baby like that?” we’d proudly answer, “Because it makes her happy.” And, as if on cue, Marie-Claire would smile ear-to-ear, and even the most skeptical person would be won over!*

Renée, Al, Marie-Claire, Esmé, and Didier



*Sophia had problems nursing when she was born. Our nurse practitioner advised me to use a special device to supplement her feedings. So, I taped this tiny tube to my breast and*



*inserted it into her mouth, along with my nipple.*

*About that time, when she was three weeks old, she started becoming very fussy. During feedings, she would scream and flail, often accidentally knocking out both my nipple and the tube.*

*Despite my frustration, I stuck it out until the night before her two-month checkup. That night she was worse than ever. Sophia was thrashing, yanking on the tube, and mangling my nipple. I swore I would never feed her that way again, even if it meant I could no longer breast-feed.*

*The next day I told Dr. Karp about my struggles feeding Sophia, and he said four words that changed everything: “Don’t forget the swaddling.” We had swaddled Sophia initially but stopped after a few weeks because she fought it so much. However, Dr. Karp encouraged us to give it another go.*

*That afternoon, I tightly swaddled her and tried her on the breast (without the feeding tube). The most extraordinary thing happened: She breast-fed calmly and with focus. It was as though she never had a problem.*

*Sophia is now three months old, and feeding has been a breeze for the past month. We swaddle her now only*

*if she has a bad day when she can't settle herself, and the cozy wrapping always works like a dream.*

Colin, Beth, and Sophia

*Starting at about one month of age, Jack began getting fussy each evening between six P.M. and midnight. I could comfort him but only by breast-feeding him nonstop.*

*Jack needed to be nursed to sleep and vehemently refused the pacifier, as if I were trying to swindle him out of his inheritance. Then I discovered the greatest thing (besides breast-feeding) for calming him down: swaddling. He's not crazy about it while it's being done, but it settles him down within minutes. At a baby class I showed my friend how tightly we wrap him, and she was shocked when he went from screaming to complete calm right in front of our eyes! I was so proud of myself and of my great little boy.*

Kelly, Adam, and Jack



### **In The Middle of the Night: Switch off Your Baby's Crying with the 5 "S's"**

It's the middle of the night and you want to calm your baby! Can't remember exactly what to do? Here's a summary for those

times when you want all the “S’s” in one place to help you become the “Best Baby Calmer On The Block.”

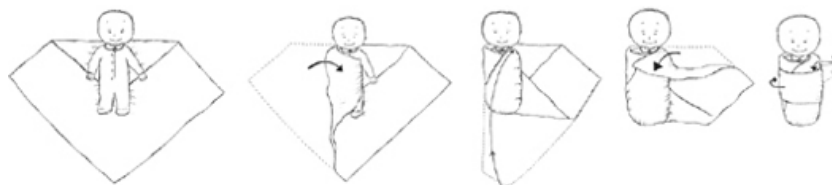
As you do the 5 “S’s,” remember these important points:

1) Calming your baby is like dancing with her ... but you have to follow her lead. Do the 5 “S’s” vigorously only lessening the intensity after she begins to settle.

2) The 5 “S’s” must be done exactly right for them to work.

### ***The 1st “S” – Swaddling***

Don’t worry if your baby’s first reaction to wrapping is to struggle against it. Swaddling may not instantly calm her fussies but it will restrain her uncontrolled flailing so she can pay attention to the next “S” that will turn-on her calming reflex and guide her into sweet serenity!



### ***The 2nd “S” – Side/Stomach***

The more upset your baby is, the unhappier she will be on her back. Rolling your infant onto her side or stomach will make her much more serene. Just this simple trick can

sometimes activate a baby's calming reflex ... within seconds.



### ***The 3rd “S” – Shhhh***

Shushing crying babies magically makes them feel at peace and back home, but you've got to do it about as loud as your baby's crying and close to her ear ... or she won't even notice it. Use this super-effective “S” to keep her calm throughout her fussy period and when she sleeps by using a womb sound CD or a noise machine that can make rough, rumbling sounds.

### ***The 4th “S” – Swinging***

Like vigorous shushing, energetic jiggling can turn your baby from screams to sweet serenity in minutes ... or less. As you support your baby's head and neck, wiggle her head with fast, tiny movements, sort of like you're shivering. Once she's entranced you can move her swaddled into a swing for continual, hypnotic motion. (Make sure the strap is between your baby's wrapped legs, the swing is fully reclined, and it's set on the fastest speed.)



### ***The 5th “S” – Sucking***

This last “S” usually works best after you have already led your little one into calmness with the other “S’s.” Offering her your breast, finger, or a pacifier will be the icing on the cake of soothing. You can teach your baby to keep the pacifier in her mouth by using “reverse psychology”—the moment she begins to suck on the pacifier, gently tug on it as if you’re going to take it out. She’ll suck it in harder and soon she’ll learn to keep it in her mouth even when she’s cooing.

9



The 2nd “S”: Side (or  
Stomach)—Your Baby’s  
Feel-Good Position

Main Points:

- How the side and stomach positions can calm your baby by switching his calming reflex on and his Moro (falling) reflex off
- Important information about SIDS and your baby’s sleeping position
- The reverse-breast-feeding hold and other great ways to cuddle your baby and soothe his crying



*Dugger’s eyes opened wide when he saw how I handled his baby girl, Bobbie. The moment Bobbie cried, I placed her cheek in my palm and rolled her small body onto my sleeve, resting her chest and stomach against my forearm—Bobbie calmed in mid-scream! Then I jiggled her up and down like I was the most nervous*

*person on the planet and she was asleep within two minutes.*

*Dugger later told me, “Football was my favorite sport when I was a boy, and I carried the ball as if it were a treasure. But I never would have felt okay handling Bobbie like that if I hadn’t seen you do it first. Now I carry Bobbie like a football every day and I can usually make her fall right asleep.”*

---

In real estate, the most important rule is: location, location, location. In baby calming it’s position, position, position!

There’s no question that fussy newborns are easier to calm when they’re lying on their side or stomach. Many babies are happy to lie on their backs when they’re in a good mood, but it’s a tough position to calm them in when they get cranky. Other babies feel insecure on their backs even when they’re not fussy. These irritable infants often quiet as soon as they’re put on their sides or have their tummies draped over their parent’s shoulder or forearm.

## **Why Do the Side and Stomach Positions Make Your Baby Happy?**

The side and stomach positions work so well because:

*They trigger the calming reflex by imitating your baby’s position in the uterus.* Before birth, your fetus was never flat on his back. He spent most of his time on his side in the fetal position—head down, spine rounded, knees pressed against his belly. Over millions of years this position became a potent trigger for the calming reflex,

keeping fetuses serene so they didn't accidentally move into a bad position or kink their umbilical cords.

Once out of the womb, bending your baby's neck down a bit, touching his stomach, and laying him on his side activate position sensors inside his head that trigger the calming reflex. Specialists in the care of premature infants place them flexed and on their sides as soon as these tiny newborns are healthy enough to be handled. (Even many adults find coiling up into the fetal position comforting.)

"Tummy touching" might also turn on calming as a reflex left over from our ape ancestors. For millions of years it has been crucial for ape babies to stay still when they were tummy-to-tummy, clutching their mama's fur. It's possible that those animals who were soothed by the sensation of tummy touching thrashed less, fell less, and therefore survived and passed their genes along to their own babies.

*The side and stomach positions keep your baby from accidentally setting off his Moro (falling) reflex.* Cuddling a fussy baby on his back is a little like calming and pinching him at the same time! The holding part feels great, but lying on the back can make some young infants feel insecure. In that position, any twitch or cry can trigger the brain's position sensors and unleash the Moro reflex, making your baby shriek and fling his arms out as if he's being dropped out of a tree.

On the other hand, putting your baby on his side or stomach makes the position sensors in his head send out a message that says, "Don't worry. Everything's fine!" (Once your baby's Moro has been turned on, it may take his brain a minute or two after he's rolled onto his side or stomach for an all-clear message to be recognized and the calming reflex turned on.) Some infants are so sensitive to position that just rolling them from their sides slightly over toward their stomachs calms them,



and rolling them a tiny bit from their sides toward their backs makes them panic.

## **A Position for Life: Helping Babies Avoid SIDS**

The side and stomach are the best positions for calming unhappy babies. They're as soothing as cookies and warm milk for them. However, all experts agree that after babies are calmed and they are put to bed, *they should only sleep on their backs.*

In 1992, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended that babies never sleep on their stomachs. Research showed that infants who were put down in that position had an increased risk of dying from crib death, or what's known as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). In a giant victory for families, we were able to lower the death rate from SIDS from six thousand babies a year to three thousand five hundred, just by keeping sleeping babies off their stomachs.

In March 2000, the AAP issued its latest advice on protecting babies from SIDS. They stated that SIDS was rare under one month of age, peaking between two and four months. They also noted that babies with the highest risk of SIDS were those who slept on their stomachs, slept on a soft substance, had moms who smoked, were overheated, had no prenatal care, had teenage mothers, or were born prematurely. They went on to recommend that babies always be put to sleep on their backs and said that side-sleeping was not recommended because it was also associated with a higher risk of SIDS (probably due to babies accidentally rolling onto their stomachs during sleep).

Furthermore, to prevent SIDS, the AAP recommends that you don't smoke during pregnancy and eliminate all smoking from your house; don't take alcohol or sedative drugs, especially when you bed-share; never sleep with

your baby on a sofa or waterbed; keep soft objects out of his bed (toys, pillows, sheepskins, loose blankets, comforters); and don't let your baby get hot and sweaty to the touch.

### **Once Upon a Time: How Parents Have Used the Side/Stomach Position in Other Times and Cultures**

*Among the Inuit (Alaskan natives), a very deep hood is used as a baby bag and serves as an extension of the womb. The newborn lives in a heated climate, completely buried inside the mother's clothing, and curled up like a half-moon.*

Béatrice Fontanel and Claire d'Harcourt, *Babies Celebrated*

In most traditional cultures around the world, babies hang out—literally. Their mothers, sisters, aunts, and neighbors carry them in baskets and sheets on their fronts, backs, hips, and shoulders for up to twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Few parents across the globe place their infants on their backs, but when they do, they usually put them on a *curved* surface, not a flat one. The arc of a small blanket suspended from a tree or tripod puts a baby back into the familiar and reassuring rounded fetal position, which allows him to sleep more restfully.

- The Lapp people of Greenland carry their babies curled up in cradles that hang on one side of a reindeer (counterbalanced on the animal's other side by a heavy sack of flour).
- The !Kung San people of the Kalahari Desert carry their infants in leather slings all day

long. They keep them in a semi-sitting position, because they believe that posture encourages a baby's development.

- In parts of Indonesia, loving mothers never let their babies stretch out completely; in their culture that is the feared position of the dead. Infants are compactly bundled in a seated position and suspended from the ceiling to sleep like little floating Buddhas. (Even new mothers must sleep sitting up for forty days after the delivery to evade evil spirits who are attracted to people weakened by illness or injury.)
- The Efé tribe of pygmies in Zaire hate putting their babies down—even for a moment. They keep their tiny tots happy by holding them upright or curled up in their arms all day long, and even while they are sleeping. However, since it's such a big effort for one person to do all this carrying, the Efé believe in teamwork. For the first several months, tribal members pass newborns back and forth among up to twenty people, an average of eight times an hour!

Even when women in different cultures take their infants out of their arms, they hang them over their laps or chests, which allows their babies' soft tummies to remain in constant contact with their mother's warm, comforting skin.

### **Go with the Winning Side: How to Use Position to Help Soothe Your Baby**

Here's how you can treat your baby to the calming pleasure of being on his side or stomach. First, wrap

your baby in a cozy swaddle, then try one of these positions used by countless experienced parents:

## **The Reverse-Breast-Feeding Hold**

This hold is my favorite for carrying a crying baby while I'm walking or bouncing him into tranquillity. It's easy and comfortable to do, and it supports his head and neck perfectly.

1. Sit down and lay your baby on your lap; have him on his right side with his head on your knees and his feet on your left hip.
2. Slide your left hand between your knee and his cheek so you support his head (or head and neck) in your palm and outstretched fingers.
3. Roll him onto your left forearm so his stomach rests against your arm and bring him in to your body, lightly pressing his back against your chest.

In this position, your thumb will be right next to his face and you can even let him take it into his mouth for added pleasure. (Always wash your hands first.)



## **The Football Hold**

Fathers love the football hold. This stomach-down position requires a little extra arm strength, but it's fun and effective. In fact, silencing babies, mid-squawk, with the football hold is one of the greatest baby “magic tricks” of all time.

1. Sit your swaddled baby on your lap, face him to your left, and place your left hand under his chin, supporting it like a chin strap.
2. Gently lean him forward and roll his hips over so his stomach is lying on your left forearm. His head rests in your palm, his chest and stomach are snugly cushioned against your forearm, and his legs are straddled over your arm, hanging limp.



## **The Over-the-Shoulder Hold**

Hoisting your fussy baby up onto your shoulder can have a powerful, soothing effect. Often, simply lifting your baby into an upright position gets him to open his eyes and perk up.

When your baby is upright you can also let the weight of his body press his stomach against your shoulder to provide him with some extra tummy touching, making this hold doubly comforting. Be sure to swaddle your baby *before* you put him over your shoulder. It will help him stay asleep when you move him off your shoulder to his bassinet.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of calming baby holds. You can also try the cannonball position, where your baby is curled in a ball, knee to chest, across your lap, or the hot-water-bottle position, with your baby draped over a warm hot-water bottle so the heat and pressure are against his stomach. (Remember, don't let him sleep on his stomach.) Have fun discovering the position that makes your baby the happiest.

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## **The Whys About the “S’s”: Questions Parents Ask About the Side/Stomach Position**

### ***1. Where should I put my baby’s hands when he’s on his side?***

Your baby’s arms should be placed straight along his body. Even with the tightest wrap, there’s enough wiggle room to allow your baby to move his bottom arm a little bit forward to get into a comfortable position.

### ***2. Can a baby’s arm ever go to sleep when he’s lying on his side?***

No. Arms only fall asleep when there’s firm pressure on the part of the elbow called the funny bone. That’s why it happens when you snooze on a hard desk using your arm as a pillow. Since the arms of a swaddled baby move a little bit forward once wrapped, there’s never enough pressure on the arm to cause it to fall asleep.

### ***3. If babies miss the womb sensations, wouldn’t it make sense to position them upside-down?***

Well, that’s an interesting thought, but the answer is no. You might think babies who have spent months upside-down would like this position, but the womb is filled with fluid so the fetus actually floats almost weightlessly inside. Once outside of the uterus, the buoyancy is gone, and an upside-down baby would develop

uncomfortable pressure as blood pools in his head.

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## A Parent's Perspective: Testimonials from the Trenches

These fussy babies were “be-side” themselves with joy when their parents put them in these feel-good positions:

*Dina was confused. At the hospital, she was told to let Noah sleep on his back, but when her mom came to visit she told her the opposite. “We argued about the best position for my six-week-old baby to sleep in. He had a really hard time settling himself when he was flat on his back. I had to pat him for fifteen to twenty minutes until he finally drifted off, and even then he’d still wake up every three hours.*

*“My mom said I should let him sleep on his stomach. While he did sleep more soundly in that position, I was terrified of doing anything that might increase his risk of SIDS.*

*“I asked Dr. Karp his opinion. He showed me how to wrap Noah tightly and put him down to sleep on his back. I was thrilled because it worked as well as my mother’s stomach-down position, but was much safer.”*







*Alfre said that when she was growing up she learned an easy way to calm babies, which the women in her family had passed down from generation to generation. It was called the “Big Mama” technique.*

*The way it worked was to sit down with a pillow on your lap and place the screaming baby stomach-down on top of it. Then you start bouncing the heels of your feet up and down (hard), patting the baby on the bottom (hard), and singing a lullaby right in the baby’s ear.*

*Once the sun went down, two-month-old Ruby began her nightly twist-and-fuss routine. Her parents, Steve and Sarah, worried she was suffering from stomach pain, until they discovered that Ruby would promptly fall asleep if they placed her over their shoulder with her stomach pressing firmly against them as they marched around the backyard, jiggling her body with every step.*



*Baby Michael’s father was the family pro at soothing Michael’s screaming. He would sit in the rocker with a pillow on his lap, lay Michael belly-down on top of the pillow, and rock him hard and fast. Within five minutes Michael was always out in lullaby-land.*

10



The 3rd "S":  
Shhhh—Your Baby's  
Favorite Soothing Sound

Main Points:

- Shhhh triggers your baby's calming reflex
- The whooshing sound your baby heard in your uterus was as loud as a vacuum cleaner
- Shhhing only soothes screaming babies if it is loud
- Ten machines you can use to make a soothing white noise



***My young husband walked our crying baby up and down, making that shshshshshing sound of comfort that parents know only too well.***

Eliza Warren, *How I Managed My Children from Infancy to Marriage*, 1865

***As I was making my rounds at a local hospital, I saw Carol trying to calm a***

*crying newborn in the nursery. Carol, a wonderful and experienced nurse, had wrapped the baby snugly, placed her on her side, and was softly whispering in her ear, “It’s okay. It’s okay.” She even offered her a pacifier, but nothing helped. I asked Carol if I could try soothing the baby. She describes what happened next:*

*“Sophia had been inconsolable for her first two days of life. After Dr. Karp offered to help he bent over Sophia’s bassinet, with his face near her ear, and emitted a harsh, continuous ‘shooshing’ sound for about ten seconds. That was it! Sophia stopped crying within the first few seconds of this magical sound and remained silent for the next two hours.”*



Of course, one loud shhhh won’t keep an infant calm forever, but it was exactly what Sophia needed to get her attention long enough for Carol’s other calming methods to work.

## **Why Does Shhhing Make Your Baby So Happy?**

Did you ever notice how the sound of the wind or the rumble of the ocean makes you feel relaxed and at peace? Shhhing is so deeply a part of who we are that it’s even profoundly calming for adults.

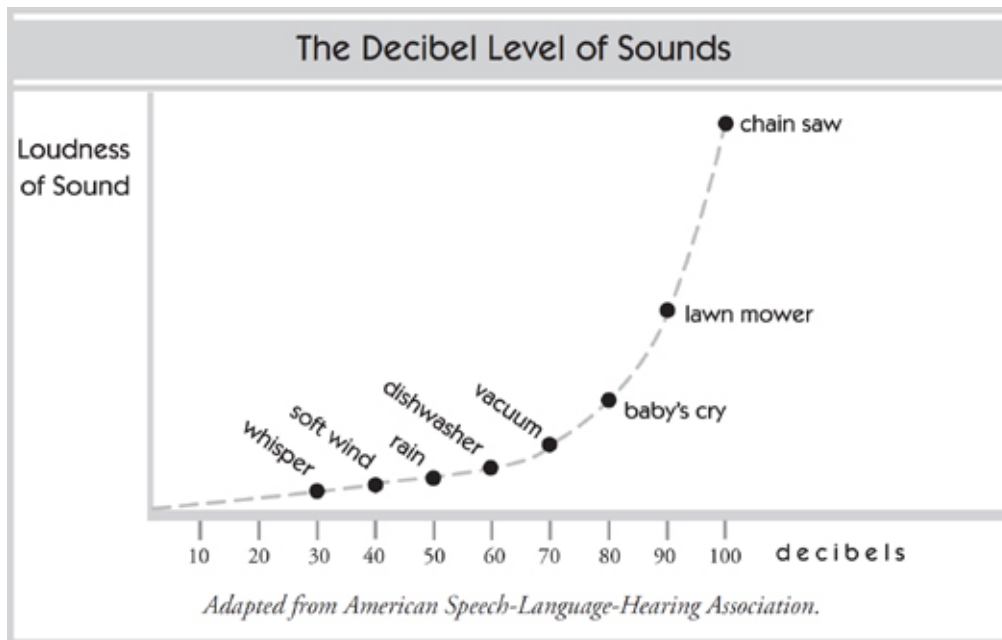
For new babies, loud shhhing is the “sound of silence,” the anti-cry. Shushing may seem a strange way to help a crying baby; however, so is turning on a

vacuum cleaner. Yet that's what many baby books suggest! What's so special about that sound?

The answer is, this loud white noise imitates your baby's experience inside the womb and switches on her calming reflex.

When I asked Nancy and Gary to guess what their baby, Natalie, heard inside the womb, Nancy said it was probably something like, "Hey, Gary, get over here!" Nancy was partly right. Fetuses do hear the muttering of voices and other "outside" noise. However, most of their daily entertainment is a continuous, rhythmic symphony of shhhh. Wave upon wave of blood surging through the arteries of your womb makes this harsh, whooshing sound, which is as loud and rough as a gale wind blowing through the trees.

How do we know this is what they hear? In the early 1970s, doctors placed tiny microphones into the wombs of women in labor and found the power of the sound was an incredible eighty to ninety decibels (even louder than a vacuum cleaner)! (You may have heard this womb noise when your doctor or midwife checked your fetus with an abdominal microphone.) To get a good idea of what this sounds like to your baby, try dunking your head under the bathwater while the faucet is turned on—full blast.



Don't worry that your newborn baby might get overwhelmed by such a forceful noise. Although the sound inside the uterus is louder than a vacuum cleaner, *your baby doesn't hear it that loud*. That's because her middle ears are waterlogged with fluid, her ear canals absorb sound and are plugged with waxy vernix, and she has thick, inefficient eardrums.

These sound-damping factors last until a few months after birth. Gradually your baby's hearing will improve as her eardrum changes from being like a piece of thick paper to a tightly stretched piece of cellophane that vibrates with any distant noise. However, for a while, her reduced hearing reduces the intensity of your shhhing, or vacuum cleaner, to a comforting din.

Imagine your baby's shock at birth when she emerges from that rich uterine world of loud quadraphonic whooshing into the quiet world of whispering and tiptoeing that parents create for their newborns. Sure, we may enjoy resting in a still room, but for your baby the silence can be deafening. And her muffled hearing will make your house seem even more stark and empty. New babies experience a type of sensory deprivation, and so it shouldn't surprise us that they cry from

excessive quiet. It's as if they're saying, "Please, someone make a little noise!"

## Once Upon a Time: How Parents Have Used Shhhing in Other Times and Cultures

Do you remember when your grade-school librarian shushed you? All humans go "shhhh" (or "ssss") to say "Be quiet" to each other. This sound is one of the very few vocalizations understood by *all* humans, in every corner of the globe. And in many unrelated languages it's the root of the word asking for silence:

"chut" (*Urdu*)

"shuu" (*Vietnamese*)

"chutee" (*Serbian*)

"soos" (*Armenian*)

"tzrch" (*Eritrean*)

"teeshina (*Slovenian*)

"hush," "silence" (*English*)

"toost" (*Swedish*)

"hushket" (*Arabic*)

"chupraho" (*Hindi*)

"sheket" (*Hebrew*)

"shuh-shuh" (*Chinese*)

"stille" (*German*)



Even the Japanese use shhhh as the root of their request for quiet: "shizukani" (although as a lover of Japanese food I might have guessed it would be "shu-shi").

As strange as it may seem, I believe that the calming effect of shhhh is something that babies taught *us*. If it were not for the immediate reaction cave babies had to shushing, parents would never have noticed its tremendous value. I'm sure that once a Stone Age mom learned this great trick, she couldn't wait to share it with her friends. And through the centuries, the

discovery and teaching of this technique was probably repeated in every village and tribe around the world.

Unfortunately, most of us today haven't had much experience watching women with their babies. That's one of the reasons why so many parents and grandparents have forgotten this age-old, effective technique.

### **The Story of Shhhh: The Calming Sound That Babies Taught ... Us**



How did mothers from the Alaskan tundra to the swamps of Albania discover that this strange sound soothes screaming babies? No one is absolutely sure, but my guess is that it happened something like this:

About fifty thousand years ago, two Stone Age mothers were eating lunch together when one woman's baby started to shriek. Her mom immediately leaned over her "cave" baby's cradle and tried to calm her by squawking in her ear—the way she had seen a mother pterodactyl successfully calm her young. But the baby continued to cry.

When the poor child had just about wailed to the point of "Neanderthal-mania," her mom's friend asked if she could try something she had once seen another mom do to soothe her frantic baby. The "cave" mother handed her wild little "infantasaurus rex" over and watched in amazement as her friend held her tightly and made a harsh, shhhing sound right in her infant's ear. Like magic, the baby suddenly became calm!



## **Learning How to Shhhh with the Best of Them**

*As a nurse walked by the room of a first-time mother, the door popped open and the father emerged, pushing a bassinet that was practically vibrating from the cries of his red-faced, screaming baby. In an attempt to help the poor little girl, the nurse lovingly leaned her face over the baby and let out a “Shhhh” as loud and harsh as a burst steam pipe!*

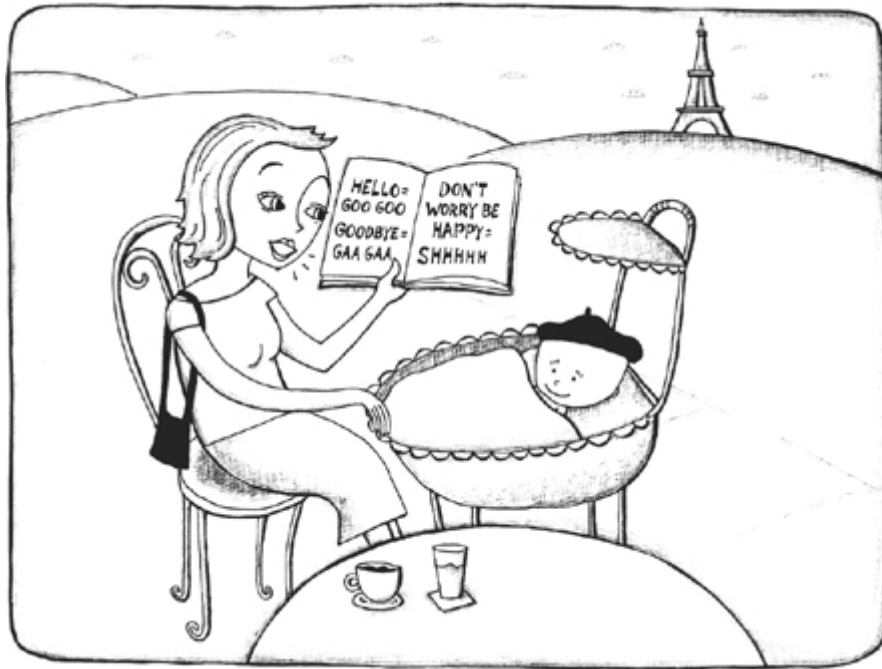
*I’m confident that had she continued her shushing for a few moments longer, the infant would have calmed. But she was stopped in her tracks when the baby’s father yanked the bassinet away. Glowering at her, he said, “How dare you tell my daughter to shut up!”*

Of course, this caring nurse was not telling the baby to shut up. But this father reacted as he did because he



didn't understand that the nurse was speaking in a different "language."

In "adult-ese," shhhh is a rude way of telling someone to be quiet or to shut up. However, in this case the nurse was speaking "baby-ese," in which shhhh is a very polite infant greeting. All babies recognize the "word" *shhhh*, and they love it!



Mothers all around the world shush their babies in exactly the same way. Here's how to do it:

1. Place your mouth two to four inches away from your baby's ear.
2. With your lips pursed, start releasing a shhhh sound.
3. Quickly raise the volume of your shhhh until it *matches* the noise level of your baby's crying. Try to sound like the world's most irritated librarian! This is not a gentle or polite shush but a rough, harsh, insistent shhhh. But remember, your shushing will sound much louder to you than it will to your baby because her hearing is quite muffled. And besides, her

own screaming gets broadcast at a jolting seventy to eighty decibels (louder than a vacuum cleaner)—and that’s blasting right next to her ears!

Some parents feel it’s callous and vulgar to shhhh their colicky baby or that it has an angry sound to their ears. However, to a baby’s ears, shhhh is a sound of love and welcome.

4. As mentioned earlier, calming your baby is like a dance—but she is leading. You aren’t guiding her into quiet, you’re following her there. So, don’t soften your shhhh until her decreasing cries show you she’s ready for it.

When you first try shhhhing, your baby should quiet within a minute or two. And, after you get really good at it, you may find she calms in seconds. However, once your fussy baby settles, she will probably need continuing, moderate white noise to keep her from returning to crying. This shouldn’t be a surprise to you. After all, she used to be serenaded by this loud sound 24/7, so needing it for a few hours, or even all night long, is a major compromise on her part.

(It’s fun teaching your older children how to shhhh. It makes them more involved in baby care, and they feel so proud when *they* can calm the baby’s cries just like daddy and mommy!)

Mary and Sigfried were delighted at how well shushing helped soothe their crying three-week-old baby, Eric:

***“We never would have thought Eric could be quieted by such an annoying sound, but we’ve discovered the louder he cries, the louder our shushing needs to be.***

*And, we can only lessen the intensity of our sound after he starts to quiet down.*

*“Shushing for two to three minutes can make us pretty dizzy. Yet Eric often seemed to need it for longer periods of time. Finally, after several days of taking turns shushing him, we realized that a sustained hiss from our music synthesizer was a perfect substitute for our flagging lung capacity. This sound works really well all by itself. And it’s one hundred percent successful when combined with swaddling and motion.”*



## **Making a Shhhh-ound Investment for Your Baby**

Continuous intense shhhhing can be hard to do, so parents have invented methods of making white noise to entrance their fussy babies. For example, some Amazonian Indians present new mothers with a baby sling decorated with monkey bones that make a rattling white noise with her every move.

However, if you and your family are out of monkey bones, I suggest you acquire a mechanical sound assistant. Some people feel strange using these, but if you can drive a machine to work every day, why not use one to help make your baby happy? Here are ten useful shhhh substitutes that can help your baby in the throes of colic:

### **Testing Out Your Baby’s Shhhh Sensitivity**



If your baby is fussy but not hungry, try this experiment to test her shhhh sensitivity:

Swaddle your baby and place her over your shoulder. Put your mouth right by her ear and shhhh softly for ten seconds. If she continues to cry, let your shhhh become louder and harsher.

When you have found the right sound she will quiet in seconds, as if suddenly entranced. Practice making the shhhh at different pitches and see what works best with your baby.

After your infant calms, gradually lower the volume of your sound. If she starts to wail again, just crank back up the intensity.

1. A CD with rough, rumbling womb sounds
2. A room fan or bathroom exhaust fan
3. A noisy appliance, like a hair dryer, air filter, or vacuum cleaner
4. A toy bear with a recording of the sounds of the uterus
5. Static on the radio or baby monitor
6. The clothes dryer with sneakers or tennis balls inside (never leave the baby alone on a dryer ... she can fall off)
7. A noise machine with rough, rumbling womb sounds
8. A dishwasher
9. Running water
10. A car ride

**Weird Noises You Can Make at Home (But Don't Let Your Friends Hear You)**



*For soothing their newborn's cries, Alise says her husband swears by a deep, resonating hum that's a cross between shushing and the vibrations of a bouncy seat.*

*Tom and Karen discovered their son, Ben, quieted when they moaned. "He gets alert when I make a loud moan, like when I was in labor or like a bunch of Buddhist monks chanting together. Ben likes the sound to be deep and vibratory."*

Several noises other than a simple shhhh can help your crying baby come down for a soft landing. Some parents I've worked with make a rhythmic chant like Native Americans doing a rain dance (*Hey ... ho, ho, ho*); others sound more like foghorns or buzzing bees.

Pediatrician William Sears recommends what he calls the "neck nestle." You snuggle your baby's head into the groove between your chest and jaw, with your voice box pressed against her head, and make deep groaning sounds in the back of your throat.

The best way to know exactly the right level of sound your baby needs is to gradually increase the volume and see how she responds.

These final tips will help you use your shhhh-ound investment wisely:

- Harsh whooshing sounds work better than the patter of rain or the sound of a heartbeat.

- Use a white noise CD so you can play it at the volume that works the best and lower it to a quieter rumble after your baby is deeply asleep.
- Place the sound one to six feet away from your baby's ears to get the maximum effect with the lowest volume.
- If the appliance is really loud, like a hair dryer, move it at least six feet away after the baby calms.
- Use your CD all night to help your baby sleep longer and better. (See [Chapter 15](#).)

### The Story of Tessa and the Vacuum Cleaner



*Tessa, now five years old, is a “pistol”—smart, funny, and passionate. However, during her first weeks of life, she would get as frantic as a hurricane. Her parents, Eve and Todd, wrapped her, walked her, and even went for car rides, but nothing worked.*

*One afternoon, Tessa was really wailing but Eve couldn't hold her because she had to get the house ready for company. So she left her baby to cry and began to vacuum. The instant the vacuum was switched on, Tessa became stone silent!*

*Eve bolted over to check her. Tessa was sleeping sweetly, her body relaxed. She wasn't sleeping despite the ruckus but because of it! Amazingly, the womb experience that Tessa was missing most was “channeled” to her through the sound of Eve's seven-year-old upright vacuum.*

*From that moment on, whenever Tessa went ballistic, her parents used the vacuum cleaner to soothe her. Eve and Todd began to joke that Tessa was receiving secret messages from the planet Hoover. This calming trick was so predictable that they began inviting their friends over during Tessa's fussy time to watch the show.*

*Over the next six months, whenever Eve had to take Tessa to work with her, she always brought along a little portable vacuum to help Tessa settle in for a good long nap!*

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## The Whys About the “S’s”: Questions Parents Ask About Shhhing

### ***1. Which sound will calm my cranky baby the best: a heartbeat, lullaby, or shhhh?***

When your baby is resting peacefully, all of these can lull her into a deeper level of relaxation. However, if she's really upset, the most effective calming sound is a white noise that imitates the turbulent “shhhh” of your womb.

### ***2. How many hours a day can I use white noise? Is all night too much?***

All babies sleep longer when their parents use white noise for all naps and nights. Even if you use it twelve hours a day, that's a fifty percent cutback from what she heard in your womb. Babies also need hours of quiet to learn how to tune in to the normal sounds of your home, so just use white noise to calm crying and boost sleep. And don't worry. Your little one won't get dependent. In fact, it will be easy to wean her off when the time comes. (See [Chapter 15](#).)

*Jane's six-week-old son, Josh, woke up fussing every two to three hours during the night until she began using white noise. "The first night I used a womb sound CD, Josh calmed down quickly and slept five hours. Then he fed and slept for another three hours!"*

**3. *When should I wean my baby off white noise?***

A baby could be weaned off white noise by three to four months of age, but I recommend it for at least twelve months for naps/nights. Soothing sound promotes good sleep, even through teething and growth spurts! Whenever you want to stop it just gradually lower the volume over one to two weeks. (See weaning the 5 "S's" in [Chapter 15](#).)

**4. *Does shushing lose its effectiveness if you do it too much?***

You would think babies would eventually get bored with this sound, but they don't. Just like milk, it continues to be comforting for infants for months and months.

**5. *I worry that white noise is too strong for my baby. Is it possible that, rather than calming her, it overwhelms her?***

Please remember three things:

1. Your baby is accustomed to the loud noise of your womb, not the silence of your home.
  2. You will always be right if you follow your baby's lead. Only use loud sounds when she is screaming, and gradually lower the intensity once she calms.
  3. If the sound is driving you absolutely nuts, try some earplugs!
-



## A Parent's Perspective: Testimonials from the Trenches

The different types of shhhing noises moms and dads come up with are inspired examples of parental ingenuity. Here's how some parents I know used sound to guide their babies to happiness:

*Patrick noticed that his son, Chance, was calmed by the sounds of aquarium pumps. So he mounted one on each side of his little boy's crib. The noise and vibration helped Chance settle himself and fall asleep.*



*When Talia began screaming in the supermarket, I put my face right next to her ear and uttered a rough “shhhh” until she calmed. While this seemed rude to the people watching me, it soothed her in seconds.*

*Once, when Talia had a mini-meltdown at the local Federal Express office, I quieted her with this same technique. The shushing worked so well that a clerk asked me for a repeat demonstration. She told me her daughter had twins and was searching for an effective tool to relieve their crying.*

Sandra, Eric, Talia, and Daniel



*We turned on the radio for our fussy daughter, Camille, but instead of putting on soft music we tuned it between stations*

*to get loud hissing static. We discovered Camille didn't like the popping, crackly sound of static on the AM radio—she was an FM static aficionado only! Within a few minutes of tuning in to her favorite “non-station,” her face would soften and then she would close her eyes and drift into a peaceful sleep.*

Hylde, Hugo, and Camille



*Steve and Nancy's six-week-old, Charlie, would only stay calm in the car if they played a CD with hair dryer sounds while they were driving. After he was four months old he no longer needed the CD to be able to tolerate car rides.*



*Not only did two-month-old William have serious fussy periods, but he slept so lightly that he heard every squeak in the house. His parents, Fern and Robert, discovered that the white noise of their room fan muffled the outside sounds and helped him sleep longer.*



*Annette calmed her baby, Sean, by calling him “Shhhh-ean.” It worked so well, the family joke became that when he was four years old, the little boy thought his name was pronounced “On”!*



11



The 4th “S”:  
Swinging—Moving in  
Rhythm with Your  
Baby’s Needs

Main Points:

- Vigorous jiggly movement can switch on your baby’s calming reflex
- The three key points to successful swinging
- Lullabies: What swinging sounds like when it’s put to music
- The “Windshield Wiper”: A great way to calm your fussy baby when you’re tired
- Eight tricks for turning a swing into your baby’s best friend



***Life was so rich within the womb. Rich in noises and sounds. But mostly there was movement. Continuous movement. When the mother sits, stands, walks, turns—movement, movement, movement.***

Frederick Leboyer, *Loving Hands*

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*Every night, Ellyn and Harold put their son Zachary in his stroller and rolled him repeatedly over an elevated threshold on the floor. Each time, Zack got jolted like a car racing over a speed bump. Harold sometimes bounced Zach this way one hundred times in a row to get him to stop crying. And if his son was still fussing after that—he did it one hundred times more!*

*Zachary's brother, Nathaniel, preferred another type of motion to snap him out of his yelping. Ellyn and Harold held him while “bopping” to the Rolling Stones. Ellyn said over four months they almost wore out their living-room carpeting from dancing Nathaniel around for hours each night!*



## **Why Does Swinging Make a Baby So Happy?**

When we think of the five senses—touch, hearing, vision, smell, taste—we often forget we have a powerful sixth sense. No, not ESP; I’m referring to our ancient and deeply satisfying sense of movement in space. This wonderful sense is exactly what gets stimulated when you sway side-to-side to settle your fussing infant (and it also explains why rocking chairs are such a favorite of grandparents).

Rhythmic movement, or what I call swinging, is a powerful tool for soothing our babies—and ourselves. Most of us can remember being lulled by the hypnotic motion of a porch swing, hammock, or train.

Why do these movements cause such profound relaxation? Swinging motions that mimic the jiggling your baby felt inside you turns on “motion sensors” in his ears, which then activate the calming reflex.

## Once Upon a Time: How Parents Have Used Swinging in Other Times and Cultures

*There was something so natural as well as pleasant in the wavy motion of the cradle ... and so like what children had been used to before they were born.*

Michael Underwood, *Treatise on the Diseases of Children*, 1789

Since the dawn of time, perceptive parents have recognized the wonderful effect movement has on babies. For our ancestors, soothing their infants with continuous motion was easy, because they spent all day long walking and working with their infants on their hips.

As every parent knows, it's impossible to keep still while you're holding a baby. You constantly shift your weight, pat your baby's bottom, touch her head, and kiss her ears. Imagine how foreign the stillness of a bassinet must feel to your baby compared to the gentle strokes and movements she's pampered with while she's in your arms.

Of course, all moms have to put their babies down every once in a while. But in many cultures it's dangerous to place a baby on the ground, so a mother will hand her infant to a relative or put her in a homemade moving device, like a cradle.

In *Gynecology*, one of the world's oldest medical books, a 200 A.D. physician named Soranus instructed women on how to keep their babies healthy. Some tips

from this “Dr. Spock” of ancient Rome have not stood the test of time, such as warning parents that carrying their son on their shoulders could injure his testicles and turn him into a eunuch! However, some of his advice has proved priceless, like his recommendation to jiggle babies by “balancing the crib upon diagonally opposed rocks” and teetering it back and forth. This idea inspired the invention of the cradle (a crib placed upon rockers instead of rocks), which rewards babies with an equally hypnotic, albeit much less jolting, motion.

In many countries today, babies are still kept in constant motion. Their bodies are bounced and wiggled all day while strapped to the backs of their mothers or sisters or family yak. Thai parents rock their babies in baskets fastened to the ceiling. Eastern European women swing their infants in blankets that they hold like a hammock. Iranian women sit on the floor, with their babies placed in the grooves between their outstretched legs, and pivot their heels side-to-side, swishing their tiny children like metronomes.

In the United States, however, parents have long been warned not to handle their babies too much. In the early 1900s, Dr. Emmett Holt, America’s leading pediatrician at that time, wrote in *Care and Feeding of Children*: “Babies less than six months old should never be played with at all. To avoid overstimulation, babies need peaceful and quiet surroundings.” He worried parents would jar their babies’ fragile nervous systems. By the 1920s, the question “to rock or not to rock” a baby was no longer open to discussion. Quite frankly, no one dared admit doing it anymore.

Babies adore infant carriers. Carried babies are nurtured by their parent’s rhythmic motion and calming warmth, scent, touch, and sound. In America in the 1970s, women carrying their babies in slings were considered counter-cultural oddities, but now, it’s odd for a mom *not* to “wear her baby”!

Of course, it goes without saying that one has to be gentle with babies. You must always hold and support your baby's head when she's in your arms or when you're moving her from one place to another. But remember your baby was constantly bounced and jiggled inside your uterus as you walked, or hustled up and down stairs. Savvy mothers know that when their baby is fussy, vigorous *tiny* movements calm them much faster than slow, broad swinging.

### **Putting the Moves On: Using Motion to Calm Your Fussy Baby**

*When Ruby was in the middle of a scream-fest, Jean Marie would pick her four-week-old up, sit on the bed with her feet on the ground, and bounce up and down in quick, jerky little motions like a child on a pogo stick.*

Babies love to bounce. Why else do we call our infants bouncing baby girls and boys? Over the centuries, parents have perfected countless innovative ways to jiggle their unhappy tots into tranquillity. Here are the Top Ten:

1. Baby slings and carriers
2. Dancing (with quick little moves up and down)
3. Infant swings
4. Rhythmic pats on the back or bottom
5. Hammocks
6. Rocking in a rocking chair
7. Car rides
8. Vibrating bouncy seats

9. Bouncing on an exercise ball

10. Brisk walks

### **A Bonus Eleventh Technique— The Milk Shake**



This method may sound odd, but you'll be amazed how well it works:

1. Sit your baby on your lap (facing to your left) and place your left hand under his chin like a chin strap. Lean him forward a little so his chin rests solidly in your hand.
2. Slip your right hand directly underneath his buttocks.
3. Lift him straight up into the air with your right hand; he'll be leaning forward a tiny bit so his head will be cradled in your left hand a few inches in front of his body.
4. Now, with your right hand, bounce him with *fast* (two to three times a second) but *tiny* (one to two inches) up-and-down movements, like you're making a milk shake.

The Milk Shake is also a great way to burp your baby—and build your biceps.





## **Swinging Rules: The Three Key Points to Successful Motion**

*Those who find that rhythmic rocking doesn't work are almost certainly rocking too slowly.*

Penelope Leach, *Your Baby and Child*

For really fussy babies, the swaddle must be tight, the shhhh must be harsh, and the swinging must be fast and jiggly. Remember, swinging refers to all manner of rhythmic actions, from patting to car rides to walking with your baby in a sling.

The three rules of successful swinging are:

### **1. Start Out Fast and Jiggly**

Calming most frantic infants requires small, trembly movements, like someone with the world's biggest case of shivers. This type of motion switches on the calming reflex and makes your baby think, *Wow ... that feels really good!*

Some babies also like the free-fall feeling their parents give them when they suddenly dip or bend over. But be careful. If your baby is sensitive, that motion may startle him and set off his Moro reflex, upsetting him even more.

## **2. The Head Jiggles More Than the Body**

A shimmying or shivering motion triggers your baby's calming reflex by switching on motion detectors ... in his head. That's why it's the movement of the head, and not the body, that really turns the reflex on.

As you jiggle your baby, don't cup your hands firmly around his head. It's critical that you allow your hands to be a little open and relaxed so his head makes tiny wiggles, *like Jell-O quivering on a plate*. If you hold his head too snugly, it won't wiggle and you probably won't activate the reflex.

## **3. Follow Your Baby's Lead**

How forceful should your jiggling be? The vigor of your motion should reflect the level of your baby's crying. Gentle movements are fine for relaxed, sleepy infants, but the more agitated your baby is, the faster and more jiggly you need to be. Wait for his cries to lessen before you reduce your pace. Then, the calmer he gets, the slower your swinging can become.

Tamar and Dan realized they had to play "follow the leader" with their baby:

*The most effective technique we've found to quiet Damian is putting him up on our shoulders and thumping his back quickly and firmly. As he calms, we downshift the intensity of the patting, bit by bit.*

*Vigorous movement also works, either in a rocking chair or dancing from side to side. And, combining rocking and patting is a winning combination for us that never fails to settle him as long as he's not hungry or wet.*



Although thumping your baby's back may sound harsh, he'll probably love it, and it will also help him burp! As a rule, thumping should sound like a drum, loud enough to hear across the room—but not in the next room.

## Is Jiggling Ever Bad for Babies?

*Ken and Lisa were hesitant to jiggle baby Emily. Like many other parents, they feared it would make her spit up, get overstimulated, or even harm her. But when they tried it, they were amazed: "We worried it would be too strong for her, but it worked like a charm!"*

Almost any mother with more than three kids has learned that fussy babies settle fastest when they're energetically bounced. And jiggling is certainly much safer for infants than driving them around town with a weary parent behind the wheel. However, for many first-time moms and dads, this shivering motion may

seem counterintuitive and wrong. When I teach new parents my technique, they often ask in a concerned voice, “I know it’s been done for millions of years, but are you sure jiggling can’t accidentally cause Shaken Baby Syndrome?”

Fortunately, the answer is ... No! No! No!

## **Shaken Baby Syndrome: The Big Difference Between a Jiggle and a Shake**

*The act of shaking leading to Shaken Baby Syndrome is so violent that individuals observing it would recognize it as dangerous and likely to kill the child.*

American Academy of Pediatrics, Report on  
Shaken Baby Syndrome, July 2001

Shaken Baby Syndrome is a horrific type of child abuse that requires a force even greater than falling off a bed or out of your arms. It occurs when a baby’s head is whipped back and forth, an extreme movement that has also been referred to as Baby Whiplash Syndrome. Why whiplash? Because it involves the forceful snapping of his head, side to side, like cracking a whip. That aggressive shaking can tear open tiny veins under the skull, causing bleeding and brain damage.

Jiggling, on the other hand, differs from the violent whipping motion that causes Shaken Baby Syndrome in two important and fundamental ways:

1. With jiggling, your motions are fast but *tiny*. Your baby’s head does not dramatically flail about. Instead, it moves—at most—one to two inches from side to side.
2. With jiggling, your baby’s head always stays in line with his body. There is no whipping action with the

body going in one direction and the head moving abruptly in the opposite one.

It is my firm belief that jiggling can actually help prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome. Because it calms babies so quickly and successfully, it can keep parents from reaching the point of desperation that might drive them to a violent response.

Nevertheless, even with all the very best tips and advice, parenting can sometimes make anyone feel frustrated, edgy, and inadequate. That's why it's crucial that you *never shake—or even jiggle—your baby when you're angry!*

Please—if you're at the end of your patience, put your baby down (even if he is crying) and give yourself a break. Don't hesitate to call for help from your spouse, your family, a friend, or a crisis hotline.

### **Kristi Discovers How to Calm Kyle's Colic with the "Jell-O Head" Jiggle**



Kristi and John's son, Kyle, was a big, apple-cheeked baby with a wave of copper hair. He would be fine one night but scream for three hours the next! Kristi called for help after her five-week-old baby had been shrieking at the top of his lungs for hours. I made a house call.

Kristi describes what happened that Sunday night:

*"As luck would have it, Kyle finally fell asleep moments before Dr. Karp arrived. I didn't really want Dr. Karp to wake him up or even touch him. Sure enough,*

*when he placed his stethoscope on Kyle's chest, he started shrieking.*

*“Dr. Karp apologized for waking him, but reassured us that Kyle seemed healthy and his biggest problem was that he was having trouble calming. Then he deftly swaddled and jiggled our frantic baby, and we were stunned that within a minute Dr. Karp had Kyle resting angelically on his lap as if his last explosion had never happened.*

*“John and I practiced the technique and did okay, but we wimped out and asked Dr. Karp to put Kyle back to sleep before he left. Our boy did great that night, but the next day he was unbelievably fussy. And we just didn't feel comfortable trying the tricks we had learned the night before.*

*“Finally, my mom came to the rescue. She wrapped Kyle tightly, placed him on her lap (laying him on his side with his head cradled in her hands), shhhed loudly, and did what I like to call the ‘Jell-O head.’ She wiggled her knees back and forth, making his head quiver between her loosely cupped hands, like Jell-O on a plate. At first, Kyle resisted her efforts. He strained against the blanket and cried even harder. However, after three or four minutes he quieted, and after fifteen minutes he was fast asleep!*

*“My mother repeated this miracle many times throughout her stay with us and I began to view her as the expert on Dr. Karp’s method. I found that I had a hard time doing the Jell-O-head part, but I kept working at it and eventually began to feel more confident.*

*“At first it took almost twenty minutes for this trick to settle Kyle into sleep. But soon I got it down to ten minutes, and by the time he was seven weeks old I could take him from shriek to smile in two minutes flat.*

*“The more I practiced, the more I learned that the crucial steps for Kyle were tight swaddling and the Jell-O head. Gentle rhythms helped him when he was already quiet, but to calm screaming he needed almost an earthquake. Then, after a short time, he would heave a huge sigh and tension seemed to leave his body. I felt like a great mom! By four months of age, Kyle was adorable, happy, and doing fine without swaddling, the swing—or the Jell-O-head jiggle.”*

Kristi, John, Kyle, and Cassandra



## Lullabies: What Swinging Sounds Like When Put to Music

The word *lullaby* means *to sing to sleep*, and the tempo of these tunes is usually one beat per second—approximately the same as a heartbeat. The slow, rhythmic pace of lullabies is perfect for your baby after he has been fed and is drifting into the land of Winken, Blinken, and Nod.

However, these tranquil songs are usually powerless to stop babies in the midst of a crying frenzy. By that point, they're so lost in screams they can't hear you, even though you may be singing their favorite song. Just as adults can be "blind with rage," babies can become "deaf with distress."

Fortunately, you can rescue your baby from crying by switching to a tune with a zippy rhythm of two to three beats per second. These fast songs work especially well after your baby is swaddled. They're the original "Wrap" music! If you're a Beatles fan, try calming your baby with a fast jiggle like "It's Been a Hard Day's Night." As he begins to settle, slow down to "We Can Work It Out"



or “All You Need Is Love.” And when he’s putty in your hands, shift to a slow song like “Golden Slumbers” or the number-one favorite of all new parents, “I’m So Tired.”

Lullabies work better and better with repetition, as your baby gradually learns to associate the music with the sweet cuddling you give him every time you sing.

### **Lullabies Help Parents Too!**



Lullabies calm babies—and parents. These songs gently soothe *our* jangled nerves and lull us into a more peaceful state of mind. Lullabies also often contain a dash of black humor to help sleep-deprived parents vent their feelings and laugh a little. Consider, for example, the lyrics of the classic lullaby, “Rock-a-Bye Baby”:

**Rock-a-bye baby on the treetop,  
when the wind blows the cradle will  
rock,  
when the bough breaks the cradle will  
fall,  
*and down will come baby, cradle and all.***

The rhythms may be for sleepy babies, but the words are definitely for frazzled grown-ups!

## **The Windshield Wiper and Infant Swings: Two Great Ways to Move Your Baby in the Right Direction**

*Deborah's two-month-old son, Max, loved being lifted up and down, over and over again, using his mother like a carnival ride.*

*Genevieve's mom found she had to walk her baby, lap after lap, around the block to keep her happy.*

Carrying your baby in your arms or sling all day is one of the most pleasurable treats of being a new mom, but, by the end of the day, it can leave you feeling exhausted. So how else can you jiggle your baby without wearing out your back, your carpet, or your sense of humor?

I suggest these two user-friendly and highly successful calming motions: the Windshield Wiper, which is great for calming frantic babies, and the infant swing, which keeps babies quiet after they've been calmed.

## **The Windshield Wiper: How to Use Your Lap to Quiet Your Colicky Baby**

The Windshield Wiper perfectly combines the 5 "S's" for a very powerful soothing experience. Next to in my arms or a sling, it's my favorite method for switching on a baby's calming reflex.

Don't get discouraged if the movement seems a little complicated the first time you try it. After five to ten practices, you'll see it's one of the easiest ways for pooped parents to soothe upset infants. (It's best to practice the Windshield Wiper with a doll or when your baby is quiet and alert.)

Here's what to do:

1. Swaddle your baby tightly (the 1st "S").

2. Find a comfortable chair to sit in with your feet resting flat on the floor. (Most parents find that sitting forward in the chair works best.)
3. Sit with your knees together and your feet a few inches apart (approximately the same distance as your shoulders).
4. Nestle your baby on his right side in the groove between your legs (the 2nd “S”), allowing his cheek and head to rest in your left hand (on top of your knees). If your baby is long, or your arms are short, pull him closer to you and let his ankles rest on your left hip.
5. Slide your *right* hand under his head so your two hands overlap a bit and his head is cradled in an open, *loose* grasp.
6. Soften your shoulders, take a deep breath, and let your body relax.
7. Roll your baby partly, or totally, onto his stomach. His tummy should press against your left arm or legs. *Make sure he’s not at all rolled toward his back.*
8. Lean forward over his body, and make a rough shhhh right next to his ear (the 3rd “S”). Your shhhh should be as loud as his crying.
9. Now swing (the 4th “S”) your knees side-to-side—like a windshield wiper. If he’s crying hard, move faster *but* make your moves smaller and smaller. In seconds you’ll be making quick, tiny movements—two to three beats per second and one inch from side to side. The louder your little one cries, the faster and smaller your swinging should be. Then, as he calms, gradually slow your motion down. (Remember, his head must jiggle like Jell-O back and forth between your hands to turn on the calming reflex.) Some parents prefer bouncing their

baby up and down on their knees, but this often doesn't work as well as swinging.

10. Finally, if your hands are well positioned, your left thumb should be in front of his mouth. Offer him your clean thumb to suck on (the 5th "S"). Don't worry about your thumb being too big to fit; remember how big he can open his mouth when he cries! Or, if you prefer, your hand is also in position to hold a pacifier for him to suck on.



### **A Beginner's Version of the Windshield Wiper**



Until you master the Windshield Wiper, try this easier version:

1. Swaddle your baby and securely wedge him on his side (as described in [Chapter 9](#)) in the bassinet or crib.
2. Grab the bassinet on the side, near his head.
3. Jiggle it quickly, like you're shivering, making his head wiggle like Jell-O.

4. Shhhh loudly or turn on some harsh white noise.

Your baby should calm after twenty to thirty seconds of this method. Then roll him on his back and let him sleep.

## **Infant Swings: Get Your Fussy Baby into the Swing of Things**

Many of you probably live far from your families, and the burden of baby care falls on your shoulders twenty-four hours a day. No wonder you need some help! That's why it was inevitable that the inventors of labor-saving devices like washing machines and garbage disposals would create some baby-calming devices like swings, bouncy seats, and ... cars. (Of course, cars weren't invented for this reason, but that's how many parents use them.)

Many weary parents find products that vibrate or swing are even better than car rides. When used properly, these devices are more effective, don't cause accidents or pollution, and they let you stay in your PJ's!

Unfortunately, some parents hesitate to use swings because they believe myths like: "It moves too fast." "It can hurt a baby's back." "It makes them vomit." "Babies get dependent on them." "It's meant for older infants."

*Betsy found the swing helpful, but she was so afraid it would hurt Hannah that she put two pounds of bananas in it with her just to slow the thing down!*

*Lisanne felt torn. The swing helped Sasha, but she worried, "I don't want him to become hooked on it."*

Of course, the last thing any parent would ever want to do is hurt her child or impair his development. But, don't forget, babies are jiggled and rocked for months in the womb. That's why, far from spoiling Sasha, his hours in the swing were a small compensation for his having been evicted from the uterus. Once Sasha reached three months, he was old enough to soothe himself without any help from a swing. Like Sasha, most babies by three to four months of life find the swing isolating and boring. I've never seen a baby who couldn't be easily weaned from the swing by five months of age. (See [Chapter 15](#) on weaning babies from the swing.)

Occasionally, your friends and families may also have worries about infant swings. Some comment disapprovingly: "Babies should be in their mother's arms, not in a machine." Or, "It shouldn't be called a swing, it's really a 'neglectomatic'!"



For most of the day you'll carry your baby in your arms or a sling, but some babies protest whenever they are put down. In the past we always had kith and kin to lend hands of support. In today's mini-families, a swing can help replace that missing extra pair of hands you

need to comfort your baby while you shower, prepare dinner, or take a nap.

## **Eight Tricks for Getting the Most Out of Your Swing**

*Fern boasted, "The swing was magic for our son William. The motion and the noise worked great to get him into a peaceful sleep. It became my third hand."*

Like all baby-calming techniques, there are tricks to using swings that can improve your success with them.

**1. Start swinging early.** Babies love swings. After all, they're rockin' and rollin' in your womb for months. But if your baby was preterm, has hypotonia (floppy like a Raggedy Ann doll), or is under one month, ask your doctor's permission before using it.

**2. Never put your baby into the swing when he's screaming.** Karp's Law of Swings states: If you put a screaming baby in a swing, what you'll get is a swinging, screaming baby!

A little-known fact about swings (and bouncy seats too) is that they're not very good for *making* frantic babies calm. However, once your baby's crying has been temporarily quieted, they're great for *keeping* him calm and lulling him into sleep. So, always settle your baby for several minutes before you put him in the swing.

**3. Keep your baby's arms wrapped.** Swaddling helps swinging babies quiet faster and stay quiet longer. However, you still need to strap him securely into the swing's seat by putting the bar or belt between his wrapped legs.

**4. Recline the seat back as much as possible.** If the seat is too upright, it can be hard for your baby

to support his head. Recline it back as far as it can go or use a swing with a cradle attachment.

**5. Do a twenty-second jiggle whenever crying starts up again.** After your baby is in the swing, he may start to fuss again. Remember, only tiny but vigorous movements are a great way to turn on the calming reflex in a fussy baby. So if his crying flares up, grab the back of the swing seat and start jiggling it forward and back an inch, two to three moves a second. Within twenty seconds he should relax again.

**6. Use the fastest speed.** Unless your baby is soundly asleep, the slow speed will probably be too mild to keep him into a deep state of relaxation. Cranky kids settle best on the fast speed and many sleep best that way all night long. See what works best for your baby.

**7. Use loud white noise at the same time.** Play a loud white noise one to two feet from your baby's head until he is so deeply asleep you can lower it a bit (to a strong rumble) without waking him up.

**8. Practice makes perfect.** As with all of the 5 "S's," after a few pleasant experiences in the swing, your baby may start getting happy as soon as you put him in it.

*Sandy could calm Harriet in her lap, but when she moved the baby to the swing, little Harriet roared all over again. Sandy, warned not to overstimulate her already frantic child, would set the swing on the slowest speed. But this was too gentle to keep her little firecracker "zoned."*

*Sandy changed her approach by wrapping Harriet's arms snugly and turning on the hair dryer to quiet her*



*momentarily. Then she hustled her into the swing and jiggled it by hand for a few seconds. Once her baby looked peaceful, Sandy set the swing at the maximum speed. Immediately, everything came together. Soothing Harriet became a snap, and suddenly the swing worked every time.*

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## The Whys About the “S’s”: Questions Parents Ask About Swinging

### ***1. Are swings ever bad for a baby’s legs, hips, or back?***

No. Inside the womb, your baby was twisted like a pretzel. His supple body is incredibly flexible, which is why he can be placed in a swing without any concern for his legs, hips, or back.

### ***2. I sometimes worry my baby’s neck is too doubled over in the swing. Is that possible?***

In the swing, your baby should be reclined back as much as possible. His neck should not be doubled over. That could make it hard to breathe especially if he is premature or sick.

### ***3. Should I avoid rocking my baby vigorously right after he has eaten?***

Believe it or not, jiggling doesn’t make babies spit up more. In fact, keeping him from crying may even make your baby less likely to throw up. Bouncing can also loosen a gas bubble and help your baby burp.

### ***4. Can a baby get dizzy or nauseous from the swing or the Windshield Wiper?***

No. Jiggling motion does not set off the nausea center of the brain. Dizziness and nausea are triggered by big *wide* movements like driving down a curvy mountain road. Swinging makes fussy babies feel more comfortable, not less.

***5. If I put my baby in the swing too much, will it lose its effectiveness?***

Some babies love to suck, some need white noise to stay calm, and others are only happy when they're swinging all day. Luckily, what babies love, they love all the time! That's why they never tire of milk, cuddling, or swings.

***6. What should I do if my baby cries more when I rock him fast?***

Your infant may keep yelling for a few minutes after you begin jiggling him, since it can take a little time for him to realize you're doing something he likes. If, however, your baby continues crying despite vigorous jiggling, check your technique. Make sure your moves are fast and tiny, you're using loud white noise, he's tightly wrapped, and, when he's in your lap or arms, that he's on his side or stomach.

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## **A Parent's Perspective: Odes to Swings and Other Things**

Everyone knows that people can be moved to tears, but many parents are learning that their babies can also be moved to happiness. Here are a few babies who calmed once their parents got a little mojo happening:

***When baby Noah began to cry, David tried burping him by hoisting Noah onto***

*his shoulder and lightly patting his back. Despite David's loving attempts to get a burp out, Noah continued to wail.*

*Perhaps out of frustration or from some ancient instinct, David started patting Noah harder. He thumped him like a tom-tom drum, with a cupped hand, at about two pats per second.*

*Almost instantly, Noah quieted. His body melted into his dad's arms and a few minutes later he fell asleep. "I was surprised to see how firmly he liked to be patted. But he relaxed so fast and so deeply that I knew it was right."*



*When Margie and Barbara's son, Michael, was six weeks old, he screamed so loudly at night that their downstairs neighbor would often bang on the ceiling.*

*Margie tried to placate him with gentle rocking and soothing songs, but nothing worked until she discovered what she called the "Native war dance." She clutched Michael to her chest, his stomach pressed against her and her arms around him like a straitjacket, and shouted, "HA-ja ja ja, HA-ja ja ja." With each loud "HA" she doubled over and bent at the knees, making Michael feel as if he'd fallen through a trapdoor. With each "ja" she thumped him on the back and ratcheted her body partway back up. By the third "ja" she was standing straight again, ready for the next "HA."*

*Margie said that at three A.M., the vigor of the rhythm and the loudness of the chant were essential. Usually, within ten minutes or so Michael was snoozing again.*



12



The 5th “S”: Sucking—  
The Icing on the Cake

Main Points:

- Sucking calms babies by satisfying their hunger and by turning on their calming reflex
- Three ways to help your baby succeed with pacifiers
- How to sidestep six common pacifier problems



***Suck, and be satisfied.***

Isaiah 66:11

If mixing all the “S’s” together is like baking a cake, then sucking is the icing on the cake. This last sweet nudge allows babies to settle down, let go, and fall asleep.

A baby’s survival outside the womb depends on her ability to suck. Like an actor rehearsing for a starring

role, your baby began practicing sucking on her fingers long before birth. (Ultrasound photos of fetuses show them sucking on their hands as early as three months before their due date.) It was easy for your fetus to suck her fingers, because the soft walls of your womb kept her hands conveniently right in front of her mouth. Likewise, once she reaches four months of age and has enough muscle control to park her thumb in her mouth anytime she wants, it will again become a breeze for her to suck her fingers.

However, during your baby's fourth trimester she'll spend very little time sucking her fingers. It's not that she doesn't want to—she'd probably slurp on them twenty-four hours a day if she could. But for a newborn, getting a finger into the mouth and keeping it there is almost a Herculean feat. Even when your baby concentrates hard, drooling in anticipation of her success, her poor coordination usually causes her hands to fly right by their target, like cookies narrowly missing a hungry toddler's mouth!

Why is sucking such a sweet experience for babies? What does it do that gives them so much pleasure?

## Why Does Sucking Make Babies So Happy?

Sucking makes babies feel extraordinarily good for two reasons:

1. **It satisfies their hunger—of course.** Who doesn't love to eat? Well, new babies love it so much that they pack away a milky meal eight to twelve times a day! For babies, all this eating means hours of pleasure from sucking, sucking, sucking.

Some people say that babies eat like "little pigs," but even piggies have a hard time holding a candle to a baby. Every day, young infants "snort down"

about three ounces of milk for every pound of their body weight. That's equivalent to an adult drinking five gallons of whole milk a day, seven days a week. No wonder they need to eat so often.

**2. It turns on their calming reflex.** Babies suck to eat, but sucking is yet one more way prehistoric fetuses used to turn on their protective calming reflex and improve their chances of survival.

Sucking for food is called eating, and sucking for soothing is called non-nutritive sucking. If your baby is hungry she'll probably only suck a pacifier for a minute before crying, as if to complain, "Hey, I ordered milk—not rubber!" However, if she just wants some comfort, she'll happily suck on the pacifier for a good long while.

### **Can a Young Baby Suck Too Much?**



Some authors warn parents not to let their babies suck "too much," cautioning that sucking is habit-forming. (I wonder if, given the option, these experts would reach into your womb and pull your baby's thumb right out of her mouth!) Fortunately, it's impossible for young babies to suck too much. Sucking isn't candy or an addiction; it's a highly sophisticated, self-calming tool. It's an integral part of the fourth trimester and one of your baby's first steps toward self-reliance.

The same deep calm that's activated in your baby's brain by sucking can also be switched on in the brains of older kids and adults by other "sucking" experiences, such as lollipop licking, cigarette smoking, and nail biting. (No wonder psychologists compare cigar smoking to thumb sucking!)

Many studies have shown that non-nutritive sucking is healthy for babies. It's like vitamin S! It lessens stress

(blood pressure, heart rate, etc.) and can stimulate the release of natural pain-relieving chemicals in a baby's brain that decrease suffering from shots, blood tests, or circumcisions. Scientists have also found that premature babies who suck pacifiers grow faster, and full-term babies who are “paci” suckers have a lower risk of SIDS.

## Once Upon a Time: How Parents Have Used Sucking in Other Times and Cultures

Have you ever noticed how nicely your baby falls asleep while sucking? Most babies just soften like melted butter. Of course, mothers throughout time have traditionally satisfied their infants' need to suck the old-fashioned way, with the breast. Mother's milk is the center of an infant's world—which is why some people even refer to breast-feeding moms as Earth Mothers.

But, rather than Earth Mother, I think a breast-feeding mom should be called Galactic Goddess! That's because the ancient Greeks invented the words *galaxy* and *galactic* out of their word *gala*, meaning *milk*. Legend said that the stars in the heavens came from milk spraying out of the breasts of the goddess Juno, which is also why we call our galaxy the Milky Way.

For mothers from tribes like the Efé of Zaire and the !Kung San of Botswana, sucking is usually the first solution they try to calm their babies. At the least little squawk, these moms plunk their babies onto the boob thirty, forty, one hundred times a day!

In past centuries, it was common in some cultures to put sugar inside a rag for babies to suck on. Sometimes this “sugar teat” was dunked in brandy if a baby was particularly fussy. My friend Celia, raised in Russia in the 1920s, remembers that her neighbors, unable to



afford sugar, instead offered colicky babies a small piece of chewed-up bread wrapped in a thin cloth.

As rubber nipples for bottles became popular in the early 1900s, so did rubber pacifiers for sucking on. The English called these “dummies,” choosing this name not because a baby looked dumb with a pacifier in the mouth, but because these little rubber teats silenced cries so quickly.

## Helping Your Baby “Suck”ceed with Pacifiers

For thousands of years, mothers have offered their breasts to their babies as pacifiers. Our babies are designed to suckle frequently; in fact, mothers in some cultures put their babies to the breast one hundred times a day! In our culture today, however, such frequent nursing is impractical even though many of our babies still “desire” it. Some parents try to help their babies suck on their thumbs, but for most infants, that is like picking up ice with chopsticks—it slips away despite the best efforts. That’s why they usually need a little sucking assistance.

Luckily, today’s parents have another effective sucking tool for moms whose babies want to suckle one hundred times a day—pacifiers.

However, as with other aspects of baby calming, there are certain tricks to using pacifiers well. These tips increase your baby’s chances for pacifier “suck”cess:

- *Try different nipples*—In my experience, no pacifier shape is superior to another. Some babies like orthodontic pacifiers, with their long stems and tips that are flattened on one side. Others prefer nubbiier pacifiers with short stems. Ultimately, the perfect pacifier shape for your baby is the one she likes the best.

- *Don't try the hard sell*—You can try putting the pacifier in your baby's mouth when she's crying, but don't force it if she refuses.
- You'll be most successful if you calm her first with the other "S's" and then offer the pacifier.
- *Use reverse psychology to keep the pacifier from falling out*—This is the best trick I've ever seen for teaching a baby to keep the pacifier in her mouth. When your baby is calm, offer her the pacifier. The moment she starts to suck, tug it lightly as if you were starting to take it out of her mouth (but don't tug so hard that it actually comes out).

Your baby will respond by resisting your tug and automatically sucking on the pacifier a little harder. Wait a moment and then give a little pull again. Repeat this process ten to twenty times, whenever you give your newborn the pacifier. Her natural tendency to resist you will train her mouth to keep a firm grip on the pacifier. Many two- to three-month-old infants can be trained to keep the pacifier in their mouths even while smiling—and crying.

This reverse psychology technique is based on a simple principle of human nature: We all believe that what is in our mouth belongs to us! That's why trying to pull your nipple out of your baby's mouth is like prying a toy from the arms of a two-year-old; the harder you pull, the more she resists, and thus develops the coordination and strength to keep hold of it.

## **Pacifier Pitfalls**

Some parents and grandparents worry that pacifier use may teach a baby bad habits. But truthfully, a pacifier is just a tool to help calm your baby until she

can do it herself. There are, however, six potential pacifier problems you'll want to steer clear of:



1. **Nipple confusion**—Before nursing is well-established, some breast-feeding babies get confused when they're given rubber nipples to suck on. A baby sucking on a rubber nipple often uses a lazy, biting motion, which requires much less effort and coordination than sucking on the breast. Unfortunately, this also sometimes teaches a baby an improper way to use her mouth muscles.

Therefore, bottles and pacifiers should be avoided during the first two to three weeks of life to avoid nipple confusion (or longer, if there are any breast-feeding problems).

Once the nursing is going well, you have a choice. You may decide never to offer a bottle and exclusively breast-feed or you may choose to offer your baby occasional bottles. If you choose the latter, because of work or to have the option of giving a bottle if you are ever sick or unavailable, I strongly recommend that you introduce the bottle by three to four weeks of age (parents who wait longer than that are often rudely surprised by their baby's emphatic rejection of the synthetic nipple). Additionally, once your baby is taking a bottle well (with breastmilk, water, or non-caffeinated peppermint or chamomile tea), do not skip more than one to two days without giving a bottle ... so your baby doesn't forget how to take it.

2. **Chemical contamination**—Buy clear silicone pacifiers instead of yellow rubber ones. The yellow rubber gets sticky and deteriorates after a while and may release tiny amounts of unwanted chemical residue.

3. **Keep sweets away**—Don't dip a pacifier into syrup to make your baby suck on it more eagerly. Sweeteners like honey and maple or corn syrup run a risk of giving your baby botulism (a disease causing temporary paralysis, and even death).

4. **Keep it clean**—When you buy a pacifier, wash it well with soap and hot water. Rinse it when it falls on the floor—and several times a day even if it doesn't. Don't suck your baby's pacifier to clean it in your mouth, since your saliva may spread colds, herpes, or other illness.

5. **No strings attached**—Never hang a pacifier around your baby's neck. Strings or ribbons may get caught around her fingers, cutting off the circulation, or wrap around the throat and choke her.

6. **Enough is enough**—Once a baby reaches four to five months of age, I usually get rid of pacifiers. By that time, your infant can suck on her own fingers and do many other things to calm herself. Stopping the pacifier after six months is more difficult, because by then your baby has already started to develop a close emotional relationship with her "paci," much like a teddy bear or security blanket.

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## The Whys About the "S's": Questions Parents Ask About Sucking

### *1. How can I tell if my baby needs milk or just wants to suck?*

These signs indicate your baby is crying for food:

- When you touch her face, she turns her head and opens her mouth in search of the nipple.

- A pacifier may initially calm her, but within minutes she'll start fussing again.
- When you offer her milk she takes it eagerly and afterwards becomes sweet and calm.

## ***2. Does sucking on a pacifier shorten breast-feeding?***

Since how a baby sucks on a pacifier differs from how she sucks on a breast, wait two to three weeks, until breast-feeding is going well, before introducing the pacifier. At that point, pacifiers can occasionally make breast-feeding *more* successful by lessening a baby's crying and helping her mom get a break from nonstop sucking.

## ***3. Can pacifiers cause ear infections?***

A few studies have reported that babies using pacifiers get more ear infections. This probably happens because sucking hard on a pacifier disturbs the pressure in the ears (the same way pressure changes on airplane flights can give kids ear infections). Fortunately, young infants can't suck a pacifier hard enough to cause much pressure to build up. So you don't have to worry about this for the first four months.

## ***4. Can pacifiers protect babies from SIDS?***

Scientific studies consistently report a lower incidence of SIDS among infants who use pacifiers. It's not entirely clear how bedtime pacifier use protects babies. Nevertheless, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends bedtime pacifier use (bottle-fed babies from birth; breast-fed babies over one month of age).

## ***5. Can my baby become addicted to the pacifier if she always sleeps with one?***

No! This is one old wives' tale you can put to bed. When Hannah was five months old, it took her mother a mere three days to wean her pacifier use down from all night and several hours a day to just two minutes a day.

However, as mentioned, a baby over five to six months may begin to develop an emotional attachment to her binkie. Although you can still wean her from the pacifier after that age, it's often more traumatic.

***6. If sucking is so important, should I wrap my baby with her hands out so she can get to them?***

Calm babies may do fine with their hands unwrapped, but fussy babies have a hard time sucking their fingers without accidentally whacking themselves in the face. For these kids, having their hands free is a frustrating tease. It's much easier on agitated babies to swaddle them and give them pacifiers, because they can control their bodies and suck better when their arms are not flailing and disturbing them.

***7. Will frequent feeding spoil my baby or make her tummy more colicky?***

Many parents, like Valerie and David, are warned that "overfeeding" can give their baby tummy pain:

***"Our baby, Christina, was screaming and would calm only on my breast. My husband said I was making her colicky by feeding her every time she cried. My friends warned me I would spoil her by feeding her so often. What should I do?"***

When Valerie asked me this, I told her, first, thank goodness she had a method that worked to

calm her baby. Second, it's impossible to spoil a fetus—and all babies are “fetuses” for the first three months. Third, she needed to call her doctor to make sure her baby was getting enough milk.

I never worry about a young baby's frequent suckling leading to spoiling or upset tummies. After all, we know from our studies of primitive cultures that babies were “originally designed” to nurse, on and off, all day and night. However, it sounded to me like Valerie was overlooking something very important. Although suckling Christina was a beautiful and satisfying way to soothe her fussiness, Valerie was not taking advantage of the other natural calming tools she possessed. So I recommended that she and David learn and practice the other 4 “S's.” That would enable David to play a more active role and for Valerie to have a respite from breastfeeding.

Dads are especially eager to master other calming tricks, because they often feel left out when the only method that calms their baby is a milky breast. Once fathers learn how to quickly soothe their babies, they feel much more confident caring for them.

***8. If I let my baby suckle on my breasts all night, I sleep well and it feels very cozy. Is there anything harmful in doing this?***

Spending the night with your baby at your side is how most people have slept throughout the ages. I think one of the most blessed feelings a woman can have is the sweet sleep that she shares with her nursing child. When you are together like that, it's natural that she may want to nibble a little on and off. However, it's your choice. You can go along with your baby's wishes or keep your shirt on and try to pacify her another way. There's no right or

wrong about this—the decision is yours. (See [Chapter 15](#) for a discussion of the pros and cons about co-sleeping.)

However, if you're sleeping with your baby, please be aware of the following:

- Keep pillows and blankets away, avoid waterbeds, and make sure she can't fall off or get stuck under the headboard or against the wall. (Swaddling will help keep her from scooting into dangerous places.)
- Make sure you're getting enough rest. You're no good to your baby if you get sick or become a menace when you are driving.
- Once your baby's teeth begin to come in, be aware that feedings lasting more than a half hour may cause tooth decay.

***9. There are a lot of thumb suckers in my family. Will giving my baby a pacifier prevent her from sucking her thumb later ... or encourage it?***

Some babies are just incredibly driven to suck. Their strong desire is not a sign of being overly immature, dependent, or insecure (or of your being too lax as a parent). In my experience, the vast majority of cases of prolonged thumb and pacifier sucking is simply an inherited trait, no different from eye color or dimples. Or, to put it another way, it's one thing you really *can* blame on your parents!

There is little doubt that pacifiers prevent thumb sucking; it's just too hard to get both into the mouth at the same time. But in my experience it doesn't affect the length of time a baby demands to suck on something (finger or paci).

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## A Parent's Perspective: Testimonials from the Trenches

Some babies are interested in sucking only when they want to eat. For other babies sucking is like a massage, tranquilizer, and hot bath all rolled into one!

Here are stories of some babies who were “suckers for sucking”:

*Annie and Michael were especially worried when their little boy screamed; Rylan's heart problem made extreme exertion dangerous. So Ann carried him around the apartment for hours, until her back was in such pain that she couldn't stand it any longer.*

*She resisted giving Rylan a pacifier because she “didn't want to start teaching him bad habits that he would have trouble stopping later on.” Finally, however, driven to desperation, Ann reluctantly gave it a try and “Bingo! Giving Rylan the pacifier was a godsend! We still had to entertain him, but the binkie let me walk away and take a break, especially when he was in his vibrating seat.”*



*Stanley began to struggle with his feedings when he was seven weeks old. He had always begun his meals with gusto, but now after ten minutes he was pulling away and licking at the nipple as if he had forgotten how to eat. Seconds later he would arch back and wail as if he wanted to jump out of his mother's arms. But that*

*wasn't what he wanted either, because as soon as Stanley was put down, he cried even harder.*



*Stanley's parents, Maria and Bill, tried rocking and wrapping him, but when he was really agitated he could free his hands in seconds. Maria, confused and frustrated, wondered if her milk had turned bad or dried up.*

*Fortunately, the problem was much less complicated than that. Maria had plenty of milk—in fact, too much. When Stanley tried extra suckling for fun at the end of his feeding, Maria's breasts continued releasing a stream of milk into his throat. Stanley had to pull away to avoid choking, but he was in a pickle because he still wanted to suck.*

*Once Maria and Bill began offering the pacifier at the end of his feedings, he became an angel again.*

*Steven and Kelly said their one-month-old bruiser, Ian, loved sucking on his paci. But if it fell out of his mouth he started to scream. Kelly lamented, "It works great, but we feel like we're becoming his pacifier slaves. My mom joked that we should just tape it in his mouth. I knew that even kidding about that was terrible, but we were going out of our minds."*



*When Steven and Kelly called, I taught them about "reverse psychology." One*

*week later Kelly called back, amazed at how quickly the paci problem was solved. Within a week lan's mouth muscles were so well trained he could hold the pacifier for one to two hours without dropping it.*

*Kelly said, "It's weird. I thought the best way to keep lan's pacifier in his mouth was to keep pushing it back in. But what worked was to do exactly the opposite!"*

*Some babies will suck on anything you put in their mouths, but some are like miniature gourmets. Take Liam, who as a two-month-old refused to suck on anything—not pacifiers, not his fingers, not even a bottle, with one exception: He loved to suck on his mother's second finger!*

13



The Cuddle Cure:  
Combining the 5 “S’s”  
into a Perfect Recipe  
for Your Baby’s Bliss

Main Points:

- Some babies can be calmed with just one “S” but most need several “S’s” to settle well
- The Cuddle Cure is the powerful combination of all 5 “S’s” at the same time
- Two essential steps for perfecting the Cuddle Cure:

*Precision*—A review of the most important points of each of the “S’s”

*Practice*—Why you must practice to excel at the Cuddle

As you know by now, the most successful baby-calming techniques handed down for centuries are based on the 5 “S’s.” However, if you haven’t yet been successful at soothing your baby in minutes using the 5 “S’s,” don’t lose heart. You can still learn how to guide your unhappy baby from tears to baby bliss using these methods.

## What If the Crying Continues—Even When You’re Doing Everything Right?

*To make no mistake is not in the power of man; but from their errors and mistakes the wise and good learn wisdom for the future.*

Plutarch

Any one of the 5 “S’s” can have a comforting effect on mildly fussy babies. However, for real explosive, colicky kids, a little swaddling or shushing may not make a dent. Here are reasons why your “S’s” might not have succeeded in calming your crying baby:

1. **She’s having a little problem**—Your baby may be hungry or struggling with a poop. Fortunately, these problems are usually obvious and easy to resolve without the “S’s.”
2. **She’s having a big problem**—Approximately ten to fifteen percent of colicky babies have a medical explanation for their irritability, such as food intolerance or stomach acid reflux. (See [Appendix A](#) to review the medical causes of colic and [Chapter 14](#) to review the treatment for many of those problems.)
3. **The “S’s” are being done one at a time**—The more powerfully a baby is wailing the more she will need the help of several “S’s” simultaneously.
4. **The “S’s” aren’t being done correctly**—As with any reflex, if it’s not triggered in exactly the right way it just won’t happen.

This chapter focuses on perfectly combining the 5 “S’s” into the Cuddle Cure and reviews the common

mistakes parents make as they begin to learn the “S’s.”

### **If One Is Good, Two Are Better: Calming Babies with Multiple “S’s”**

*Nina and Dimitri were dismayed that their champion cryer, Lexi, got more enraged when they tried to calm her with the sounds of the hair dryer or the infant swing. However, when they used the hair dryer and swing together, they worked like a charm.*

Someone once said, “There’s a sucker born every minute.” Well, when it comes to babies that’s especially true. In fact, thousands of suckers, swingers, and even shhhers come into the world every day! Just as babies have different hair color and temperament, each infant differs slightly in the way he needs to be calmed. Some settle best with rocking, others quiet instantly with white noise, and some surrender as soon as they’re put on their stomachs. These easy babies require the help of only one of the “S’s” to make them feel calm and serene.

Cranky infants, however, need more help. They often require two, three, or four of the “S’s” done together to cease their cycle of screaming. And the fussiest, most colicky babies demand all 5 “S’s” simultaneously.

#### **Getting Acquainted: An Experiment in Soothing Your Baby**



To find your baby’s favorite calming technique, place him on his back when he’s a little bit fussy. One by one, add another “S” and see how many it takes to settle him down.

- 1. Shhhh him softly. If that doesn't work, do it louder, right in his ear.**
- 2. Swaddle his arms to keep them from flailing. Do that while shhhing.**
- 3. Place your wrapped baby on his side or stomach and shush him again.**
- 4. Now add a quick, jiggle motion.**
- 5. Finally, on top of all of these, offer a pacifier or your finger to suck on.**

By this time, most fussy babies will usually be calmed.

## **The Cuddle Cure: Combining All 5 “S’s” into a Recipe for Baby Bliss**

*On a plane from New York to Los Angeles, I watched an elderly woman calm a baby with such precise, elegant moves that I imagined I was witnessing an ancient ballet.*

*In mid-flight, this infant suddenly erupted into crying. After a few piercing wails, the frail grandmother picked up her frantic traveling companion and began a symphony of responses. She nestled the little girl's stomach against her shoulder, made a continuous shhhh sound in the baby's ear, rhythmically thumped her bottom, and swayed her torso side to side like a snake working its way uphill.*

*In less than a minute her tiny bundle was sound asleep.*



It's tempting to believe that someone who's good at calming babies has "the gift," but that's not the case. Soothing young infants has nothing to do with special talents. It has everything to do with understanding why babies cry and learning and practicing the skills to soothe them.

Most parents automatically rock and embrace their crying babies, but sometimes that's not enough. The Cuddle Cure combines all 5 "S's" into a technique so powerful it turns on the calming reflex in even the fussiest babies.

Mothers in many cultures around the world use variations of the Cuddle. In Tanzania, some women soothe crying babies by cuddling them while they pretend to grind corn! They vigorously bend and straighten and hum rough, grinding noises until the baby settles.

If the Cuddle is like an ancient cake recipe, with the ingredients being the 5 "S's," most baby books are unfortunately like incomplete cookbooks. They list the 5 "S's" but don't mention exactly how to do them or how to mix them together.



Without instructions on how to mix the ingredients for a cake, you're more likely to end up with warm goop than a wonderful dessert. And, without instructions detailing how to do each "S" and how to mix them together, it's easy for parents to end up with a *more* fussy baby rather than a perfectly calmed one!

And, once the Cuddle has helped you stop your baby's screams, that's not the end of it. The Cuddle is also a valuable tool for keeping your baby calm *after* you soothe his crying.

After your little one falls asleep in your arms, you may not be able to put him down and walk away. He may be very relaxed, but he's not in a coma. Deep within their brains, snoozing babies are still aware of the world around them. That's why abruptly stopping the hypnotic rhythms of the Cuddle may make a baby explode back into tears even from what appears to be a sound sleep.

Fortunately, the Cuddle is perfect for keeping your baby calm after you've quelled his cries. Your colicky baby may stay happy for hours as long as he feels like he's still safely packaged in the womb (swaddled, swinging, and with loud white noise playing close by). If your baby suddenly starts thrashing again, simply picking up the tempo should help regain his attention so you can lead him back to serenity.

## **How to Be the Best Cuddler on the Block**

Although the Cuddle works better than anything else for calming colic, it may not feel natural at first. Many new parents find it's like riding a bicycle; it initially seems complicated and intimidating. Some parents give up after a few tries, thinking, *This may work for some kids but our baby hates it.*

I certainly understand this frustration. It's excruciating to try to quiet your baby's shrieking when everything you do seems to make it worse. But, like riding a bicycle, once you get the hang of doing the Cuddle it's really a lot of fun. Soon you'll feel like you've been doing it your entire life.

And if the Cuddle isn't working perfectly, it's probably just because you need a little technique tuneup. The most common reason this ancient method fails is because it's not being done properly. In fact, incorrect swaddling, swinging, and shushing may even make your crying baby *more* upset! So, like the song says, "If you're gonna do it, do it right, right."

Let's recap the important pointers to get each of your "S's" in gear:

## **Swaddling**

Parents often abandon swaddling because their babies strain against it. They misinterpret this struggling to mean, "Let me out. I hate this. It's unfair!" But please don't give up on this crucial first step. To be successful with wrapping, you must:

- Keep your baby's arms straight down at his sides.
- With each fold of the swaddle, tuck and snug the blanket as tightly as possible.
- After swaddling, don't allow the blanket to loosen and pop back open.

Remember, *swaddling is not meant to calm your baby!* Its purpose is to stop his flailing and to help him pay attention to the other "S's," which *will* soothe him.

## **Side/Stomach Position**

Lying on the back is fine when your baby is calm. But if he's sensitive, being rolled toward the back may upset the position sensors in his head and trigger a "red alert," making his crying even worse.

- When your baby is on his side, keep him rolled at least a bit toward his stomach. Some babies are so sensitive they will have difficulty getting calm if they're rolled even slightly toward their backs.
- Make sure your baby is not hungry. If he's eager to eat, holding him in a way that touches his cheek may trigger his rooting reflex and make him think you're offering food. You can imagine how this could confuse and frustrate a famished baby.

### **Shhhing**

The shhhh sound is easy to make, and most parents find it natural to do—softly. Therein lies the problem: Most parents shhhh too quietly and too far from their baby's ear.

- Crank up the volume of your shhhh until it's a bit louder than your baby's screams. Remember, the sounds in the womb are louder than a vacuum cleaner and your infant's ears naturally muffle sound for the first few months.
- If you're using a machine to make white noise, place it one to two feet from your baby's head so it's loud enough to trigger the calming reflex.

### **Swinging**

Gentle swinging may keep a quiet baby content, but it's much too mild for screaming babies. The most important tips for successful swinging are:

- Move your fussy baby in quick, teensy, shiverlike wiggles. Slow, wide moves may keep a baby asleep, but they're not vigorous enough to calm a crying infant.
- Support your baby's head and neck, but hold his head a little loosely so it can jiggle a little like Jell-O in your hands.

*Jake's father, Jimmy, told me he tried the Cuddle, but it wouldn't work. I reviewed each step of his technique and discovered he was doing almost everything right, except his swinging was too wide. Rather than sliding his knees an inch from side to side, he was going twelve inches with each move. These wide swings didn't get Jake's head jiggling enough. Once he made the motion fast and short, the swinging calmed Jake almost every time.*

## Sucking

Sucking is usually the easiest "S" to get right. But if your baby rejects the pacifier, here's how to change his mind:

- Calm him first. Most babies can't take a pacifier while they're screaming.
- Try different brands. Some babies prefer a particular pacifier shape.
- Use reverse psychology. Gently tug on the pacifier as soon as he begins to suck it. He'll resist you, and the more you play this game,

the sooner you'll train his mouth to keep a good long grip on the binkie.

## **Becoming a Cuddle Expert: Practice Makes Perfect**

*If at first you don't succeed—you're running about average.*

M. H. Alderson

Remember, this technique has worked for millions of years, so even if it doesn't work perfectly the first few times you try it, you'll definitely get the hang of it if you keep practicing. (In the beginning, it's best to practice this technique with a doll or when you and your baby are calm. It's harder to learn when you're exhausted and your little angel is making noises that could shatter glass.)

Parents aren't the only ones who improve with practice. As you get better, your baby is getting better too. Bit by bit, he'll learn to recognize what you're doing—and that he likes it.

Patience is especially important if you're starting these techniques when your baby is already six to eight weeks old. It may take several tries for you to learn them and then several more tries for your baby to unlearn his prior experiences and begin to get used to the 5 "S's." However, if you persevere you can still be one hundred percent successful!

14



Other Colic Remedies:  
From Massage and  
Feeding Problem Cures  
to Old Wives' Tales

Main Points:

- Three ancient colic cures proven to be true paths: massage, fresh air, and extra warmth
- Effective remedies for four medical causes of infant crying: allergies, constipation, feeding problems, reflux
- A look at four unproved colic treatments



***Put cotton in your ears and gin in your stomach!***

19<sup>th</sup>-century colic advice

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Through the centuries, experts continually thought up colic treatments to fix whatever they believed to be causing their baby's unhappiness. These false assumptions led them to champion many different types of therapies that have proven to be total dead ends: alcohol, sugar water, sedation, anti-cramp medicine, and

burp drops. There are, however, besides the 5 “S’s” a few other ways of helping crying babies that are true paths.

## **Three True Path Colic Cures: A Grandmother’s Bag of Tricks**

When you want a break from the 5 “S’s,” here are three time-honored tricks for colicky babies that work well: massage, walks outside, and a little extra warming.

### **Massage: The Miracle of Touch**

*Massage is love which is one unique breath, breathing in two.*

Frederick Leboyer, *Loving Hands*

Massage is a very ancient treatment for colic. Its extraordinarily soothing effects are based upon our oldest and most profound sense—touch.

### **Touch and the Fourth Trimester**

There’s an old saying, “A *child* is fed with milk and praise,” and I would say a *baby* is fed with milk and caresses. Your baby’s loving caresses began inside your womb, where she enjoyed a feast of velvety cuddling twenty-four hours a day. Once born, your baby still loves to be touched and stroked. Your skin-to-skin embrace of her is the touch equivalent of calming, hypnotic movement or sound.

### **Cuddling Builds Brains**



A recent study from McGill University asked, “Does extra cuddling make animals smarter?” The researchers looked at two groups of little rat pups. The first group had very “loving” mothers who licked and stroked their babies a lot. The second group received much less affection from their moms.

When the rats became old enough to be taught mazes and puzzles, scientists noticed that the cuddled animals were extrasmart. They had developed an abundance of connections in a part of the brain crucially important in rats (and people) for learning.

The moral of the story is clear: Cuddling your baby feels good, and it may even boost her IQ!

Touch is not only a wonderful reminder of a baby’s time as a fetus; like milk, it’s an essential “nutrient” for her growth. In fact, in some ways it’s even more beneficial than milk. While stuffing your baby with extra milk won’t make her any healthier, the more tickles and hugs she gets, the stronger and happier she’ll become.

In 1986, a brilliant baby-watcher named Tiffany Field confirmed the benefits of touching in a study on the effects of massage on premature babies. She had nurses massage a group of preemies for fifteen minutes, three times a day, for ten days. The results were astounding. Massaged babies gained forty-seven percent more weight than expected and were able to go home almost a full week earlier than babies who didn’t get massaged. In an equally stunning follow-up study, when the massaged babies were examined one year later, their IQ’s were higher than the babies’ who were handled routinely. Dr. Field also discovered that when healthy full-term babies were massaged for fifteen minutes a



day, they cried less, were more alert and socially engaged, gained weight faster, and had lower levels of stress hormones.

## **Infant Massage: Rubbing Your Baby the Right Way**

Beautiful, big-eyed Mica was so sensitive and vigilant that she often had difficulty shutting out the world, even when she was exhausted. When Mica was one month old, I recommended that her parents, Lori and Michael, try using massage to help their daughter wind down:

*At first Mica seemed leery of this type of touching. She accepted some foot massage, but that was as far as I could get before she became unhappy. I stuck with it, though, and after a week, Mica began to enjoy the touching. She even became excited when she heard me rub massage oil into my hands. I was delighted! Massage time soon became our special bonding time. Mica would deeply relax and sometimes fall asleep. I loved doing this for our daughter. And best of all, it helped her become calmer in general and to get over her evening fussies.*

Lori, Michael, and Mica

Here are the five steps for giving your baby a perfect massage:

- 1. Prepare for pleasure**—About an hour after your baby has eaten, remove your jewelry, warm the room, dim the lights, take the phone off the hook and, if you like, you may turn on some soft music. Have some slightly heated vegetable oil (almond oil is great) within easy reach, and some wipes and diapers too, just in case.

**2. Bring yourself to the moment**—Sit comfortably with your naked baby right next to you or on your bare, outstretched legs. Place a towel around her body to keep her warm. Now take five slow, deep breaths to allow yourself to be fully present for this wonderful experience. Massage is not a mechanical routine, it's an exchange of love in one fleeting and tender moment of time.

The first few times you massage your baby, you may notice that you're "in your head," thinking about how to do the massage. Don't worry: Once you become more familiar with the routine, your attention will naturally begin to focus on your fingertips, your baby's soft skin, and your loving heart.

**3. Speak to your baby with your hands**—Rub some oil between your hands and start by touching your baby's feet. Always try to keep one hand in contact with her skin and softly talk to her about what you are doing and what your hopes are for her life to come or sing a lullaby. Uncover one limb at a time and massage it with a touch that is fluid but *firm*. Let your massage strokes move slowly along her body, in synchronicity with your calm breathing.

Use smooth, repetitious strokes over her feet, legs, stomach, chest, arms, hands, back, face, and ears, gently rotating, pulling, stretching, and squeezing. Twist her arms and legs as if you were lightly wringing a wet sponge. Feel free to experiment with using your fingers and different parts of your hands, wrists, and forearms.

**4. Reward your baby's tummy**—Thank your baby's tummy for doing such a good job. Bicycle her legs and then firmly push both knees to the belly and hold them there for ten to twenty seconds to give a nice, satisfying stretch. Then massage the

tummy in firm, clockwise, circular strokes, starting at her right lower belly, up and across the top of her tummy, and ending at the lower left side. (This sometimes helps babies release gas or poop.)

**5. Follow your baby's signals**—If your baby begins to get restless, it's a sign to change your pace or end the massage. Wipe the excess oil from her body, letting a bit remain to nourish her skin. Bathe her with soap and warm water later that day or the next morning.

### **Why Don't More of Us "Stay in Touch" by Massaging Our Babies?**



Despite all the evidence on how wonderful touch and massage are for babies and parents, it's still not a typically "American" thing to do. In part, that may be because parents have been cautioned that it might spoil their infants.

These warnings have had a chilling effect on how we raise our babies. In our culture, we don't often stroke our babies and when we do our touch is usually muffled by layers of clothing. As previously mentioned, while many American parents hold their infants for less than eight hours a day, many parents in other cultures keep "in touch" with their babies for more than twenty hours a day. That's why, sadly, from our infants' perspective, the United States could be classified as a third-world country lacking a richness of touch and deprived of a balanced diet of caressing.

Giving your baby a massage is also wonderful for moms and dads because it can lower your stress and boost your self-esteem.

If you would like to learn more about the technique of baby massage, an excellent resource is Vimala McClure's *Infant Massage*.

## **Walks Outside: Calming Some Babies Is Just a Stroll in the Park**

If our babies could talk, they would probably bug us, “Why can’t we live outside like all the other Stone Age families?” Our ancient relatives lived outside, and perhaps that’s one reason why some of our little cave babies get deadly bored sitting at home. For them, nothing is more fun than hearing the wind in the trees, feeling the air on their faces, and watching the continually moving shadows.

Some parents ask me how calming by being outside fits with the idea of the fourth trimester. For babies, a walk outside is a parade of calming out-of-focus images and jiggly, soothing rhythms. I believe they are lulled by this hypnotic flow of gentle sensations, like a constant, multisensory white noise.

So, when your baby is crying, try giving her a breath of fresh air. Going for a walk will also help lift your spirits and fill you with a sense of peace.

## **Warming Your Baby Up to the Idea of Calming Down**

In the uterus, infants are constantly in “hot water”! That may be why so many babies love warm things. To help you soothe your baby when she’s fussing, try these “hot tips”:

- *A warm bath*

*Every time their six-week-old son, Jack, was fussy, Kim and John calmed him by submersing him in warm water. “Jack always gets super relaxed when he is put into a hot bath. He goes into a Zen-like state and is mellow and ready for bed afterward.”*

- *A warm blanket*

*When her niece, Erica, was very fussy one day, Barbara heated the baby blanket in the clothes dryer for a few minutes, thoroughly checked it for hot spots, and then bundled Erica in it. Erica calmed so quickly that from then on, whenever she became fussy she got swaddled in warm wraps. (Barbara was always very careful to avoid overheating or burning her.)*

- *A warm hat*

Covering your baby’s head makes her feel cozy and comfortable. Newborns lose twenty-five percent of their body heat through their heads, so a baby with an exposed head is like an adult walking around on a chilly night in underwear.

- *A warm hot-water bottle*

Dr. Spock loved to tell parents to lay their colicky babies tummy-down on a warm hot-water bottle. He thought it helped relieve stomach pain, the way warmth can help menstrual cramps, but more likely it works by putting soothing pressure on your baby’s stomach and turning on the calming reflex.

- *Warm socks*

As with a blanket, you can warm up your baby’s socks to make her feel extra toasty. Just check for hot spots before putting them on.

## **Warning: Keep Your Baby from Becoming a Red-Hot Pepper**



Keeping your baby warm can be helpful, but overheating her is not good. It may make her restless, cause a heat rash, and there is a slight chance it can increase a baby's risk of SIDS.

Pay attention to the following to avoid the pitfalls of overheating:

- If your baby's ears or toes are red and hot and her armpits are sweaty, she's probably too warm and needs to be dressed more lightly.
- You can warm towels, blankets, socks, and hats in the clothes dryer, with a hair dryer, or in a microwave oven for thirty seconds. But before you put any heated item on your baby, always open it up and hold it against your forearm to make sure it isn't too hot.
- Never microwave any clothing with metallic thread.
- Never use an electric blanket or heating pad. These can overheat babies and expose them to unnecessary electromagnetic radiation.
- In hot weather, swaddle your baby in light wraps.

**Four Modern True Path Colic Cures:  
A Doctor's Bag of Tricks**

Although medical problems are not commonly the cause of colic, I estimate that ten to fifteen percent of extremely fussy babies cry because of one of four tummy troubles: food allergy, constipation, feeding problems, or stomach acid reflux.

Children who suffer from these treatable conditions may get some relief from the 5 “S’s” and the grandmother’s tips discussed earlier; however, what many of these infants truly need is a medical solution for their particular difficulty.

Here are a few hints on how to soothe these unhappy infants.

### **Preventing Food Allergies: Getting Tummies Back on Track**

It’s believed that approximately ten percent of colicky babies cry due to food sensitivities. Unfortunately, doctors have no accurate test to check babies for this problem. To discover if your child has a food allergy, you must play Sherlock Holmes and eliminate foods from your diet or switch your baby’s formula to see what happens. (Always consult your doctor before doing so.) It usually only takes two to four days to see if the crying gets better.

If your baby improves when you eliminate foods from your diet, she may have a food allergy. However, sometimes this improvement is just a coincidence. To be sure your child truly has to avoid those foods, I advise you to wait for the fussiness to be gone for two weeks and then to eat a spoonful of the suspected food, or feed your baby a half ounce of the suspected formula. Try this over four to five days; if there’s an allergy the crying will return.

Most babies with food allergies are allergic to only one or two foods, with the most common, by far, being

cow's milk and dairy products.

### Calcium Rules



If you're breast-feeding and you stop eating dairy products because your baby is sensitive to them, rest assured there are many other ways to get adequate calcium in your diet. Besides calcium supplements, you can also get calcium from green vegetables (broccoli, leafy vegetables), sesame-seed butter, dark molasses, fortified orange juice or soy milk, corn tortillas, etc.

Eliminating dairy foods from your diet is not a risk to your child. However, if you stop dairy products for more than a few weeks, speak to your doctor to make sure you're meeting *your* body's calcium needs.

That's why doctors often recommend bottle-fed babies switch from cow's milk formula to soy. Many babies improve by doing this, but as I noted earlier, at least ten percent of milk-allergic babies are soy-allergic too. These babies require a special, hypoallergenic formula; ask your doctor about these.

### Constipation: Interesting Ideas on a Dry Subject

Like grandma always said, "It's important to stay regular," and that's especially true for babies! Fortunately, breast-fed babies are almost never constipated. They may skip a few days between poops, but even then the consistency is pasty to loose. Bottle-fed babies, on the other hand, do get constipated, but



several commonsense approaches can usually help rectify the problem:

- *Change the formula*—Sometimes changing your baby’s formula can help resolve her constipation. Some infants have softer stools when they drink concentrated formula versus powder (or vice versa); others do better with cow’s milk formula versus soy; and, rarely, some may improve with a switch to a low-iron formula.
- *Dilute the mix*—Your baby’s poops may improve when you add one ounce of water or half an ounce of adult prune juice (organic is best), once or twice a day, directly to the formula. (Never give babies under one year of age honey or corn syrup as a laxative.)
- *Open the door*—One last way to relieve constipation is to get your baby to relax her anus. Infants who strain to poop often accidentally tighten their anus. Like adults who can’t pat their heads and rub their tummies at the same time, many babies have trouble tightening their stomach muscles and relaxing their rectums simultaneously.

Try getting your baby’s anus to “loosen up” by bicycling her legs and massaging her bottom. If this fails, insert a Vaseline-greased thermometer or Q-tip one inch into the anus. Babies usually respond by trying to push it out, and they often push the poop out at the same time.

### **A Poop Advisory: Sometimes Constipation Signals a More Serious Problem**



Healthy babies may skip a day or two between poops. However, less frequent BM’s may signal a

more worrisome problem. If your baby goes more than two or three days without a stool, you should touch base with your doctor. He may consider evaluating her for three rare, but curable, diseases that can masquerade as constipation:

1. *Hypothyroidism*—This easily treated condition is caused by an underactive thyroid gland and may slow mental development if allowed to continue untreated.
2. *Hirschsprung's disease*—This rare intestinal blockage happens when the rectal muscles can't relax to let the poop out. Surgery can correct it.
3. *Infantile botulism*—This very rare disease temporarily paralyzes babies. It's brought on by botulism spores that live in the ground and in liquidy sweets like honey or corn syrup (which should never be given to babies).

## **Feeding Problems—Babies Who Cry from Too Much (or Too Little) of a Good Thing**

Fortunately, 99.9 percent of the time, your baby and your milk are perfect together. However, getting too little or too much milk may trigger severe crying.

### **“Got Milk?”—Babies Who Cry Because They Don't Get Enough Milk**

It's usually easy to tell if a bottle-fed baby is getting her fair share of milk: Count the number of ounces she eats. With breast-feeders, however, it's trickier. If you are nursing, the following questions may help you to figure out if your baby is crying because she's not getting enough milk:

*Are your breasts making enough milk?* If your breasts feel heavy when you wake up, if they occasionally leak, and if you can hear your baby gulping when she's feeding, it's likely that your breasts are making plenty of milk.

*Does your baby become serene after a feeding?* Well-fed babies are usually blissful, calm, and relaxed after a feeding.

*Is your baby peeing enough?* During the first few days of life, infants don't urinate very often, but once your milk comes in, your baby should pee five to eight times a day.

*Is your baby gaining weight normally?* Many moms and grandmoms are always worried that theirs is the only skinny baby in town while all the other infants are little sumo wrestlers! To know if your baby is gaining enough weight, you need to put her on a scale. For the most accurate weighing, check her on the scale at your doctor's office. Remember, babies lose eight to twelve ounces over the first few days of life, but thereafter they gain four to seven ounces per week.

*Does your fussy baby become soothed and content by sucking on your finger or pacifier?* Just because your fussy baby wants to suck doesn't mean she's hungry. Offer her your finger to suck on. If she sucks happily for a few minutes, she probably wants recreation, not nutrition.

If you answered no to any of these questions, you should call your doctor to discuss whether or not your tiny one's cries might be a sign of hunger.

## **Rebuilding Your Milk Supply**

If extra milk calms your baby's crying and you want to rebuild your milk supply, you probably can. Speak to your doctor, a lactation consultant, or a La Leche League

leader for advice. You can try some of these remedies too:

### **1. Diagnose the Problem**

- Sometimes poor feeding is caused by a “mommy problem.” You may be trying to put your baby on the breast incorrectly. Or you may have flat nipples, a thyroid problem, fatigue, pain, poor nutrition, and—rarely—insufficient breast tissue. If your nipples are cracked or sore, speak with your doctor to make sure you don’t have a yeast infection. Also you can try letting a little of your milk dry on them after each feeding. Breast milk contains special factors that speed the healing of irritated skin.
- Poor feeding may also be caused by a “baby problem.” Some babies have a hard time getting the hang of nursing. Some are weak, some are “lazy,” some suck their tongue instead of your nipple, a few are tongue-tied, and others are just plain confused and try to bite instead of suckle.

Regardless of the cause, if you are having pain or any nursing problem, get help as soon as possible.

**2. Increase Your Supply.** Once you know your breasts are fine and your baby is sucking well, the next step is increasing your milk supply. Here’s how:

- Eat well and get as much rest as you can.
- Empty your breasts frequently. Nurse your baby every two to three hours (during your waking hours). Some lactation consultants recommend that moms use only one breast per feeding; however, especially when you want to build up your milk supply, I think

it's best to switch breasts frequently (move her from one breast to the other every seven to ten minutes until she stops wanting to suck).

- If you are not too tired or overwhelmed, you may build up your milk supply further by pumping or expressing milk once or twice a day. I recommend pumping for five to ten minutes *before* the first feeding of the morning, or whenever your breasts feel the fullest. Don't worry about depriving your baby of milk. You'll remove some foremilk, but that still leaves the rich hindmilk for her to enjoy. After a few days you should notice your supply increasing.
- Use imagery while you're nursing or pumping to increase milk production. Get comfortable and imagine your favorite safe, relaxing place and visualize your breasts making lots of milk. One mother I know imagined lying in the sun on a tropical island, with rivers of milk flowing out of her breasts to the ocean, turning the seas white—it worked!
- Try some fenugreek tea or a product called Mother's Milk tea made of fennel, anise, mint, and fenugreek to stimulate your breasts' milk glands.
- Ask your doctor about prescription medications that help increase your milk supply or the letting down of the milk you already have. Also ask if you need your thyroid checked.

**3. Supplement Your Baby's Breast Milk with Some Formula.** You could also help your hungry baby by giving her pumped milk or formula. This can be given in a teaspoon, eye dropper, or syringe, but it

is often best to use a feeding device called a Supplemental Nursing System (SNS). The SNS is a bag of milk connected to a soft, strawlike tube, which allows the baby to drink from the bag and the breast simultaneously. This method helps a woman rebuild her milk supply without teaching her baby the wrong way to suckle, a problem that may occur when nursing babies are given too many bottles.

### **“My D Cup Runneth Over!”—Babies Who Cry Because There Is Too Much Milk**

Some babies love milk so much, they overeat. These kids guzzle down four to eight ounces each feeding and then vomit it all up because, as the saying goes, “their eyes were bigger than their stomachs.” Other babies, however, guzzle not out of gluttony but out of self-protection. Their mom’s milk is pouring out of her breast so quickly that they’re trying not to choke.

Flooding can also occur in bottle-fed babies. Rubber nipples that are too soft or have holes that are too big can make a baby with a strong suck feel like she’s drinking from a running faucet.

If you think your milk flow may be too much for your baby to handle, look for these signs:

- Does your milk quickly drip out of one breast when your baby is sucking on the other?
- Does she gulp and guzzle loudly?
- Does she struggle, cough, or pull away as soon as the milk starts to flow into her mouth?

If you answer yes to these questions, try expressing one to two ounces from your breasts immediately before the next feeding. Also, during the feed, hold your nipple

between your second and third fingers, like a cigarette, and press against the breast to slow the flow of milk, or try nursing lying down (with your baby next to you or on top of you) and see if the meal goes better.

## **Stomach Acid Reflux: Calming the Cry by Soothing the Burn**

Bitter crying during or just after a feeding may indicate insufficient or excessive milk flow, a strange taste in your milk, a strong gastro-colic reflex in your baby (see [Chapter 4](#)), or that your baby is one of about three percent of colicky babies who suffers from stomach acid reflux.

If you suspect acid reflux as the cause of your baby's misery you should review the telltale signs of reflux mentioned in [Chapter 4](#). Of course, if you think your baby may be suffering from this problem, you should consult your baby's doctor.

Through the years, several remedies have been recommended to alleviate reflux. A few are dead ends, but many are true paths to success.

### **Dead-End Stomach Acid Treatments**

- *Position*—Parents of refluxing babies have long been told to keep their baby sitting up in a swing or infant seat after eating so gravity can help keep the milk in the stomach. However, studies show this position does not lessen the frequency or severity of reflux (although some parents still swear by it).
- *Rice-cereal-thickened feeds*—Some doctors recommend thickening a feeding with rice cereal to “weigh” the milk down and keep it

in the stomach. But studies have also failed to show that this causes any real improvement in reflux.

## True-Path Stomach Acid Treatments

- *Position*—Although sitting up may not help, two positions *have* been proved effective for lessening reflux: lying on the stomach or lying on the *left* side.

Both positions are great while your baby is awake. The left-side position is also fine for sleep, as long as your baby is swaddled and wedged to keep her from rolling onto her stomach. The back is the preferred position for all babies to sleep in; however, some doctors recommend the side position for babies with severe reflux and nighttime vomiting. Ask your child's doctor for her opinion.

- *Burping*—Burp your baby every five to ten minutes during a feeding. Otherwise a big burp at meal's end may accidentally bring up the burning, acidic contents from your baby's stomach.
- *Feeding tips*—Make sure your infant isn't overeating. Try feeding a little less and see if the spitting stops and the crying improves. You can continue giving her shorter feeds as long as she's gaining four to seven ounces per week and she's satisfied for a few hours after a feeding.
- *Eliminate cow's milk products*—For some babies, reflux indicates a milk allergy. Discuss this possibility with your doctor to decide if the elimination of cow's milk is warranted.



- *Antacids*—Your doctor may suggest over-the-counter antacids or prescription acid-reducing medicines like famotidine (Pepcid), ranitidine (Zantac), omeprazole (Prilosec), and lansoprazole (Prevacid) in the hope of lessening her “heartburn” pain. (Never give your baby antacids without consulting a physician.)
- *Stomach-emptying aids*—During the 1990s doctors discovered that certain medicines caused the stomach to quickly empty its acidic contents into the intestines as well as “shut the door” at the top of the stomach so acid couldn’t squirt up toward the mouth. Medicines such as metoclopramide (Reglan) and erythromycin are now occasionally used for babies with stomach acid reflux who continue to scream despite all the other approaches.

## **Herbal Teas, Homeopathics, Chiropractic, and Osteopathy: Dead Ends or True Paths?**

### **Herbal Teas: A Cuppa Comfort?**

Through the ages, herbal teas that aid digestion have been recommended for unhappy babies. Traditionally, mothers brewed either chamomile, peppermint, fennel, or dill for their babies’ upset tummies.

The ancient “roots” of this practice are reflected in the names chosen for these herbs. In Spanish, the word for peppermint is *yerba buena*, meaning the *good grass*; in Serbian it’s *nana*, meaning *grandmother*. Dill has settled stomachs in ancient Egypt, Greece, and in Viking times.

Its English name derives from the Old Norse word *dilla*, meaning *to soothe or calm*.

Chamomile is said to have calming properties; peppermint eases intestinal spasms; dill helps soothe gas; and fennel dilates the intestinal blood vessels, facilitating digestion and producing a warming effect.

As much as I love herbal teas, I'm sorry to say that little proof exists that they offer any real benefit for colicky babies. However, they do no harm, so if you would like to give some to your baby, here's how:

To make dill or fennel tea, steep two teaspoons of mashed seeds in a cup of boiling water for ten minutes. A teaspoon of this may be given to a fussy baby several times a day. If your baby refuses the tea, you may sweeten it by adding a little baby apple juice or sugar (do not use honey or corn syrup).

Additionally, dill can be given in the form of a tonic called "gripe water," a popular folk remedy for colicky babies in Great Britain and the Commonwealth countries (although its effectiveness has never been proved).

## **Homeopathy, Chiropractic, Osteopathy: Are They Worth a Try?**

Homeopathy is a philosophy of healing that teaches "like cures like." In other words, the body can be made to heal itself by giving a tiny dose of something that would actually *cause* the very same problem if given in a large dose. For example, a homeopath might recommend minuscule amounts of poison ivy extract to stop an itchy rash.

Do homeopathic remedies work? Some parents swear by them; however, hard evidence is difficult to find. Hopefully, this will change over the next five to ten

years as the National Institutes of Health gets results from studies they are conducting on the subject.

There are four main recommended homeopathic remedies for colic: chamomila, colocynthis, magnesium phosphorica, and pulsatilla. These may be given singly or in combination; however, in general the correct homeopathic remedy is chosen according to the specific characteristics of a patient's symptoms—in this case, a baby's fussiness.

As with Western medicine, it's best to use homeopathics in consultation with an experienced practitioner.

The same uncertainty that surrounds homeopathy surrounds the claims that chiropractic or osteopathy can help calm crying babies. While there are some studies reported by these practitioners about the treatment of colic through the manipulation of the spine or skull bones, I have seen several colicky babies whose frustrated parents sought out chiropractic or osteopathic help with little or no success.

15



The Magical 6th “S”:  
Sweet Dreams!

Main Points:

- What a baby’s normal sleep pattern should be
- How to use the 5 “S’s” to help your baby sleep longer and better
- Weaning your sleeping baby off the 5 “S’s”
- The truth about putting your baby on a schedule
- A few more helpful sleep hints, from extra feedings to darkened rooms
- Co-sleeping: Why room sharing is best for babies



*At Allison’s two-month checkup, her mother told me Ally slept only for three-hour stretches at night. Shaya confided that getting up so often was wearing her*

*down and making it hard for her to be patient with her other two young children.*

*I asked Shaya if she was still swaddling Ally at night. She wasn't. "I stopped about a month ago because the nights have been so warm and she always gets out of it!" I suggested she dress Ally in just a diaper, wrap her tightly in a larger blanket that could be securely tucked around her, and play some loud white noise in her room. The next week Shaya reported the good news. Allison, now tightly swaddled, was sleeping on her back for eight hours every night, without interruption.*

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Ahhh ... sleep!

For most new parents, a good night's sleep is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, shimmering in your sleep-deprived mind like a mirage. Newborns sleep in such short dribs and drabs that we should never brag we're "sleeping like a baby." It makes much more sense to say we're sleeping like a bear, or a ditch digger, or, better yet, like a new parent.

Why don't babies sleep more? Your baby actually sleeps quite a bit; however, nature could have been a teensy bit more considerate about helping your baby choose when to enjoy his sweet dreams. Most newborns distribute their snooze time pretty evenly throughout the night (and day).

Mothers around the world usually take the erratic timing of these sleep periods in stride. Many years ago, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton reported that babies in rural Mexico also had evening fussy periods, just like our babies. However, their mothers were amused rather than upset by this, joking that since adults gab all day long, nighttime was a baby's turn to talk.

Anthropologists observing the !Kung San of southern Africa found their babies woke as often as every fifteen minutes. Their moms responded by pulling them to the breast for a little snack. Usually, they would fall back asleep in seconds.

In the U.S., most parents prefer to let their newborn sleep in a bassinet by their bed. For the first few months of life, your baby will likely request the pleasure of your company for a meal every two to four hours throughout the night. Bottle-fed babies often sleep a bit longer, because formula turns into big curds that sit in the stomach longer than the easily digested, tinier curds of breast milk.

I'm sure it's hard to believe right now, but your baby's early-morning feedings may turn into some of your sweetest memories. Those beautiful moments—when all noise and commotion are stilled—may make you feel like you're floating in a cloud suspended in time. Gretchen, mother of three, said, “Our two-month-old, Julian, will be our last baby, and as crazy as it sounds, I look forward to nursing him in the middle of the night! It's the only time when we can really be alone, and I get to enjoy my delicious little boy in peace and quiet.”

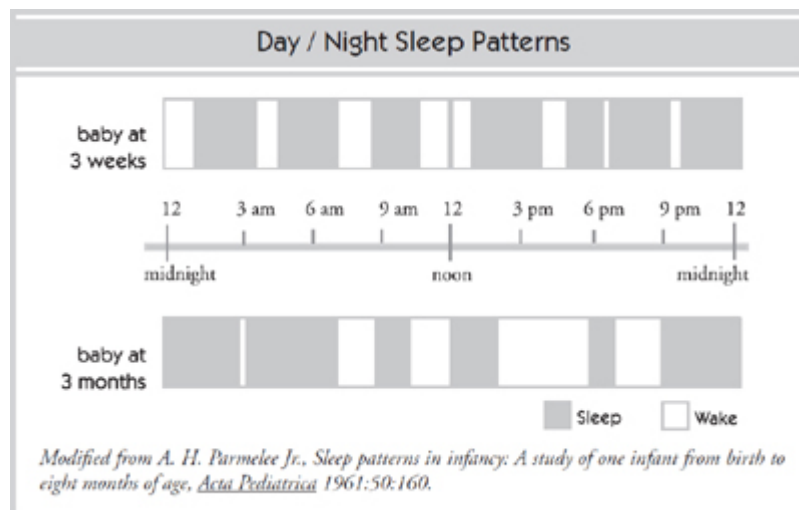
## **Baby Sleep: Your Infant's Normal Patterns**

All babies have sleeping and waking cycles. If you're like most new parents, your goal is to get your baby to do his longest sleeping at night and be most awake during the day.

But, exactly how long should your baby sleep? On average, babies snooze fourteen to eighteen hours in a twenty-four-hour period. That might sound like a lot but it's broken up into little snippets, slipped between short stretches of wakefulness. In effect, it's like being given a thousand dollars—*in pennies!*

As you can see in the sleep pattern graph, during your baby's first weeks of life two-thirds of each day will be spent asleep (gray areas). The average infant takes naps lasting two to three hours alternating with hour-long awake-breaks (white areas) for feeding, fussing, and some alert time. Initially, your baby's longest stretch of sleep will probably be about four hours.

By three months, your baby will still sleep fourteen to eighteen hours a day, but the awake time (white areas) will join into longer periods of wakefulness, and sleeping (gray areas) may extend for up to six to eight hours.



During these initial months, your baby's brain gets better and better at dividing the twenty-four hours of the day into three main activities:

- *Awake time*—to eat and learn about the world
- *Active (REM) sleep*—to dream and “file away” the day's lessons
- *Quiet sleep*—to rest and recover from all the day's efforts

Both babies and adults have two different types of sleep (and I don't mean too little and none). Quiet sleep makes up fifty percent of your baby's slumber. It's when he's out like a log, his breathing easy and regular, his

face still and angelic. During quiet sleep your baby's muscles are actually a little tensed; he's not floppy like a rag doll.

The other fifty percent of your baby's snoozing consists of active sleep. This sleep is characterized by sudden bursts of brain activity called REM (Rapid Eye Movement), and it occurs between periods of quiet sleep. REM sleep is when your baby's dreams are spun and his deep memory centers organize all his new experiences of the day. In active sleep, your baby has irregular breathing, sudden twitches, limp dangling limbs that feel like overcooked spaghetti, and, most spectacularly, he makes tiny heart-melting smiles. Contrary to myth, these grins are not caused by gas; rather, your baby is practicing what will soon become his most charming and powerful social tool—his smile.

Adults enjoy a full two hours of REM when we sleep. By comparison, your new baby revels in almost eight hours of REM every day. Why do babies have so much more REM than we do? No one knows for sure, but one theory posits that they need much more time to review the day because so many experiences are new to them. It's as if their brains are saying, "Wow! So much new stuff today, and I want to remember *everything!*" By comparison, most of an adult's day is so routine that our brains fast-forward through this period of review, as if to say, "I can skip all that. I know it already."

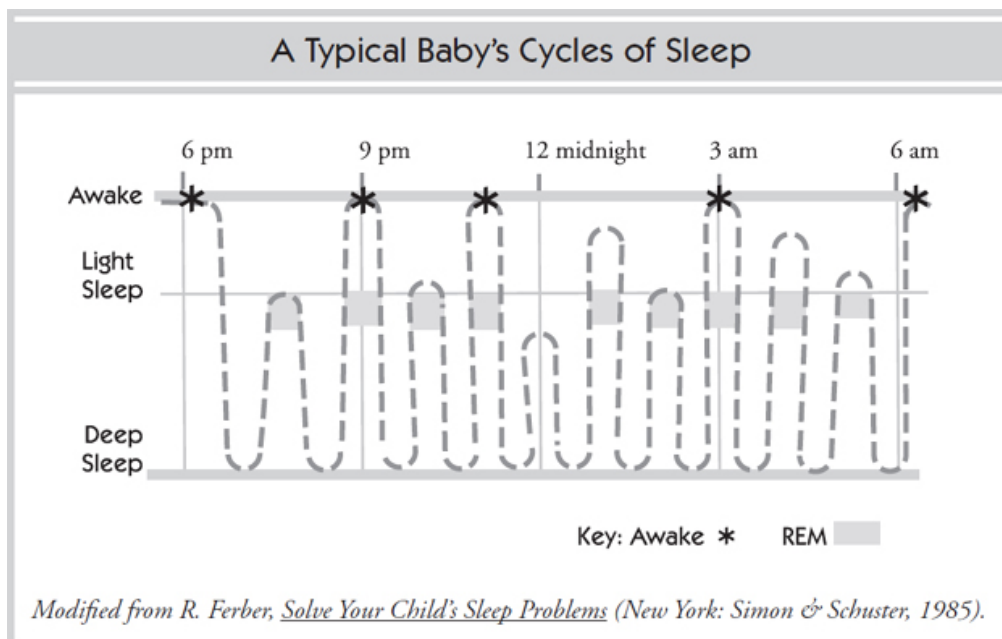
Sleeping obviously is not a time of alertness, but it's not "coma" time either. You are aware of many things around you while you snooze. For example, you probably have no trouble hearing the phone ring in the middle of the night and even when you sleep on the edge of the bed you rarely fall out of it.

Babies, too, receive a constant flow of information from the world around them while they slumber. That's why your baby may experience their still bed and the



extreme quiet of your home as disturbing understimulation.

The waves of quiet and active sleep that your infant moves through take place within larger cycles of deep and light sleep. These repeat, like the tides, over and over again, all night long. Your baby cycles between deep and light sleep about every sixty minutes. Infants with good state control and mellow temperaments can often stay asleep during their lightest sleep, and even if they wake up, they usually fall right back to sleep. However, babies with poor self-calming abilities and challenging temperaments often have trouble staying asleep when they enter their light-sleep periods. During this phase of sleep, they may be so close to wakefulness that the added stimulation of hunger, gas, noise, or startle may be enough to rouse them to alertness or even agitated crying.



## **Rest Easy: Helping Your Baby Stay Asleep with the 5 “S’s”**

When it comes to sleeping, you and your baby are a team, and you will both have to be flexible to make it

work. However, as every mother knows, for the first four to six months, you will be the team member who bends the most. You will rearrange your priorities, put off chores, and try to sleep in synch with your baby's schedule.

But don't despair. There are five specific ways you can nudge your baby into a better sleeping schedule during these early months: the 5 "S's." These womb sensations will keep your infant's calming reflex turned on and, when they're used at night, they may even keep him soothed until daybreak.

### **1. Swaddle—**

Tight wrapping prevents your baby's accidental whacks and disturbing startles. Just by swaddling your baby, you may increase his sleeping periods from three to four or even six hours at a stretch. Remember, his blanket must stay very snug for it to work all through the night.

Karen's son, Connor, was three months old (and seventeen pounds!), but he still had trouble sleeping more than three hours at a stretch:

*"When I put Connor down after nursing, he would struggle and squirm for over half an hour until he finally settled down to sleep. He hadn't been swaddled since he was a newborn, but Dr. Karp suggested I try again.*

*"I was surprised that he not only accepted the swaddling (after a little struggling) but settled down immediately and slept one hour more than usual. Wrapping also extended his daytime sleeping from fifteen-minute catnaps to one-to-two-hour luxurious naps, morning and afternoon.*



***“I was delighted with this improvement, until a friend came by the next week and showed me that I was still swaddling Connor too loosely. She taught me how to do it tighter and he began sleeping eight hours straight at night!”***

## **2. Side—**

Although the side and stomach are the best positions to use for soothing a fussy baby, the back is the only position you should use when you put your baby down to sleep. The only exceptions to this are allowing very restless babies to sleep sitting, strapped into a fully reclined swing or the rare medical conditions that might make a baby’s doctor recommend tummy sleeping (discussed in [Appendix A](#)).

## **3. Shhhh—**

Most babies sleep better when a harsh, continuous white noise plays near their bassinet. A womb sound CD drowns out other distracting noises and have a profoundly lulling effect. As with swaddling, the mere addition of white noise to your baby’s nursery may extend his sleep by an hour or two.

## **4. Swing—**

The movement of a swing (and to a lesser extent, a vibrating seat) can help your baby nap better and sleep longer at night. Most babies don’t need to swing all night to sleep well, but I know many parents whose babies sleep well only when they are allowed to fully reclined swing all night during their first months of life.

## **5. Suck—**

Sucking on a breast or pacifier may help your baby fall asleep and prevent SIDS, but it won't really help him stay in deep sleep.

Even babies who have never experienced the 5 "S's" can benefit from their sleep-enhancing effects. Don't be concerned if your baby initially resists them. If you patiently persist, you'll be surprised by your success.

## **Weaning Your Sleeping Baby Off the 5 "S's"**

All children eventually must learn to fall asleep on their own and to put themselves back to sleep when they wake during the night. In my experience, by three months most babies are ready to learn how to do this and should be placed in the crib sleepy but semi-awake.

I know that the parents of infants under three months are warned by some baby book authors that using nighttime sleep aids like the 5 "S's" will spoil their babies and make them abnormally dependent. I couldn't disagree more! For nine months before your baby was born, your womb surrounded him with sensations like the 5 "S's" every second of every day. That's why all babies sleep better and longer with a couple of "S's" to keep them company during the long night. But don't worry—by the time your little one is four months old, you can start weaning him off them without difficulty.

The first "S" you'll wean is swinging. Usually, by two to three months, you can reduce the swing speed to the slowest setting. (Only use a fully reclined bed swing during the baby's first month.) A few days later, if your baby is still sleeping well, let him sleep in the nonmoving swing. Finally, a few days later, if he still is sleeping soundly, move him to the bassinet.

The next "S" for you to phase out is sucking, usually between four to six months (although some love to suck

for more than a year). Babies love to suck on the breast, and once they are nursing well you can introduce a nighttime pacifier. Doctors have noticed that babies who fall asleep sucking on pacifiers—even if the baby drops it soon after sleep begins—have a lower risk of SIDS!

Every once in a while, sensitive babies may wake and cry when the pacifier falls from their mouths. If that happens to your little one, you can help her learn how to keep the pacifier in the mouth more securely by following the “reverse psychology” advice on [this page](#).

Next, many parents wean the swaddling. After around four months, try wrapping your baby snugly—but with one arm out. He should be able to suck his fingers and soothe himself. If he sleeps just as well that way try putting him to bed with no bundling. However, if he starts waking up more, take a step back and return to wrapping both arms down for another month. Try the one-armed wrap every month until your baby shows you he can sleep well unswaddled.

The very last “S” you’ll wean is rumbling, white noise sound. Over a period of two weeks you can gradually lower the volume of your womb sound CD until it is so low you can simply turn it off.

In general, my little patients are out of their swings by three to four months, out of the swaddle by four to seven months (a handful have continued until ten months) and sleeping in a quiet room sometime after twelve months. (The shhhh noise is the last “S” to be dropped because it is so easy, effective, and simple to control.)

When your sweet baby goes all night without any of the “S’s,” give him a diploma. Finally, he has fully graduated from the fourth trimester and is ready to really get going on his life adventure!

## The Truth About Putting Your Baby on a Schedule

New parents are often confused about the importance of putting their baby on a schedule. Should schedules be avoided or embraced? Like so many other child-rearing issues, there's more than one right answer.

Toddlers and young children love routines. They feel secure and safe when they know what's going to happen. In another year or two, you'll probably have a bedtime ritual: "blankie," warm milk, and *Goodnight Moon* to guide your sweet child into peaceful sleep—every night.

Similarly, flexible eating/sleeping schedules can be a great help to young babies and their parents. That's especially true if you have twins, older children, if you're working out of the house, and/or you're a single parent.

But before you try to put your new baby on a schedule, you should know that scheduling is a fairly new parenting concept. Mothers in the past didn't feed their babies according to the time on the sundial. And many moms today don't feel right trying to fit their baby into a preset mold.

I am not saying it is wrong to try to put your one-month-old baby on a schedule. Just as long as you understand that babies have only been "asked" to bend themselves to our clock-driven schedules over the past hundred years, and many babies are simply too immature to do it.



Your baby's receptiveness to being put on a schedule depends upon his ability to handle delayed gratification. In other words, how good is he at holding off his need for food or sleep? Some newborns are easily distracted, but others take months before they can ignore their brain's demands for milk or rest. The parents of these babies must patiently delay their desire to get their infants on a schedule until their babies are ready for one.

That said, if you want to try your baby on a schedule after one to two months, the best way to begin is by increasing the time between his daytime feedings to three hours. Of course, if he's hungry before two hours are up (and you can't soothe him any other way) forget the schedule and feed him. Also, wake him up and feed him if he goes more than four hours without crying for food. Babies who go too long without food during the day often wake up and feed more at night.

The next step in scheduling is to train your infant to fall asleep without a nipple in his mouth. After his feeding, play with him for a little while before you put him to sleep. That will begin to teach him he can put himself to sleep. If he immediately passes out after you

fill his belly with warm milk, that's okay, just jostle him until he opens his eyes. Then lay him down and let him float back into sleep. With patience over the next month or two, this will help your baby develop the ability to put himself to sleep.

It's easier to establish a schedule if you follow the same pattern every day. After your baby is a month old, start this reassuring nighttime routine:



low lights  
toasty bath  
loving massage with heated oil  
some warm milk  
cozy swaddle  
a lullaby ... softly sung  
and  
gentle white noise playing in the background

Within a short period of time, the constant association of these experiences to your baby's sleep time will work almost like hypnosis. As soon as you start the routine he'll say to himself, "Wow, I feel sleepy already!"

Most infants automatically fall into a regular pattern after a month or two; however, if you can't wait to establish a more predictable routine, feel free to give scheduling a try.

If, on the other hand, he seems to resist being molded to your schedule, I encourage you to respond to your tiny baby's needs with promptness and love; you can always try the schedule again in a week. The bottom line is that your job as a parent is to adapt to the needs of your newborn, not the other way around.



## **A Few More Helpful Sleep Tips**

Here are a few more tips to help your baby sleep longer:

### **Feed Your Baby More During the Day**

These steps can increase your baby's daytime eating and nighttime sleeping as he reaches the end of the fourth trimester:

- Wake him for a feeding if he naps for more than four hours.
- Feed him in a quiet room so he doesn't get distracted and refuse to eat.
- Give him "cluster feedings" (several meals given every two hours in the late afternoon and early evening to load him up with calories).
- "Top off the tank" by waking him for a midnight feeding.

One thing that will not help your baby sleep better is feeding him rice cereal at bedtime. While it is true that some nighttime formula can help a breast-fed baby sleep longer, repeated scientific studies have proved that rice cereal does not prolong a baby's sleep. And why should it? From a nutritional point of view, it makes no sense that four to six ounces of milk (with all its fat and protein) would leave a baby hungry but a few spoons of rice starch would keep him satisfied all night.

If you have any doubts at all that your infant is getting enough to eat, ask your doctor to weigh him to make sure that he's thriving.

### **Hold and Rock Your Baby During the Day**

Parents are often told to keep their baby awake during the day in the hope of getting him tired and making him want to sleep longer at night. Although this sounds logical, keeping a tired baby awake often makes him miserable, overtired, and thus *worsens* his sleep at night. In fact, not only should you let your newborn sleep during the day but you should give him motion while he naps (in a swing, a bouncy chair, or on you in a baby sling). In my experience, babies who are carried (“fed” with nourishing touch and motion) throughout the day are often calmer (less “hungry” for that stimulation) at night.

## Turn the Lights Down

Reducing the lights in your house as evening comes also gives your baby the signal it’s time for sleep. Low lights quiet a baby’s nervous system and prepare him to relax. Many hospital nurseries have an evening routine of dimming the lights and covering the incubators of premature babies to block the light and help them get into their parents’ day/night rhythm.

*Mabel, the mother of four daughters, piqued my curiosity when she mentioned that her pet theory about the cause of colic was electricity! She said, “I noticed my kids are more stimulated and have a harder time falling asleep when we keep the house well lit in the evening. I think the artificially long ‘daytime’ we create with electric lights tricks them into believing it’s still time to play. Our kids consistently sleep better when we dim the lights at night or use candles.”*



## Room Sharing: “I Just Got Evicted ... Can I Sleep at Your Place?”

*Thou shalt sleep with thy fathers.*

Deuteronomy 31:16

Since mankind’s earliest days, parents and babies have slept right by each other for mutual protection, warmth, and to make nighttime feedings convenient. Japanese parents traditionally sleep with their baby between them, safe as a valley protected by two great mountain ranges. They don’t question whether a mother and infant should be together all night; they consider themselves to be two parts of one person and therefore they should be separated as little as possible. Mayan families are very social and for them the shared bed is a time to be together. These parents believe making their baby sleep alone is an unfair hardship.



As recently as the late 1800’s, American children usually slept in bed with their parents. However, at the start of the twentieth century, U.S. parents were encouraged to stop sharing the bed. They were warned it might spread illness, spoil children, or cause them to

suffocate. So we moved our babies to their own cribs, and eventually to their own rooms. Today, Americans see our children's sleep as a time for them to begin learning about privacy and self-reliance. And some view sharing the bedroom as a parental sacrifice or flirting with an unhealthy habit.

But the resistance to room sharing is finally changing as evidence mounts that it's actually good for babies.

The research on room sharing shows that not only is it a convenience for feeding your baby (you don't have to get out of your bed and toddle down a cold hallway), but it is also safer. Studies show that during the first four to six months, just having your baby in a bassinet next to your bed reduces the risk of SIDS.

As breast-feeding continues its rise in popularity, nursing mothers appreciate the cozy convenience of having their baby nearby. Furthermore, non-European immigrants to the United States have introduced a potpourri of cultural traditions—most of which encourage the intimacy of room sharing.

Room sharing doesn't always fit the needs and lifestyles of contemporary parents. One mother in my practice said, "My husband just can't sleep well with our four-week-old in the room." However, many parents find they sleep more peacefully knowing their baby is right next to their bed. And the white noise from the womb sound CD often helps parents fall back to sleep faster after they give the baby a feeding.

Sleeping right next to your baby is a natural continuation of the womb experience. It provides him the reassuring sound of your breathing and scent, and it helps mold his breathing and sleep pattern. Additionally, after the rigors of pregnancy it's an abrupt change for *you* to be far away from your infant, connected by only an intercom. One mother who worked long hours shared, "Sleeping with my baby in a

co-sleeper next to me lets me make up some time I couldn't spend with her during the day.”

Enjoy this sweet, fleeting opportunity of intimacy. If you plan to eventually move your baby out of your bedroom, it's easiest to do so by five to six months of age, before he gets used to this bedtime routine. You can still end room sharing after that time, but in general, the longer you wait the tougher it is for your baby to make the switch.

## Is Bed Sharing Dangerous to Your Baby's Health?

Some parents not only room share, but *bed* share with their new baby. This is clearly a SIDS risk if the parents are sleep deprived, cigarette smokers, inebriated, very obese, or share the bed with other children.

The more you read books and blogs about little babies, the more you'll notice some conflicting opinions as to whether or not bed sharing is a risk when these factors are *not* present. However, since new parents are usually exhausted, most pediatricians feel it's best to err on the side of caution and recommend having babies sleep *next to* the bed (in a bassinet or co-sleeper) not *in* it.

In 1999, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) warned parents about the possible dangers of bed sharing with children less than two years old. Their conclusion was that parents should never sleep with them in their beds.

Of course, our highest priority must be to prevent any child deaths from unsafe sleep practices, but banning bed sharing until after two is unrealistic and unnecessary. For example, 80 percent of the deaths in the CPSC study could have been avoided by filling the

spaces around the bed (to prevent head wedging) and by avoiding waterbeds.

Most doctors recommend no bed sharing until around six months. By then, infants are usually strong enough to move their face away from puffy pillows and comforters and the arms of exhausted or obese parents. They are also better able to cry loudly and get their parent's attention.

No approach is perfect for all families, but the vast majority of infant sleep deaths are preventable—with just a few precautions.

### **Ten Ways to Reduce the Risk of SIDS and Suffocation**

1. Only let your baby sleep on the back.
2. Breast-feed if you can.
3. Don't smoke, drink, or use drugs! (And don't let others smoke in your home.)
4. Don't overheat (try to have the room 65–72 degrees, avoid overdressing, and cover your baby's head).
5. Use snug swaddles for all naps/nights to keep your baby from accidentally rolling to the stomach or into a dangerous position.
6. Offer a pacifier at bedtime (wait until the nursing is well established).
7. Never sleep with your baby on a couch or waterbed.
8. If you choose to bed share, always use a co-sleeper attachment to keep your baby protected.

9. Remove pillows, toys, bumpers, and thick or loose bedding that could cause smothering.
  10. Practice tummy time to help your baby develop strong muscles to move away from choking risks.
- 

## The Whys About the “S’s”: Questions Parents Ask About Sleeping

### ***1. Every time I put my sleeping baby down, he’s up and yelling in minutes. Why?***

Even though your baby is asleep when you put him down, he still has some awareness of his surroundings. To him there’s too big a difference between your arms and a quiet, still bassinet.

Try using the 5 “S’s” to help your baby make the transition to his crib. Swaddling, white noise, and swinging lessen the abrupt change from your cuddle to his cradle and can eliminate one or two night wakings.

### ***2. When my baby falls asleep after a feeding, should I burp him and risk waking him up?***

Yes. You should burp him, to keep him from spitting up in his sleep, and change his diaper too, to prevent a diaper rash. After a feeding, most babies feel a little “drunk” and usually go back to sleep quickly, especially if you’re using the 5 “S’s.”

By the way, it is also a good idea to put ointment on your baby’s bottom at night to protect his skin from any pee or poop that comes out while he’s asleep.

### ***3. I worry about overbundling my baby in the warm weather. How can I tell if he’s getting overheated at night?***

It’s quite easy to know if your baby is overbundled: feel his ears and toes. If they are red,

sweaty, or very warm, he's too hot; if they are cold and bluish, he's too chilly; and if they feel "fresh" (not hot, not cold, but a tiny bit on the cool side), his body temperature is just right.

Even on the hottest summer days, your baby will benefit from swaddling. Dress him in a diaper only and wrap him in a very light cotton blanket.

*For summertime, Talia's grandmother made some ultralight blankets by cutting a sheet in quarters and hemming the edges.*

#### ***4. Can a baby have trouble sleeping because he's going through a growth spurt?***

Yes. Babies grow tremendously fast during the first few months, doubling their weight in about six months. Some babies do all this growing at an even, steady pace, but many babies grow in fits and starts (growth spurts and plateaus). In the midst of a growth spurt, your baby may wake up more frequently and yell for a meal. (That's really *demand* feeding!)

#### ***5. Will my baby sleep better if he takes both breasts or just one, so he gets the hindmilk?***

Unlike formula, which doesn't change from the first drop to the last, breast milk changes greatly during the course of a feeding. The milk that spurts out for the first five minutes is loaded with protein and antibodies, and it's more watery to satisfy your baby's thirst. By the time the breast is almost empty (after ten to fifteen minutes) the milk slowly dripping out is as rich as half and half. This creamy, sweet dessert is called the hindmilk.

Some experts tell mothers not to switch their breasts during a feeding. They worry that feeding just a few minutes on each side will deprive a baby of the hindmilk, which they consider nature's way



of making babies satisfied and sleepy (like the drowsiness we feel after a heavy meal).

Other experts believe babies get more milk if their moms switch breasts during a meal. They advise mothers to feed for about seven minutes on one side and then, after that breast has released its quick, easy milk, switch to the other side, which is full and waiting to be emptied.

I recommend this to my patients: Experiment to find what's best for you and your baby. If one breast keeps him happy for two hours in the day and sleeping four hours at night, then there is no need for switching. However, if he feeds too often or is gaining weight too slowly, try giving him seven minutes on one side and then let him suck for ten to fifteen minutes, or longer, on the second side (that's enough for him to fill up with the early milk from both breasts and still get the hindmilk from the second side).

## ***6. Why does my baby always get up at the crack of dawn?***

Even when babies are asleep they still feel, hear—and see! For many babies, the early-morning light filters through their closed eyes and thin skull and acts like an alarm clock. Fortunately, many of these babies can be coaxed to sleep a little longer by using blackout curtains to shut out the sun's first rays; white-noise machines to help obscure the early-morning sounds of birds, dogs, traffic, and neighbors; or, by bringing them into bed with you for some cozy time.

Parents who can't charm their infants back to sleep are often forced to wave good-bye to their warm beds and take their little "rooster babies" out for an early-morning constitutional. (Believe it or

not, these strolls may become some of your most treasured memories of when your baby was little.)

***7. Is it wrong to let my baby get used to sleeping in his infant carrier?***

It's almost impossible to *keep* your baby from falling asleep when you tote him around outside in an infant carrier. That's because putting your baby in a carrier or a sling and taking him for a walk gives him three of his favorite sensations: jiggly motion, cuddling, and the rhythmic, soothing sound of your breathing. These devices are great ways to treat our babies to a sweet reminder of the fourth trimester.

So, don't worry about accidentally teaching him bad habits. After the fourth trimester ends, your four-month-old baby will be able to entertain himself and it will be relatively easy to get him used to less contact—if that's what you really want. (Truthfully, by then many parents love their carrier so much they want to “wear” their baby more and more.)

***8. Is it okay to let my baby sleep on my chest?***

In general, I don't recommend this position. I once had a couple call me in the middle of the night when their four-week-old baby fell off his father's chest and hit the wall next to the bed. (The exhausted duo had slipped into a sound sleep.) Fortunately, he wasn't hurt, but a fall like that could have caused a serious injury.

**A Parent's Perspective: Memoirs from the  
Mattress**

***We went through fire and water almost in trying to procure for him a natural sleep.***

*We swung him in blankets, wheeled him in little carts, walked the room with him by the hour, etc., etc., but it was wonderful how little sleep he obtained after all. He always looked wide awake and as if he did not need sleep.*

G. L. Prentiss, *The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss*, 1822

Poor Elizabeth Prentiss could have learned a thing or two from the parents whose stories below reveal how they transformed their nighttime experience with their babies from getting “nickel and dimed” to money in the bank:

*Debra and Andrew swaddled their twins, Audrey and Sophia, from the very first days in their lives. Swaddling prolonged their children’s nighttime sleep. Even at four months old, the twins still preferred being swaddled. It helped them sleep a full eight hours every night.*

Debra, Andrew, Audrey, and Sophia



*As she reached the four-week mark, our daughter Eve became more wakeful and more distressed with the world around her. When she wasn’t eating or sleeping, she was fussing—and at times she screamed inconsolably. One night she yelled so much her nose got stuffed and she began to snort. I called Dr. Karp’s office for advice. As I spoke with his nurse, Louise, I cradled Eve in my arms and rested them on top of the dryer. The noise, vibration, and warmth of the dryer*

*calmed her, allowing me to talk for a few minutes.*

*Over the next couple of weeks, as I became skilled at using the “S’s” Nurse Louise had described that night, Eve rewarded us with six-to-eight-hour periods of uninterrupted sleep every night. At six months, we were still swaddling Eve at night but by then we would let one of her arms stay out so she could suck her fingers.*

Shari, Michael, Hillary, Noah, and Eve



*Didi and Richard were exhausted from Cameron’s hourly waking—all night long. They tried keeping their six-week-old up more during the day in the hope he would sleep better at night, but that just seemed to get him overtired and make him cry even more. At night, they tried to calm him with a bath, the vacuum, or a ride in the car, all of which worked for a while but Cameron would get upset again as soon as the “entertainment” stopped.*



*Then, they discovered their son liked to sleep tightly wrapped and seated in the swing next to a white-noise machine with the sound cranked up loud. However, they worried about leaving him in there, so after he fell asleep they would put him back into his bassinet. Cameron slept better that way, but still awoke every three or four hours.*

*Finally, Didi and Richard stumbled onto the secret for getting Cameron to sleep longer. One night when he was in the swing his exhausted parents fell asleep and let him stay in the fully reclined swing, strapped in, the white noise CD on, all night long. It made a huge difference. With that nighttime assistance he began to sleep a six-hour stretch, eat, and then go back down for another three hours!*

*When Wyatt was two months old, his parents—Lise, a nurse, and Aaron, a physician—noticed he would sleep five hours at night when wrapped and serenaded by white noise but only three hours when his arms were free and the room was quiet.*

*Lise said, “I was happy to see how well our son did with swaddling. But I still worried he would get ‘addicted’ to it and have trouble sleeping unwrapped when he got older. So as soon as he turned three months, I began putting him to bed unwrapped.*

*“Everything seemed fine, until a month later when Wyatt turned four months. Out of the blue, he began waking every two hours through the night—screaming! One friend told me he was teething, but Tylenol didn’t help. My husband guessed he was going through a growth spurt, but rice cereal didn’t help either. At Wyatt’s four-month checkup, I told Dr. Karp about my frustration and fatigue. He suggested I stop the medicine and cereal and try the wrapping and white noise again. To be*

*honest, I thought Wyatt was too old for swaddling, but I was desperate.*



*“Within two nights, he went from waking up and shrieking five times a night to waking once, chowing down his milk, and then immediately sacking out again until 6 AM! He loved the waterfall sound of our sound machine. I played it loud for him for the first hour and then kept it turned on medium all night long. (It helped me to sleep, too!)*

*Everything worked so well that I continued the routine until one night, when Wyatt was six months old, I skipped putting him in his cocoon and still enjoyed a deep, beautiful sleep.”*

Lise, Aaron, Wyatt, and Rachel

*I never would have believed it, but wrapping was the key to everything! Our first son, Eli, never resisted being bundled up, but Benji fought it with all his strength. However, only after he was tightly swaddled did the rocking, pacifier, and shushing calm him.*

*After a few days of practicing the 5 “S’s,” I could put Benji down for hours at a time with no problem. Now at six weeks of age, and at the peak of what should be his worst time, he’s a pretty easy baby. He takes long naps and sleeps for seven to nine hours at night (with one very brief feeding).*



*For naps, I let him sleep in the swing—on the fast speed—fully reclined with the white noise CD as loud as a shower.*

*I let him nap frequently because I've noticed that Ben gets overstimulated and has a hard time settling himself if I let him have long awake periods during the day. So, when he starts getting cranky, I take that as my cue to put him back in the swing and do my womb imitation.*

*I recommend this method for anyone with a “difficult” baby. I can't imagine what my mental state would be if I were still carrying him all day and rocking him all night. It has made an enormous difference for both me and Benji, as well as my first guys, Steve and Eli!*

Wendy, Steve, Eli, and Benji



## Conclusion

# The Rainbow at the End of the Tunnel: Finally Your Baby Is Ready to Be Born!



*He's starting to love us back a little.*

Francie about four-month-old Jackson

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*At birth, Esmé was a pudgy, sweet-smelling baby who needed to use all her concentration to gaze into her mother's eyes. Yet, by four months, she could shoot broad grins out at anyone in the room, as if to say, "Ain't I great!"*

Hooray! After months of fuzzy stares and long sleeps, your four-month-old's laugh and gurgle announce to the world: "Dress rehearsals are over ... I'm ready for my Grand Premiere!"

It has been three long months since you cut the umbilical cord, but finally your baby is *really* ready to be born. He has weathered the challenging transition from your womb to the world and is no longer trapped inside his immature body. Now the rapidly increasing control he has over his actions offers him many new ways to handle his upsets without having to resort to crying.



Please don't underestimate what your baby has achieved during his brief lifetime. It truly is amazing. In essence, he has zipped through millions of years of evolution in a mere ninety days. He may have started out as helpless as a mouse yet now he's well on his way to mastering the most important skills of our species—the ability to reach out both manually and socially. His relaxed and open hands now allow him to latch on to his rattle (or your nose) and, like Esmé, he's already learning how to use his adorable, toothless grin to make everyone he meets fall in love with him!

Like a child on the first day of school, your scrubbed-cheeked, four-month-old baby's happy jabberings bubble forth energetically. Now, there's no question he's ready to learn and start making friends. And, as a direct consequence of your baby's increasing curiosity, you'll probably notice his sudden dislike for being put on his stomach. While newborns enjoy "tummy time" because it's calming and helps them ignore the chaos of the world, your four-month-old baby demands to be placed on his back so he can see the world. Now, he's *interested* in the chaos ... he's ready to play.

Your infant isn't the only one ready for this next chapter of life. I'm sure you too are ready for a little more play ... and rest. For the past three months, you've unselfishly accepted pain, fatigue, and anxiety. Now, *you've* become one of the experienced parents on the block and you've learned enough to earn an advanced degree in "Baby-ology." It is my sincere hope that this book has been a useful part of that education in helping you see the world through your baby's eyes and in helping you master the ancient techniques of infant soothing and comforting.

At last, there is a light at the end of the arduous tunnel that was the fourth trimester and happily, far from being an oncoming train, that light is ... a glorious rainbow. All your love and hard work have paid off and

the real fun is just beginning. So congratulations! Your baby is now well on the way to becoming *one of the happiest babies on the block!*



## Appendix A

### Red Flags and Red Alerts: When You Should Call the Doctor

Fortunately, most colicky babies aren't physically sick. Rather, they're sort of "homesick"—struggling to cope with life outside Mama's womb. But how can you know when your infant's cries *are* a sign of sickness?

Here's a primer of the ten red flags that doctors look for to decide when a baby's cry signals illness, plus a review of the ten red-alert medical conditions that these red flags may indicate.

#### The Ten Red Flags Your Doctor Will Ask You About

Whenever you're worried about your baby, you should, of course, contact your doctor for guidance. When you do, he'll likely ask you these two questions to help him decide if your baby has colic or something more serious:

1. Is your baby growing well and acting normal in all other ways?
2. Is your baby calm for long periods of the day?

If you answer no to either question, then your doctor will ask you how your baby acts when she isn't crying. He is looking for these ten red flags:

1. *Persistent moaning* (groans and weak cries that continue for hours)
2. *Supershrill cry* (unlike any cry your baby has made before)
3. *Vomiting* (any green or yellow vomit or vomiting more than one ounce per episode and more than five episodes a day)
4. *Change in stool* (constipation or diarrhea, especially with blood)
5. *Fussing during eating* (twisting, arching, crying that begins during or shortly after a feed)
6. *Abnormal temperature* (a rectal temperature of more than 100.2°F or less than 97.0°F)
7. *Irritability* (crying all the time with almost no calm periods in between)
8. *Lethargy* (a baby sleeping twice as long as usual, acting “out of it,” or not sucking well over an eight-to twelve-hour period)
9. *Bulging soft spot on the head* (even when your baby is sitting up)
10. *Poor weight gain* (gaining less than a half ounce a day)

## **The Ten Medical Red Alerts Your Doctor Will Consider**

Whenever a doctor sees a crying baby who exhibits any red-flag symptoms, she tries to determine whether this indicates one of these ten serious—but treatable—medical conditions. Please remember, most of these conditions are *very, very* rare. (Excluding babies who cry because of food sensitivity or acid reflux less than one

percent of infants with severe, persistent crying are affected by the problems listed below.)

### 1. **Infection:** From Ear Infections to Appendicitis

You might think the best way to tell if your baby has an infection is to take her temperature, but many sick newborns don't get fevers. So even if your crying baby doesn't have fever, you should consider that her fussiness may be a sign of infection if she acts lethargic or irritable for more than a few hours. Call your doctor immediately. He may check her for:

**Ear Infection**—These babies may just get fussy and upset; they rarely pull on their ears.

**Urine Infection**—These babies can have smelly urine, but usually *don't*.

**Brain Infection (meningitis)**—These infants have bulging soft spots, vomiting, lethargy, and irritability that rapidly worsens over just a day or two.

**Appendicitis**—Extremely rare in infants, it may cause a hard stomach, poor appetite, and constant irritability. **Intestinal Infection**—A baby with “stomach flu” vomits, has diarrhea, and usually has been in contact with a sick relative.

### 2. **Intestinal Pain: From Intestinal Blockages to Stomach Acid Reflux**

Some stomach problems cause pain and may explain crying in ten to fifteen percent of colicky infants (in descending order of seriousness):

**Intestinal Blockage**—This is an extremely rare medical emergency that may occur right after birth or weeks later. Babies suffer from waves of severe painful spasms plus vomiting and/or the cessation of pooping. With intestinal blockages, the vomit often has a distinct yellow or green tint. (During the first days of life, a breast-fed baby’s vomit may also be yellow, because that is the color of colostrum. However, if your baby has yellow vomit, *never* assume it’s from your milk. Immediately consult your doctor to make sure it isn’t the sign of a more serious condition.)

**Stomach Acid Reflux**—This cause of burning pain occurs in approximately one to three percent of fussy babies.

**Food Sensitivity**—Five to ten percent of fussy babies get better with a change in diet and so presumably have this condition. Besides crying, it may cause vomiting, diarrhea, rash, or mucousy blood in the stools.

(For a complete discussion of reflux and food sensitivities see [Chapters 4](#) and [14](#).)

### **A “Pain in the Rear”: Can an Overly Tight Anus Block a Baby’s Intestines?**

In 100 A.D. the physician Soranus opined that a tight anus could block a baby’s intestines, leading to spasms. He recommended stretching the anus to relieve a baby’s crying. Over the next two thousand years, medical practitioners followed his advice and routinely stuck fingers up the behinds of crying

babies. Today, however, we know this problem is extremely rare and probably never causes colic.

### **Crying before, during, and after feeding**

**Immediately before a feeding:** hunger, thirst, challenging temperament

**During a feeding:** the gastro-colic reflex, the milk flow is too slow or too fast, the milk has a strange taste, stomach acid reflux

**Immediately after a feeding:** continued hunger, the gastro-colic reflex, needing to burp, needing to poop, wanting to suck more, food allergy, stomach acid reflux



### **3. Breathing Trouble: From Blocked Nostrils to Oversize Tongues**

The most common cause of breathing trouble is a condition where a baby's tiny nostrils are blocked. Babies don't know how to breathe through their mouths, except when they're crying. That's why babies who are born with tight nostrils, or who have noses swollen shut from allergies or colds, get so frantic.

If you want to check for blockage, place the tip of your little finger snugly over one of your baby's nostrils, closing it off for a few seconds. She should easily be able to breathe through the open nostril. Then repeat this test on the other side.

If your baby can't breathe or gets agitated when you do this test, call your physician. If it seems the nostril is blocked from mucus, ask the best ways to clear it. And do your best to

rid your home of dust, molds, sprays, perfumes, cigarette smoke, and anything else that might make her nose congested.

Very rarely, an infant will have trouble breathing if her tongue is too big for her mouth so it falls back into the throat and chokes her when she lies on her back. This problem is obvious from the moment of birth because her tongue will always stick out of her mouth.

#### **4. Increased Brain Pressure**

When pressure builds up inside a baby's head, it also causes:

- Irritability and crying from a headache
- Vomiting
- An unusual high-pitched cry
- A bulging fontanelle (soft spot) even when the baby is seated
- Swollen veins on the forehead
- A head that's growing too rapidly (your doctor should measure your baby's head size at every well-baby checkup)
- Sunset sign (a big-eyed stare with a crescent of the white of the eye displayed over the colored iris, making the eye look like a setting sun)

If your baby fits the symptoms described above, contact your doctor immediately.

#### **5. Skin Pain: A Thread or Hair Twisted Around a Finger, Toe, or Penis**

In years past, the sudden onset of sharp screaming in an otherwise calm baby made parents search for an open safety pin inside the diaper. Today, however, thanks to pin-less diapers, that no longer happens. Now a parent



who hears that type of abrupt, shrill cry should look for a fine hair or thread wrapped tightly around their baby's finger, toe, or penis. This problem requires immediate medical attention. (Doctors often treat this problem by applying a dab of hair-removal cream to dissolve the hair.)

## **6. Mouth Pain: From Thrush to Teething**

Thrush, a yeast infection in the mouth, is easy to recognize because it causes a milky white residue on the lips and inside of the mouth that cannot be wiped away. Thrush may also cause a bumpy red rash in a baby's diaper area and/or itchy, red nipples in a breast-feeding mom.

Thrush rarely causes fussiness, but on occasion it can cause crying from an irritated mouth. Fortunately it is easy to treat, and recovery is rapid.

Many parents ask if teething causes their baby's crying. This is extremely unlikely, because teething two-month-olds are as rare as hen's teeth. However, if you think your baby is having teething pain, give her some acetaminophen drops and see if it gives any relief (ask your doctor for the correct dosage). This medicine won't help colic, but it may reduce mild teething pain.

## **7. Kidney Pain: Blockage of the Urinary System**

A blockage of the kidney is a very rare cause of persistent crying that occurs any time, day or night. Unlike classic colic, which begins improving after two months, crying from kidney pain gets worse and worse.

## **8. Eye Pain: From Glaucoma to a Corneal Abrasion**

Eye pain, also very rare, may come from glaucoma (high pressure inside the eyeball), an accidental scratch of the cornea, or even from a tiny, irritating object stuck underneath a baby's eyelid (such as an eyelash). Your doctor should consider these problems if your crying baby has red, tearful eyes and severe pain that lasts through the day and night.

#### **9. Overdose: From Excessive Sodium to Vitamin A**

Persistent, severe crying can result from giving babies excessive amounts of sodium (salt). This may occur when a parent mixes formula with too little water. It has also rarely been described after the first week of life if a breast-feeding woman is making so little milk that her breast milk becomes very salty. These babies are easily diagnosed because they are losing weight, not drinking any other liquids, and are both irritable and lethargic all day long.

Excess Vitamin A is an extremely rare cause of infant crying. It only occurs in babies who are given high doses of supplemental vitamins or fish oil.

#### **10. Others: From Migraines to Heart Failure**

Some extraordinarily rare conditions that have been reported as the cause of unstoppable crying in young infants include: a bone fracture, sugar intolerance in babies fed fruit or fruit juice, migraine headache, hyperthyroidism, and heart failure. These babies don't merely cry for three hours a day—they act poorly all day long.

## Appendix B

# A New Parents' Survival Guide: The Top Ten Survival Tips for Parents of New Babies

Now that we've talked all about the baby's crying, let's talk about yours! All new parents know that if you ask five people for their advice (not that people even wait for you to ask), you'll get ten different opinions. So, even though you didn't ask *me* for my opinion, here is my list of ten sanity-saving survival tips to help you endure the challenges of your baby's first months a little more gracefully.

### 1. Trust Yourself: You Are the Latest in the Unbroken Chain of the World's Top Parents

*Leslie, still in her hospital bed with four-day old Gabriel, told me: "I'm usually such an optimist, yet I've had weird dreams of dropping him and leaving him places. My husband jokes that some special 'inexperienced-parent' alarm will go off when we take Gabe home from the hospital!"*

•

*Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do.*

Dr. Benjamin Spock

If you're like most new parents, you probably alternate between feeling like a major-league

pro and an amateur. It's enough to give a person "parental whiplash!" And, the conflicting advice given by many baby experts can deepen the confusion.

But before you lose confidence, please remember this: You are part of an unbroken chain of successful parents that stretches all the way back to the beginning of time. You and your baby have survived because you are descended from the best mothers, most protective fathers, and strongest children in the world. That's why Dr. Spock's advice to parents to trust themselves is so correct.

Trust your feelings. Relax and remember that all your baby really needs from you is milk and your nourishing love. And all you really need is patience, support, a little information, and perhaps a massage every once in a while.

## **2. Lower Your Expectations**

***You'll see. Having a baby is like going to sleep in your own bed and waking up in Zimbabwe!***

Sonya to her daughter Denise a month before

Denise gave birth to Aidan

Becoming a parent is filled with all sorts of misconceptions and surprises. And perhaps the biggest misconception of all is that you'll automatically know what to do the moment your baby is born. Yet even after giving birth to her third child, Beth quipped, "At the end of my first pregnancy about the only thing I was really prepared to do was filling out forms and buying maternity dresses!"



Parenting requires some practical experience (especially when caring for challenging babies). Yet many pregnant couples today have never even touched a newborn. Despite this lack of experience, they expect themselves to instantly be able to care for the babies *and* manage the household *and* have a job *and* be lovers.

Unfortunately, these unrealistic expectations have been growing in our culture for at least the past fifty years. Even though people warned you when you were pregnant, "Your life will never be the same!" you probably shrugged it off. Few believe *their* baby will be tough. For most women, being pregnant is so close to their regular life that they get lulled into a false sense of security. Before delivery, you can still linger in a hot shower and think, "I'm ready. I'm on top of this." It's so automatic that many women are tricked into believing that taking care of their newborns would be just as natural, but as you now know, that couldn't be further from the truth. It's only after your baby is born that you begin to see the demands of

parenthood more accurately. Suddenly, that long hot shower you took a month before the baby came looks like a Caribbean vacation.

Another expectation that may not immediately materialize is loving your baby the moment you see her. Of course, many parents *do* instantly fall in love with their new infant; however, one of the little-told truths about becoming a parent is that many new moms and dads *don't* feel smitten right away. It makes sense that falling in love might take a little time. After all, few of us experience love at first sight. Don't worry, like the song says, "You can't hurry love."

And that's not all. You may soon notice your brain has also unexpectedly changed. Memory loss is one more proof that your life is temporarily out of your control. One new mom told me, "My best guess is that during the delivery a piece of my brain came out with the placenta."

Lots of moms feel that giving birth turns them into complete "boobs"—and in a way it does! Lactation makes your body awash with prolactin which, along with the other massive hormonal changes going on inside you, probably is the basis for this new forgetfulness. Finally, you'll notice your ditziness is made ten times worse by exhaustion. Clear thinking is terribly hard to hold on to in the face of prolonged sleep deprivation.

So be patient and kind to yourself. In a few short months you'll have your feet on the ground again and, what's more, you'll know your baby better than anyone else in the world!

### **3. Accept All the Help You Can Get**

*When I moved to California from Florida, I was happy to be independent from my family. But when my baby was born, I missed them in a way I had never felt before. I suddenly wanted and needed my family around me.*

Kathleen, mother of two-month-old Ella Rose

Never in history were a mother and a father expected to care for their baby *all by themselves*. The idea of a nuclear family—one mother and one father to do it all—is one of mankind’s most recent, and riskiest, experiments, attempted only over the last two or three generations. (That’s a mere sixty years out of the 60,000 years since the modern human era began.) In the past, a couple’s family and community always pitched in to help, and later the couple would return the favor.

*Sharon, mother of Noah and Ariel, was a work-at-home mom, a thousand miles away from her family, with no baby-sitters or nanny. Sharon’s goal was to make sure her kids were happy and healthy—even if she was dead on her feet. She described feeling like an old tomato plant, where the fruit looks plump and delicious even though the plant that nourishes it looks scraggly and anemic.*

I’m always telling the parents of my patients: Get help and don’t feel guilty about asking—or paying—for it. Enlist your friends to bring you a frozen casserole, do some cleaning, or watch your baby while you nap. Just as you are giving so much of yourself to take care of your

new child, lean on your support network to help take care of *you*—you’ll pay it back later. The extra pair of “hands” of a niece, neighbor, nanny, or swing is neither an extravagance nor a sign of failure. It’s the bare minimum that most new moms have had throughout time.

#### **4. Get Your Priorities Straight: Should You Take a Break or Do the Dishes?**

*On the few occasions that my crying baby fell asleep before I did, I used the time for me! I soaked in a bubble bath, relaxed with a drink, read a book, and prayed that she would sleep a little longer.*

Frances Wells Burck, *Babysense*

As I just said, I encourage you to get some help, but if you don’t have access to help, don’t worry: Your job is doable—as long as you put your priorities in order. The time will come to achieve everything you want, but that time isn’t right after having a baby.

One of your top priorities is: Don’t try to do too much. For example, the week after having your baby is not the time for you to host your family from out of town. As my mother used to say, “Don’t be stupid polite!” A few well-wishers are fine, but only if they’re healthy and helpful. Visitors who can’t cook or clean take up your precious time and, what’s worse, *they can carry germs into your home*. People you keep away may call you paranoid but, in truth, you never had a better reason for being neurotic and overprotective!

Another good idea is to leave a sweet announcement on your answering machine, giving your baby’s important statistics and



telling everyone that you won't be returning calls for a few weeks. Of course, you can always return calls if you want, but this at least frees up enough time to accomplish even higher priorities—like soaking in a hot tub.

### **Rest: The Essential Nutrient for New Parents**



*Sometimes the most urgent and vital thing you can do ... is take a nap.*

Ashley Brilliant

When we were teenagers, we were “dying” to stay up all night. Now, we’re “dying” if we stay up all night!

The extreme fatigue that goes along with being a new parent can make you feel depressed, irritable, inept, and distort your perceptions of the world like a fun-house mirror. (Some countries torture people by waking them up every time they fall asleep!)

So please nap when your baby does, sleep when your mom comes, and, however you have to do it—get some rest!

### **5. Be Flexible: It's Much Better to Bend Than to Snap**

*You just have to accept that some days you're the pigeon and some days you're the statue.*

Roger Anderson

There may be a few times in life when an unwillingness to compromise is admirable—but after becoming a new parent *isn't* one of them. That's why I believe the official bumper-sticker

slogan for all new parents should read, *Be flexible—or die!*

Part of the fun, and responsibility, of being a mom or dad is to be able to choose which parenting options make sense to *you* and works for *your* child. However, it's also important to be able to throw your choices out the window and start all over again when things are not going the way you planned.

If you're a person who enjoyed being organized, on time, and having a spotless house, this new flexibility may require practice—and deep breathing. But you may as well take it all with a sense of humor because the time has come when your milk will gush down the front of your favorite blouse and when your little darling will empty her diaper load on your white sofa!

If you can, throw away your to-do list for a few months. Accept that the clock on your wall has been temporarily transformed from a time-management tool to a decoration. And know that for a while, day and night will cease to have any true relevance.

You've "bought your ticket," so let go and open yourself to the marvel, awe, and exhilaration of one of the greatest adventures of life!

## **6. Know Thyself: How Do Your Baby's Cries Make You Feel?**

When your baby screams in your face, are you able to calmly think, *He must be having a bad day?* Or do you think, *Oh, my God, I'm doing something wrong!* or *I don't deserve to be a mother!* Or even, *Who the hell does she think she is?*

There's no question your baby's screams may trigger a flood of upsetting feelings from the past. You may suddenly remember voices of anger, criticism, and ridicule directed at you long ago. And you may begin to get angry or defensive. Of course, your newborn's cries can't possibly have a connection to your past traumas. She's much too young to feel anger or to be able to criticize or manipulate you. However, fatigue and stress can sometimes fool your mind and make these innocent cries feel like stinging attacks.

This, too, is a normal part of being a new parent. When these emotions well up inside you, take the opportunity to be brave and share your feelings with your spouse or someone else who truly cares about you. The more you discuss your past pains and your current fears, the more clearly you'll see how unrelated your baby's cries are to those old experiences.

## **7. Don't Rock the Cradle Too Hard: Babies, Frustration, and Child Abuse**

*David suddenly felt a wave of anger blow across him like a hot wind. After weeks and weeks of colicky screaming by his twin sons, Sam and Ben, he got so angry he punched his hand through the door. "I was so frustrated and exhausted I couldn't control myself. I would never hurt my boys, but for the first time in my life I understood how a parent could be driven to such desperation."*

Few things feel better than when we can easily calm our baby's screams, but when everything we do fails, few things can make us feel worse.

Remember, your baby can belt out a shriek that is louder than a vacuum cleaner. That's why it is so difficult to take when she's on your shoulder and blasting right next to your ear. The sound of her cry also sets off a "red alert" reflex inside your nervous system that makes your heart race and your skin cringe, creating an urgent desire to stop it. This crying can become almost intolerable when it's coupled with fatigue, depression, financial stress, hormonal chaos, family conflict, and a history of being abused. When these stressful forces combine, they can sometimes push even a loving parent over the edge into the dark abyss of child abuse.

A mild-mannered father I know told me that he once shocked himself, in the middle of the night, when his daughter's cries started to "get to him" and he found himself rocking her cradle "a little too hard." "I felt like such a terrible parent. My little Marlo was so unhappy, yet nothing I did seemed to help. I felt so incompetent."

Another great frustration for parents is when a technique that usually calms their baby suddenly does nothing. It's like getting mugged in broad daylight when you least expect it.

However, no matter how desperate you feel, always remember that there's a big difference between feelings and actions. When you are exhausted, you can joke all you want to about leaving your baby on someone's doorstep but, needless to say, you're not allowed to do it.

What should you do when you are feeling like you're near your breaking point?

- Lighten your workload and get some help to clean the house and watch the baby.
- Do something physical to vent your energy: dig a hole, hammer nails, beat the sofa, scream into a pillow, sob into a towel, or just go out and run!
- Talk to someone: a friend, a relative, or even a crisis hotline. (The National Child Abuse Hotline—800 4-A-CHILD—has counselors available every day, all day.)

## 8. Keep Your Sense of Humor Handy

*He who laughs ... lasts!* Mary  
Pettibone Poole

•

*There are times when parenthood  
seems like nothing but feeding the  
mouth that bites you.* Peter de Vries

•

*The only normal families are the ones  
you don't know very well.* Joe Ancis

•

*Babies are always more trouble than  
you thought ... and more wonderful.*  
Charles Osgood

•

*It's not easy for me to take my  
problems one at a time when they  
refuse to get in line.* Ashley Brilliant

Raising a child is a constant series of tasks and challenges. You don't want to make mistakes, but you will. Remember, perfection is found only in the dictionary. So, forget

dignity ... forget organization ... be gentle with yourself ... and *laugh, laugh, laugh.*

Laughter is exactly what this doctor orders. Rent some funny movies or watch reruns of *I Love Lucy*. Try imagining Cleopatra burping her baby and getting a giant spit-up down *her* back.

Laugh at your hair, laugh at your baby, laugh at your messy house. Laugh at the fact that you are now one of those women you used to avoid who gets into heated discussions at parties about burping and the color of her baby's poop.

## **9. Take Care of Your Spouse (S/he Just Might Come in Handy Someday)**

*When Curtis, Cheryl and Jeff's second child, was four weeks old, Jeff said "We haven't even had sex once yet." Cheryl shot back, "What do you expect? Every sexual part of my body is either oozing, bruised, or throbbing!"*

Taking care of a new baby is so demanding and time-consuming that it's easy for a parent to start feeling like they're giving a hundred and ten percent effort (usually true) and their partner is giving only seventy-five percent (usually false).

- "I work all day and still come home and give the baby a bath." vs. "I take care of the baby all day and still make him dinner and scratch his back."
- "She's so lucky to lounge around the house, watch soaps, and hang out with the baby all day." vs. "He's so lucky to go to work and see different people."

The truth is, being new parents is a joint effort. There is so much to do that the only way to do it all, and still be friends, is to work as a team.

Your baby's world balances on the two of you. That's why she would never want to hear you say, "I gave up everything for you. I even put you ahead of my relationship with your father/mother." In fact, if your baby could, she would sit you down and tell you, "Don't you worry about me. I'm fine, but I'm really gonna need you later. So, for right now, have some fun, see a movie ... but please take care of yourselves."

Caring for your baby is only half your job; the other half is giving each other some TLC. Dads must support and adore their wives, moms must nurture and caress their husbands, and you both have to cut each other some extra slack and avoid harsh criticisms. (Of course, in any given situation your reactions will be different from your spouse's. You're separate individuals with unique life experiences.)

Make the time to take walks together, to give each other ten-minute massages, back scratches, or sexual pleasure. Try to never take your partner for granted and never go to bed angry. These first months are the hardest part of the first year, but the great news is, if you work together, your marriage can emerge from this period stronger than ever.

### **To Dads: Appreciate Your Wife—The Great Goddess of Creation**

Can you imagine how embarrassed you would be if *your* "bag of waters" broke open in the middle of a business meeting? While a new dad has spent the past nine months going about his life in a fairly normal way, his wife has been stretched in a surreal kind of mind-body "taffy pull." Let's face it, any guy who has watched his wife give birth knows the real truth about who the weaker sex is.

Mothers are great heroes! When it comes to making babies, we men chip in a sperm while our wives essentially *pull a dog sled from Alaska to the Gulf of Mexico*. In fact, except for your 23 chromosomes, every single molecule of your baby was individually carried to her through your wife's body. It's almost as if each cell should carry a little tag that reads, *Inspected by Mom*.

And, after your child is born, your wife has another awesome responsibility on her shoulders. While you get to go to work, she's at home dealing with leaking breasts, sore nipples, an extra thirty pounds, and a frantic, red-faced person yelling at her—all after little or no training.

And then there's sex (or no sex)! You may be interested in having sex after abstaining for the last part of the pregnancy, but for many new moms, sex is the last thing on their mind. Women often have "pelvic exhaustion" after the delivery, and although your wife may look like she had a "boob job," she may not feel very erotic. (Remember those are really for the baby now.)





What should you do? Rethink your priorities. Remember, no one on his deathbed ever said, “My only regret is that I didn’t spend more time at the office.” Now is the time your wife needs your attention, support, and tenderness the most. (It’s no accident researchers find the best predictor of breast-feeding success to be the spouse’s support.) Bring home flowers, change some diapers, and give her a break to go out with friends—now, that’s the type of “child support” she needs!

Another way to really help your wife is to take over the job of calming your baby. Men are superb at soothing babies when they learn the Cuddle Cure. Frank, a construction worker and father of colicky two-month-old Angela, said, “I love being able to soothe my screaming baby in seconds.”

### **To Moms: Appreciate Your Husband—The Man Who Put the Us in Uterus**

Okay, it’s true: You *have* had to do all the hard work and “heavy lifting” so far, and you’re so busy you barely get the chance to pee—but it’s not easy being a new dad either.

Remember, your husband is descended from the world’s most successful cavemen, and he probably has dinosaur-size expectations of himself. He may not have to protect you from saber-toothed tigers, but most men still feel a huge pressure to go out into the world and compete in order to provide for their families.

If your husband is quiet, don’t think he doesn’t feel things as deeply as you do. Men shown crying babies responded with less talking than their wives, but they had exactly the same sharp increase in sweating, heart rate, and blood pressure.

There’s no doubt that many new dads feel as nervous handling their infants as the first time they

asked a girl to the prom. So be patient with your sweetie. Be available if he needs you, but don't rescue him right away when he's fumbling around trying to figure out how to calm your baby—just remind him of the 5 “S's.” He'll sense your confidence in him and he'll feel great when he can do it on his own. Then, rather than seeing himself as an outsider with the baby, he'll feel like a “star player on the team.”

## **10. Don't Ignore Depression: The Uninvited Guest**

*My whole world suddenly turned black. My emotions jumped from guilt to rage to despair to such utter anxiety that I thought I would either jump out of my skin or lose my mind. I had terrible visions of hurting myself so I could be taken to the hospital and rescued from all this.*

*I felt like I was being punished for thinking I could be a good mother. I felt like I didn't deserve to have a child ... and I cried for hours.*

Louisa, mother of three-week-old Georgia

As shocking as it sounds, approximately forty percent of new moms experience unhappy feelings intruding upon their joy during the days and weeks after the birth of their babies. You may notice yourself suddenly being tearful, worried, or exhausted yet unable to sleep—all of which may be early signs of postpartum depression.

Shortly after delivery, women may experience three different levels of depression: *the baby blues*—mild weepiness, anxiety, and insomnia; *true postpartum depression*—a bruising, more debilitating type of grief; or

*postpartum psychosis*—a severe and rare condition including hallucinations, incoherent statements, and bizarre behavior.

### **The Baby Blues**

The baby blues usually start a few days after the baby is born and last at least several days. No one knows exactly why they occur, but some scientists think they're triggered by the dramatic changes in a woman's hormones after delivery. In addition, the blues can certainly be worsened by all the other stressful situations going on in a new mom's life—including having a very fussy baby.

The blues are so common that many doctors consider them a normal part of giving birth. Nonetheless, the fatigue, fear, and unanticipated sorrow can be very distressing while you're experiencing them.

*Feeling dejected and rejected Sarah called me. She had just about had it with her four-week-old daughter, Julie. Sarah said, "She's fussy and demanding all the time; I feel robbed of my joy. I dread her crying because I never know if it will last five minutes or four hours! And on top of that, I have insomnia. I'm a light sleeper by nature, but now I'm so attuned to Julie's cry that I can't sleep for longer than a catnap. I'm anxious, exhausted ... falling apart.*

*"I watched my babysitter act so calmly around Julie and I couldn't help but feel that I was making her worse with my awkward attempts at calming her."*

I asked Sarah and Tom to come in so I could teach them the Cuddle. I hoped much of Sarah's problem stemmed from her exhaustion, but I was also concerned about her having the baby blues. After teaching them the 5 "S's," I encouraged Sarah to make an appointment with a psychologist, just in case the techniques didn't help. Fortunately, the Cuddle made a dramatic improvement in Julie's screaming. Sarah quickly mastered the skills of calming her and getting her to sleep longer. As Julie slept more, Sarah began to feel like a better mom.

*"Yesterday, I calmed my little baby in less than five minutes! I was so proud! Within a week, I felt like the darkness lifted and my life had turned around."*

### **True Postpartum Depression**

One of the least discussed secrets about having a baby is depression. During the first weeks of what should be the greatest bliss of their lives, about five percent of normal moms (estimates range from three to twenty percent) experience strong feelings of sorrow and anxiety. If mild sadness after birth is called the baby blues, then this more severe depression should be called the baby "black-and-blues," because it is a bruising assault on a woman's psychological health.

Crashing waves of emotion knock these women off their feet and make them feel like they are drowning in sadness, shame, anger, anxiety, pain, fear, apathy, exhaustion, and hopelessness. It can take all the energy a mother has just to make a sandwich. Oftentimes they have fantasies of hurting themselves or their babies. These symptoms

can occur at any time after delivery and last from a few weeks to several months.

A woman who feels this way can become so fragile that almost anything makes her think, *Every other woman would make a better mother.* Or, *I'm sure she's crying because she hates me.* No matter what words of support her loved ones offer, she feels totally adrift and thinks it's impossible for them to really understand how she feels.

This black hole sucks away a woman's optimism and self-confidence. Yet, at the same time, the shame and isolation accompanying postpartum depression lead most of these moms to keep their suffering a secret from their doctors.

However, depression *is* a medical illness. Although these mothers often feel responsible for their condition, they should have no more guilt than people suffering from allergies. Like its milder version, the baby blues, postpartum depression is believed to be caused by a temporary hormonal imbalance. It, too, is made worse by the stress of fatigue, financial pressures, family problems, and colic.

If you are feeling like this, you're not alone. Many women have experienced what you are going through. Fortunately, there are some very effective treatments that can help you feel better. Please, call your doctor. You may not even have postpartum depression—low thyroid levels after delivery mimic depression. And if you do have it, you can be greatly helped by any one of a dozen excellent new medicines, hypnosis, light therapy, or psychotherapy.

### **Postpartum Psychosis**

This severe reaction to the physical, emotional, and hormonal shifts occurring around birth may affect as many as one in one thousand women (usually within two weeks of delivery). Typically, these distraught new mothers hear voices and see things that other people can't; their statements become irrational and preoccupied with bizarre trivia; and, they may refuse to eat and become frantically active and extremely confused.

Postpartum psychosis is treatable, but it's an absolute medical emergency! If you think you or someone you know may be suffering from this extremely serious condition, seek medical help *immediately*.

To get help with any level of postpartum depression, contact:

Postpartum Support International:

(800) 944-4PPD or [www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net)

Depression After Delivery:

[www.depressionafterdelivery.com](http://www.depressionafterdelivery.com)

Dear Reader,

I hope the techniques described in *The Happiest Baby on the Block* have been as helpful to you as they have been to so many parents around the globe.

Before you know it, that tiny newborn you are cradling in your arms will suddenly blossom into a walking, talking, lightning-fast toddler. Yikes! As your little one approaches that first birthday, please take a look at my practical, fun, bestselling book about bigger kids, *The Happiest Toddler on the Block*. It will teach you techniques that will help you to calm your toddler as effectively as you can now calm your baby.

My unique approach to toddlers—who are so silly and sweet that they are my favorite age group—is the result of combining my quarter century of experience in pediatric practice with the latest findings on brain function in children. In *The Happiest Toddler*, I empower you with proven tips, tricks, and techniques that will encourage your toddler to become patient, respectful, and cooperative. This innovative approach can help you *eliminate 50 percent to 90 percent of tantrums in just days!*

Needless to say, all toddlers have their good days and their bad ones. But once you learn how to speak the language of toddlers, you'll be able to stop even the biggest meltdowns and soothe even the most hysterical little child in minutes. In *The Happiest Toddler* you will find out how to communicate with your toddler and end tantrums as well as how to set effective limits and tackle problems ranging from sleep battles to toilet training, separation fears to biting. Using my revolutionary techniques such as “the Fast-Food Rule,” “Toddler-ese,” “Time-In,” and “Side Door Praise,” you too will be able to turn your child’s daily cries of “No!” and “Don’t!” into a sweet stream of “yeses” and hugs, and to create a calm, loving environment that will help your child

progress through these challenging years with joy and excitement.

My best wishes for many happy years to come.

Harvey Karp, M.D.



To the generous hearts  
of new parents everywhere  
and to our sweet babies  
who come into the world  
with such trust



## Acknowledgments

*The real voyage of discovery consists, not in seeking out new lands, but in having a new vision.*

Marcel Proust

I am a pediatrician—and I love it. I am privileged to practice a field of medicine where I get to be part-biologist, part-psychologist, part-anthropologist, part-animal impersonator, and most especially part-grandmother.

In this book, I also wear all those hats. I hope not only to show what the best parents in history have done to soothe their babies but also to explain why it works and how to have some fun, too! In doing this, my greatest goal is to teach parents, grandparents, and everyone who cares about babies how to translate their messages of love into the language all babies understand.

This book took a number of years to prepare and may never have been completed had it not been for the support and encouragement of a small group of people, to whom I owe my profound gratitude and appreciation:

- To all the kind mothers and fathers in my practice who allowed me to touch their wonderful children, to be a part of their families, and to learn along with them.
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- To my teachers Arthur H. Parmelee, Jr., and T. Berry Brazelton. Their brilliant talent for making the complex seem simple helped me learn how to observe and understand children. To the curious minds of Ronald Barr, Julius Richmond, Tiffany Field, Barry Lester, and many other honest explorers of science whose road signs guided me on this wonderful path into the inner world of babies.
- To my colleagues who reviewed this book and so generously gave of their time and knowledge: Marty Stein, Jim McKenna, Neal Kaufman, Sandra Steffes, Constance Keeffer, and Stan Inkelis.
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imagination of Jennifer Kalis, and the savvy  
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Thank you all!

# The Happiest Toddler on the Block



How to Eliminate Tantrums and  
Raise a Patient, Respectful, and  
Cooperative One- to Four-Year-Old  
Revised Edition

Harvey Karp, M.D.

with Paula Spencer

B a n t a m   B o o k s



THE HAPPIEST TODDLER ON THE BLOCK

A Bantam Book

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This book contains advice and information relating to the care of toddlers. It is not intended to substitute for medical advice and should be used to supplement rather than replace the regular advice and care of your child's pediatrician. Since every child is different, you should consult your child's pediatrician on questions specific to your child.



# Introduction

## How I Found the Secret to Successful Communication with Toddlers

*“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking out new lands, but in having a new vision.”*

—Marcel Proust

Where did your baby go? One day you’re cradling a tiny newborn in your arms, all of parenthood stretched out in front of you. Then before you know it, you’re living with an all-new creature—cuter than ever, but suddenly opinionated, stubborn, and lightning fast. Welcome to toddlerhood!

Toddlerhood is one of the joyous high points of parenthood. There’s nothing like a one-, two-, or three-year-old to help you see the world in wonderful new ways: the bugs in the grass ... the shapes in the clouds ... the “castles” in a pile of sand. Toddlers brim with curiosity, excitement, and irresistible charm.

But as every parent knows, it’s not all fun. Toddlerhood is like three parts fiesta mixed with two parts wrestling match and one part jungle safari. That’s why, around the first birthday, many parents experience a mini “clash of civilizations” as their toddlers’ actions and opinions put them on a collision course with the rules and expectations of the family.

One big reason toddlers act so wild is because during these early years, they experience an explosive rush of brain development that frequently knocks them off balance. Between your child’s first and fourth birthdays,

he'll be carried on a thrilling journey, like a galloping horse ride, that will magically transform him from a wobbly, grunting (and adorable) little being into a singing, joking, thoughtful little person ... right in front of your eyes.

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## Progress Has Its Price

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All that progress comes at a cost—mainly in wear and tear on your back, your patience, and your sanity. Anyone living with a toddler knows how quickly the emotional climate can shift. One minute all is bliss. Then *bam!* They cry, scream, and erupt into a tantrum (often in the most embarrassing places). Despite your best intentions, it can feel like the only words that come out of your mouth are “No!” “Stop!” and “Don’t touch!” And that’s no fun.

No wonder questions about patience, sharing, and misbehavior top the list of concerns parents of toddlers bring to their pediatricians. The hundreds of books and thousands of articles written on the subject are clear proof that if you’re having a hard time dealing with your toddler’s behavior, you’re not alone.

For thousands of years, countless generations of parents have struggled to get their young kids to behave. Too often, they used beating and bullying to provide the necessary discipline. Parents who didn’t hit their sassy toddlers were warned that their children would grow into spoiled and rebellious youths.

Fortunately, many communities began to phase out harsh physical punishment as a parenting tool fifty years ago. However, all too often it was replaced by another very negative approach—verbal aggression. Parents commonly responded to their toddlers’ undesirable

behaviors with verbal attacks and threats such as “You’re stupid!” or “Shut up, or I’ll really give you something to cry about!”

Over the past thirty years, we have come to recognize the destructive effects of rejection and hurtful words. Gradually we began to encourage parents to answer their child’s outbursts with love and reason. Unfortunately, while patient explanations and respectful words work well with big kids, this approach often flops when it comes to soothing stormy toddlers.

But if big-kid-style communication is not the answer, what can a parent do to raise a kind, cooperative toddler? Plenty! However, before you can learn what to do, you need to understand one odd but *critically* important fact....

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## **Your Toddler Is *Not* Just a Miniature Child**

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Toddlers are not simply miniaturized versions of older kids. Their brains are much more immature, which makes their whole way of thinking more rigid and primitive and makes their behavior quite ... uncivilized. In fact, over the next few years, one of your top parental jobs will be to *civilize* your child: teach him to say “please” and “thank you,” to wait his turn, and to pee in the potty.

The uncivilized nature of toddlers became apparent to me as a young pediatrician. At the start of my career, I followed the advice in “the books” and spoke patiently with the crying kids I was examining. But my kind words often backfired and made them scream even more! So I began trying other approaches.

I tried distraction (“Hey, look at this fun toy!”), reassurance (“See, it really tickles.”), empathy (“I know you hate shots, but ...”), and respect (“May I check if your ears are healthy inside?”). But my loving words often just bounced right off of them. I might as well have been talking Swahili for all the good it did. Despite my best attempts, too many toddler checkups ended with a *frustrated* mom holding a *frantic* child being examined by a *flustered* doctor.

Then it suddenly dawned on me—toddlers don’t think like older kids ... so why speak to them like older kids?

Compared to older children, toddlers have immature brains (no surprise there), and when they get upset the brain center that controls language, logic, and patience literally *shuts down*. No wonder they become impulsive and their behavior gets *primitive*. (FYI—the same shift happens in our adult brains when we get upset; that’s why angry grown-ups rant and rave ... and become impatient and irrational!)

Eureka! Suddenly it all made sense. It was no accident that there was a little toddler in *The Flintstones* named Bamm-Bamm. Upset toddlers spit, scratch, and yell because their stressed-out brains fall apart. In seconds, they’re transformed from little *children* to a bunch of Conan the Barbarians. And, the more upset they get ... the more uncivilized they act.

I tested out my new theory by speaking to my cranky little patients in a simpler, more primitive language (kind of like Tarzan in the movies), and I was amazed to discover that I could often soothe their tears—and even get a few smiles—in less than one minute! It was a huge breakthrough.

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## A New Mind-Set: Your Sweet Little ... Cave-Kid?

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***“A mind once stretched to a new idea  
never returns to its original size.”***

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Until recently, people mistakenly thought that most babies cried because of gassy stomach pain. Then, in my first book, *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, I offered a radical new idea: Essentially, our tiny babies are born three months before they're fully ready for the world. And when we create this “fourth trimester” for them by imitating the sensations they loved in the womb—the coziness, the sounds, and the rhythmic motions—they calm down much faster and sleep much longer.

Ah-ha! Suddenly, a lot of things made sense:

1. Car rides soothe fussing not by stopping gas pains, but by mimicking the motions and sounds within the womb and flipping on a baby's *calming reflex*.
2. Cuddling doesn't spoil babies, because before birth they're held 24/7! (So even holding a baby for twelve hours a day is a dramatic 50 percent cutback.)
3. Swaddling and strong white noise help babies sleep because they re-create the sensations they are familiar with from the womb.
4. Babies often cry when they're left unwrapped and alone in total quiet because of the sensory deprivation they experience—sort of like sticking an adult in a dark closet—which is such a contrast to the constant symphony of sensations they enjoyed in the womb.

Parents (and grandparents) who stretched their minds to the ideas in *The Happiest Baby* were quickly rewarded. Using my tips, they learned to soothe their babies'

fussies *and* immediately add at least one to three hours to their infants' sleep!

Well, it turns out that you can be just as successful with toddler-calming and -cooperation as you can with baby-calming when you stretch your mind to the innovative key concept of *The Happiest Toddler* : Little kids are a lot like little cavemen.

Ah-ha! Suddenly, a lot of things make sense:

- Toddlers forget to say “please” and “thank you” because, like cavemen, they’re impatient and impulsive. (They don’t yet value these little niceties of society.)
- Toddlers bravely defy us, like cavemen hunting elephants and buffalo, even though we’re many times their power and size!
- Toddlers, just like our ancient relatives, love face paint, sticking feathers in their hair, drawing on walls, and banging on drums.
- Toddlers have trouble being reasonable and rational (even on a good day) because, like early humans, their brains’ language, logic, and patience control center is too immature.

But if the idea that toddlers are like cavemen sounds odd to you, don’t take my word for it. Visit any park and watch the kids “at work.” The five-year-olds act like little “people,” taking turns and using words to settle conflicts, while the one-year-olds act like little “cavemen” (or even chimpanzees), walking clumsily, shoving to go first, and shrieking when upset.

Of course, even the wildest toddler isn’t *really* a caveman! But you can use this concept like a magic window through which you can see your child’s behavior in a profound new way.

And once you stretch your mind to accommodate this curious new idea and start learning the simple

techniques in this book, you'll be stunned by how quickly your toddler's behavior will improve. You will literally be able to end 50 percent of tantrums in seconds *and* prevent 50 to 90 percent of outbursts before they even happen.

What if your toddler is the rare child who is sweet and mild and never has outbursts? Well, you'll find that *The Happiest Toddler* approach is *still* a great tool because it will help you:

- boost your child's patience, respect, and cooperation
- teach him to be a good friend and listener
- build his confidence and self-esteem
- help him to grow up emotionally happy and healthy

I know that sounds like a lot for one book to promise, but the tips you're about to learn really work! Which is why *The Happiest Toddler* quickly became the number one toddler book in America within weeks of its release in 2004.

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## So Why Did I Write a New Edition?

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Since first writing *The Happiest Toddler*, I've spoken with thousands of parents, grandparents, educators, and healthcare champions across the country. Their questions and feedback have helped me make the approach even easier to use.

This new, improved edition is loaded with new examples and illustrations. It's also more tightly organized and gets to the point faster, to help busy parents put the advice into action ... immediately!



Here's what you're about to learn:

**Part One: Toddler/Parent Basics.** The first part of the book discusses why toddlers behave the way they do and why that behavior can be so very, very hard on us. I'll discuss why your job is *not* to be the *boss* or *buddy* of your little child, but rather to be like an *ambassador*. (Ambassadors are diplomats who skillfully build great relationships by using respectful words and setting clear limits.)

**Part Two: Toddler Communication Basics.** Here you'll learn the two key skills that you need to become the best ambassador/parent on your block: the **Fast-Food Rule** (the key tip for connecting with *anyone* who is upset) and **Toddler-ese** (the easy way to translate anything you want to say into your toddler's natural language).

**Part Three: Behavior Basics.** In Part Three, you'll learn several highly effective ways to boost your child's good ("green-light") behaviors, curb annoying ("yellow-light") behaviors, and immediately stop unacceptable ("red-light") behaviors.

**Part Four: How Do I Handle This One?** Finally, I'll show you how to use *The Happiest Toddler* approach to quickly solve everyday challenges such as tantrums, fears, defiance, dawdling, biting, picky eating, and many more.

In this book, you will pick up many highly effective parenting tips ... some that even lead to instant improvement! Pick a few that make the most sense to

you and—here’s the important part—try to practice them several times a day for a week or two. Practice is the key. Through practice you will build your (and your child’s) confidence and success. And bit by bit, as you feel more competent and effective, you and your child will develop a relationship that is full of fun, respect, and caring.

Now I’m thrilled to invite you to read on and learn how to help *your* wonderful little child become the *happiest toddler on the block*.

Note: I recommend that you begin using the approach described in this book when your child is around nine months of age. Starting when your child is very young will help you avoid many problems *before* they occur. But even if you begin years later, I promise you’ll find that *The Happiest Toddler* approach will help you every single day—well past your child’s fourth birthday. In fact, parents often comment that these skills have improved their connection with their older children, their bosses, their neighbors ... and even with their *own* parents.

The  
Happiest Toddler  
on the Block



# PART ONE



## The Happiest Toddler

Toddler/Parent Basics



**What makes your toddler tick? And what is it about your toddler's behavior that makes you swing between feeling tickled ... and ticked off?**

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- ◆ **Chapter 1** is a speed course on the daily challenges that toddlers have to handle. This information is designed to help you better understand why young tots do some of the crazy things that drive you wild.
  - ◆ **Chapter 2** looks at parenting from *your* side of the high chair. There are good reasons why caring for toddlers is such tough work. I will teach you why the most successful parents think of themselves as *ambassadors* to these primitive little people.
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Toddler Basics:  
The Gentle Art of  
Civilizing a Toddler

***“A two-year-old is kind of like having a blender, but you don’t have a top for it.”***

—Jerry Seinfeld

## Main Points:

- Toddlers aren’t mini-adults, or even mini-big kids. They’re more like uncivilized little *cave-kids*.
  - Our homes tend to be either too boring or too stimulating for our toddlers.
  - Your tot’s brain struggles with language and logic ... *especially* when he’s upset.
  - Your toddler’s normal developmental drives often put him on a direct collision course with you.
  - You’ll find parenting makes a lot more sense once you figure out your child’s unique ... temperament.
-

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## ♡ Help! There's a Neanderthal in My Kitchen

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Would you like to help your child become the best, most cooperative toddler on your block? You'll be most successful if you keep in mind this one key fact: Toddlers act less like little schoolkids than they do like uncivilized little ... cavemen.

*Wait a minute, you might be thinking. Did he just compare my child to a caveman? Yup, I did!*

Of course, toddlers aren't really cavemen, but they *do* exhibit lots of pretty primitive behaviors, like grunting and pointing, wiping their noses on their sleeves (or yours), scratching and biting when angry, and peeing anywhere they want. No wonder the mom of a headstrong 18-month-old jokingly told me, "It's like there's a tiny *Neanderthal* living in my house!"

In fact, between your child's first and fourth birthdays, his rapid maturation will greatly resemble a superfast rerun of ancient human development. It's thrilling to watch as the same great achievements that took our primitive ancestors eons to master spring forth in our children over the space of just three years:

- walking upright
- the ability to skillfully use the hands and fingers
- talking
- juggling ideas (comparing/contrasting)
- beginning to read

One of your biggest challenges during these years will be to teach your child the finer points of "civilization," such as manners, patience, and concern for others. But I promise that you will be much less frustrated and much

more successful teaching these good behaviors once you recognize that your uncivilized little friend is far from a fully rational and logical person.



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## The Little Adult Assumption

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To soothe a toddler who is having a blowup, many parents are taught to calmly acknowledge their child's unhappy feelings and then gently correct them: "Jane, I know you want the ball, but it's Billy's turn. Remember we talked about sharing? So please give the ball back to Billy. You can have the next turn. Okay?"

Sounds reasonable, but mature comments like those often backfire and can make livid toddlers shriek even louder! That's because little children aren't mini-adults. Their immature toddler brains struggle to understand long sentences and to control their bursts of powerful emotions.



Psychologist Thomas Phelan, author of *1-2-3 Magic*, calls our attempt to use calm logic to soothe upset toddlers “the little adult assumption.” By that he means we are expecting stressed-out toddlers to settle down because of our explanations and our polite appeals to reason—which is simply unrealistic. Too many parents believe their little ones should be able to turn off their emotions mid-tantrum and maturely reply, “Thank you for explaining that, Mother. I’ll happily do what you want.” Hmmm ... I don’t think so!



You’ll be far more successful calming your upset tyke and getting his cooperation if you replace adult-style statements with the simple, basic phrases you’ll learn in Chapters [3](#) and [4](#). And believe me, you’ll have plenty of opportunity to practice this special approach over the next few years, because even sweet, happy toddlers have emotional upsets several times a day.

Why are toddlers so prone to outbursts? There are many reasons, but here are the top four....

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# Your Toddler's Four Big Struggles

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We all know how tough it is to raise and civilize a toddler, but have you ever stopped to think how tough it is to BE a toddler?

From your toddler's perspective, she is losing *all day long!* She's weaker, slower, and shorter than everyone else ... and that's just the start of her challenges. Toddlers face four big struggles every day that make it extra-hard for them to behave like little angels.

- Our modern world is weird to them.
- Their brains are out of balance.
- Their normal development can make them misbehave.
- Their temperaments can make them overreact.

## Toddler Struggle #1: Our Modern World Is Weird to Them.

We assume that living in a house or apartment is normal, but it's actually a very weird environment for toddlers. That's because for 99.9 percent of human history, children spent most of every day frolicking ... outside.

Imagine inviting Tarzan to live with you. There's a good chance he'd go totally bonkers. Compared to his jungle home, yours delivers an unpleasant double whammy: terribly dull in some ways, yet way too exciting in other ways.

Similarly, our homes are both boring *and* overstimulating to our little kids ... at the same time. They're boring because they replace the exciting

sensations of nature (the bright colors, the feeling of the wind on their skin, the brilliant sun, the soft grass, etc.) with an immense stillness (flat walls, flat floors, no wind, no fluttering shadows, no birds chirping). Additionally, many traditional toddlers' delights (running after kids and dogs, throwing dirt clods, catching bugs, climbing trees) are literally beyond reach.

When you think of it that way, it's no wonder so many kids are bouncing off the walls by late morning.

Yet, at the same time our modern world can be too stimulating to toddlers. It bombards them with jolting experiences that kids in the past never had to deal with: crazy cartoons, slick videos, clanging computer games, noisy toys, and bright colors everywhere. We may be used to all this, but it can make many little children feel stressed.

As the day wears on, all this *over-* and *under*stimulation can drive many little kids over the edge into fatigue, irritation, and misbehavior. Uh-oh! *Tilt ... tilt ... tilt!*

## Toddler Struggle #2: Their Brains Are Out of Balance.

Your toddler's brain is like a buzzing beehive with twenty billion cells and 50 percent more nerve connections than we have in our big heads! All these connections mean millions—or billions—of signals zipping around. “Go here!” “Go there!” “Touch it!” “No, don't!” Yikes! No wonder little kids spin out of control.

To help manage this whirlwind of mental activity, our brains are split into a right half and a left. The two halves of the brain look alike but do very different things. The left half is the methodical *nerd* of the nervous system. It loves details: picking the right word,

counting the toys, and solving problems ... step by step. It helps us listen carefully, be logical, and stay calm.

The right half is the hyper “Speedy Gonzales” of the nervous system. It’s great at quick decisions, instant face recognition, and bouncing to the beat of any type of music. Unlike the thoughtful left side, the right side is distractible, impulsive, and emotional.

The two halves of the brain are in pretty close balance in big kids and adults, but the left side tends to be a bit more in control. Guess which half runs the show in toddlers? Yup, you guessed it ... the right. In fact, your tot’s emotional right side is so busy and noisy it often ignores the patient voice of the left side telling it to settle down.

And as if all that weren’t challenging enough, your toddler’s brain gets thrown even more off balance when she’s upset. Big emotions instantly *shut down* the thoughtful left brain and dramatically *amp up* the primitive right.

In truth, this same imbalance occurs in adults, too (that’s why we “go ape” when we’re upset). But since toddlers are a whole lot more impulsive to begin with, our little friends shriek, spit, crash into tables, run into streets, and act even more like Neanderthals than usual when they get upset.

Despite these difficulties, your toddler’s right brain has one absolutely spectacular ability that will become one of your best tools for connecting with her and civilizing and calming her, too: the capacity to respond to “nonverbal” communication. Even when her immature left brain gets hopelessly confused by your *words*, her right brain will have no problem understanding your tone of voice, the look on your face, and your gestures ... even when she’s upset.



NORMAL ADULT  
(calm, logical)



NORMAL TODDLER  
(impulsive, distractable)



UPSET TODDLER  
(wild, rude)

You don't need to become a brain expert, but knowing a bit of science will help you understand one very important point: Talking directly to the right brain when your child is upset, by using your tone of voice, gestures, and body language to mirror a bit of her emotion, is the key to helping her calm back down. You'll become an expert at this method when you learn the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-ese in [Chapter 3](#).

By the end of your child's toddler years, you'll easily be able to see her "new and improved" left brain taking more control. This will help her be more verbal, more focused, and less likely to pop like a firecracker at every little frustration.

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## Sign Language: Young Kids Know More Than They Can Say

When you think about it, it's not so easy to talk. Like a marching band, your lips, tongue, and throat have to move together with perfect split-second teamwork.

It takes most kids two to three years to get really good at speaking, but a fun way to jump-start your one-year-old's ability to "talk" is to teach her to sign. Remember, your toddler's right brain is an

expert at reading gestures. That's why even very young toddlers can learn sign language.

***Jane noticed that her 15-month-old son raised his hands whenever he wanted to leave. So she started to use this sign to “tell” him when it was time to go.***

There are many good books that help parents teach their children sign language. Or you can just make up your own signs. Here are a few easy ones you'll have fun with. Say the word out loud as you show your child the gesture.

- Put your hand to your mouth for “eat.”
  - Suck on your fist for “drink.”
  - Stroke the back of your hand for “doggie.”
  - Wiggle your finger for “worm.”
  - Sniff to mean “flower.”
  - Pat the top of your head for “hat.”
  - Repeatedly open, then clench your hand for “breast-feed.”
- 

Four-year-olds are definitely more patient, more civilized, and well on their way to growing up.

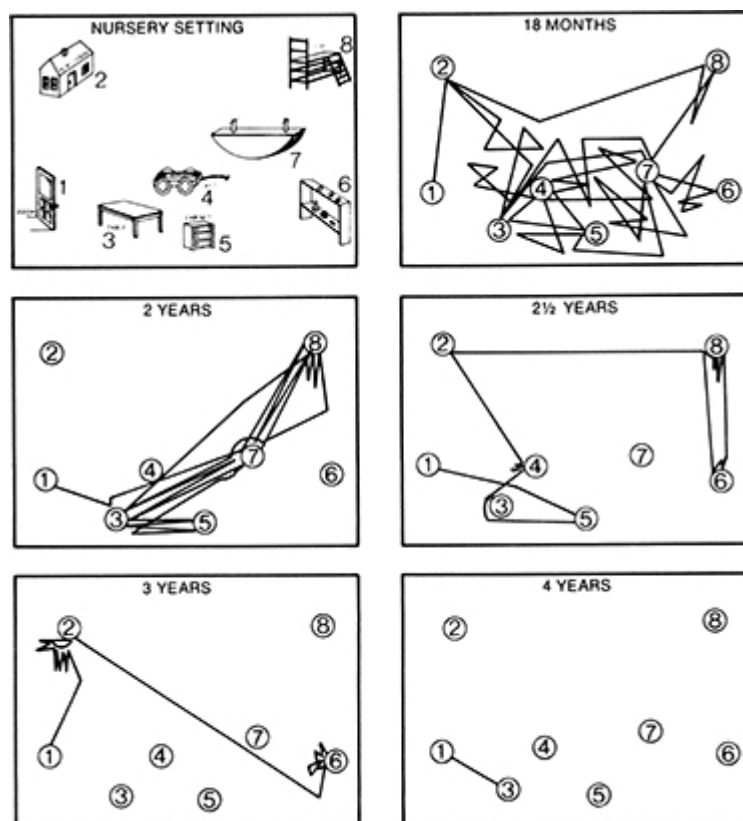
(Want to read more about how your child's brain works? I recommend taking a look at these two great books: *What's Going On in There?*, by Lise Eliot, and *The Scientist in the Crib*, by Alison Gopnick, Andrew Meltzoff, and Patricia Kuhl.)

## Toddler Struggle #3: Their Normal Development Can Make Them Misbehave.

Believe it or not, toddlers are biologically driven to do many of the things that drive us bonkers. Let's focus on a few of the developmental characteristics typical of all toddlers, and likely to put them on a collision course with their parents:

- **Toddlers are compulsive walkers ... and climbers.** After months of being limited to lying down, sitting, and crawling, suddenly being able to walk and climb is absolutely thrilling. Your primitive little friend will roam around nonstop from dawn to dusk, feeling *Wow, this is soooo cool!*
- **Toddlers are very self-centered.** Most toddlers demand to be in the spotlight: *Talk about me!* It's a wonder their first word is usually "ma ma" ... and not "me me"!
- **Toddlers have trouble switching gears.** Little tots often have trouble going from one activity to the next. They seem like machines without an "off" switch. You see this all the time in their play: *Whee! Let's whack this drum ... a thousand times in a row!*
- **Toddlers have the attention span of a bumblebee.** Young kids flit from thing to thing. Their high degree of distractibility is perfectly illustrated in the following diagram, from Louise Bates Ames and Francis Ilg's wonderful book, *Your One-Year-Old*. As toddlers mature, they gradually become able to focus their concentration for longer periods of time.

- Toddlers are rigid.** Two-year-olds are *not* famous for flexibility. You can see this even in the way young toddlers approach the rules of language. For example, once they learn that adding “s” makes things plural, they may say “foots” instead of “feet,” and are likely to continue doing so no matter how many times you correct them. The same is true for their lack of flexibility about any changes that occur in their daily lives. For example, your tot may get really upset if one night you deviate from your normal routine and forget to say “Sweet dreams!” to her dollies. And like us, the more stressed and tired they feel, the more rigid they become.



Seven Clocked Minutes of Nursery School Behavior at Different Ages

- Toddlers can't stop pushing the limits.** A *parent's* job is to set smart limits, and a *toddler's* job is to *push* those limits. Toddlers literally can't stop themselves from exploring, touching,



and pulling on everything. That's how they learn about the world and about themselves. So while *you* may feel that your little friend keeps defying you, *she* may feel you're unfairly blocking her greatest joy—discovery.

## Toddler Struggle #4: Their Temperaments Can Make Them Overreact.

Every toddler is a totally unique person with his very own face and voice ... even his personality is one-of-a-kind.

Each child is born with a personality as matchless as his fingerprints. It's a mixture of intelligence, humor, and a fascinating quality called *temperament*.

His temperament is his style of interacting with the world: his pacing, attitude, flexibility, and general mood. Is he cautious or brave? Stubborn or easygoing? Mild or passionate? Temperament explains why some of us can sleep with the TV on while others go nuts with the tiniest noise, why some forgive easily and others just can't let go. Knowing your child's temperament helps you know when to pamper and when to push.

Temperament tends to pass from parent to child. So, shy parents often have shy kids and passionate parents usually have little chili peppers. But sometimes nature throws a curveball and a couple of librarians beget a heavy-metal rocker!

Knowing your child's *developmental stage* tells you what milestone he's approaching, but knowing his *temperament* lets you predict whether he'll greet it with gusto or approach it with caution.



So what temperament does your child have? Is he a calm little Buddha or Attila the Hun? In general, temperament comes in one of three categories: easy, shy, and spirited. While some kids fall between these categories, about three out of every four are easy to peg.

### *Easy temperament*

*Evan, 26 months old, wakes up in a good mood and wanders into the kitchen for breakfast. But a potential crisis occurs when his favorite cereal is “gone-gone” after only a few flakes have been poured into the bowl. His dad, Chuck, quickly takes another brand of cereal from the pantry and sprinkles it into the bowl. “Mmm!” Chuck urges. “Your other favorite! Ohmygod it’s yummy! Try it!” Evan plunges his spoon into the milk—and finishes the whole bowl!*

About half of all kids are easygoing. They wake up “on the right side of the bed,” cheerful and ready for a

new day. They're active (but not wild), tolerate changes well, and enjoy new people and situations.

Easy kids are resilient. They bounce back from bangs and disappointments with a smile. Yet when push comes to shove, they're perfectly capable of both pushing and shoving!

### ***Shy temperament***

***Eighteen-month-old Jesse was a cautious guy. His mom, Jody, said, "He only speaks four words, but he's a thinker. He practices things in his mind before he does them." At the park, he spent weeks carefully watching kids crawl through a little tunnel. Then one day he tried it himself. After he made his way through, he was so giddy that he did it twenty times in a row.***

About 15 percent of kids are shy, cautious, and slow to warm up to new experiences. By nine months most easy babies smile at strangers passing by, but shy kids frown and cling to us for safety, frequently waving bye-bye only *after* a guest leaves. Cautious kids are often extra-sensitive. They don't like their milk too cold or pants that are too scratchy. They're easily frustrated, fearful, and clingy, often trailing us from room to room, and unhappy with changes. Cautious kids also tend to be very observant. These are the kids who recognize where they're going and may start to cry a block before you even arrive at the doctor's office! They are often early talkers but late walkers, and their motto is "When in doubt ... don't!"

Your shy tot may start the "terrible twos" early (15 to 18 months), but if you treat him with patience and respect he will finish the toddler years happy and confident. (*Warning:* Shy, cautious young children should be shielded from pressure and excessive

criticism. That type of rejection can make a shy child fearful and rigid for the rest of his life.)

### ***Spirited temperament***

***Fifteen-month-old Gina stays busy from dawn till dark, flying from one activity to another. “If she can’t open a door, she knocks it down!” says her mom. When she’s moving, she’s happy. But her constant activity means she forever needs boo-boos kissed, trips to the park, and parents who are vigilant about childproofing the house.***

One in ten toddlers is a strong-willed, spirited tyke. These “roller-coaster kids” have high highs and low lows. And when the sparks of daily stress mix with the TNT of their explosive personalities ... ***KABOOM!***

Parents usually know if they have a spirited/challenging child, because they’re the “more” kids:

- more active (they run farther, jump higher, and spin longer)
- more impatient (they hate sharing and taking turns)
- more impulsive (they’re easily distracted and accident-prone)
- more defiant (they run to the curb, look back at you ... then dash into the street)
- more rigid (they get so upset, they keep crying even *after* getting what they want)
- more intense (they get *very* glad, *very* sad, and *very* mad)
- more sensitive (their feelings are easily hurt)

These superactive kids range from cheery to moody, stubborn, and defiant. Fortunately, spirited children usually grow into happy, enthusiastic kids as long as they get lots of outside play, consistent but flexible limits, and a steady supply of patience and love.



## Temperament: Easy, Shy, or Spirited

Let's take your toddler's temperament "temperature." Look over these nine traits and circle the words that best fit your child.

	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Shy</b>	<b>Spirited</b>
<b>Activity</b>	Active	Likes quiet play	Fidgets a lot and is very active
<b>Regularity</b>	Predictable eating, sleeping	Predictable eating, sleeping	Unpredictable patterns
<b>First reaction to new people</b>	Interest	Reluctance	Either delight or rejection
<b>Handles unexpected change</b>	Easily	Reluctantly or unhappily	Easily, or gets very upset

	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Shy</b>	<b>Spirited</b>
<b>Intensity of feelings</b>	Mild/gentle	May be mild or spirited	Spirited/passionate
<b>Usual mood</b>	Happy/easygoing	Happy but easily thrown off balance	Big ups and downs
<b>Persistence</b>	Okay with not getting his way	May give up or be tenacious	Doesn't give up
<b>Distractibility</b>	Focused	Very focused	Easily distracted
<b>Sensitive to noises/smells</b>	Not much	Ultrasensitive	Not much, or a lot

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## **Variety *Is* the Spice of Life (and the Foundation of Society!)**

It would be terrible if there were no doctors in the world, but it would also be terrible if everyone were a doctor. We need leaders and followers, thinkers and doers, worriers and risk-takers. Different temperaments help fill all the niches of society.

So although you may unexpectedly find yourself with the tough job of raising a *saber-toothed tiger*, remember that some day your little tiger will have an important role to play in the world.

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## **The Ten-Second Temperament Test**

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Still not sure which category describes your child? This little test may help: Go to an uncrowded mall, release your child's hand, and pretend to turn your back for two seconds. (Keep a close watch out of the corner of your eye.) What does she do? Stand there? (Easy.) Grab your coat and cry? (Shy.) Run away without looking back? (Spirited.) The answer will give you a pretty good reading of your child's temperament.

Now that you have a better sense what makes your little friend tick, and what may be preventing her from behaving the way you want her to, let's explore the special struggles that the parents of toddlers face every day.

2



Parenting Basics:  
The Lowdown on  
Bringing Up a  
Toddler

***“There are times when parenthood seems like nothing more than feeding the hand that bites you.”***

—Peter De Vries

### **Main Points:**

- *No one* was meant to parent a toddler ... without a lot of help.
- Toddlers are tricky even for experienced parents.
- Your tot’s words or deeds may open up feelings of hurt and humiliation from deep in your past.
- Young kids are especially hard to deal with if their temperaments clash with ours.
- The key to effective parenting: Be an “ambassador”! The best parents diplomatically mix sincere respect and clear limits.



Parenting is the greatest joy—and the toughest job. You love your child, but ... *oooff!* One minute your tot is the apple of your eye, the next she's the pebble in your shoe.

Every mom and dad I've ever met has confronted some or all of the following four struggles that can make the toddler years even more challenging:



## Parents' Four Big Struggles

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- We don't get enough help and guidance.
- Daily battles can make us feel like failures.
- Our toddlers' actions can "push our buttons."
- Our temperaments may clash with our children's.

### Parent Struggle #1: We Don't Get Enough Help and Guidance

*"It takes a village to raise a child."*

—African proverb

Man, it's hard spending a whole day entertaining a young child. How did our grandparents do it? The truth is ... they didn't.

The whole idea of the nuclear family (a household of just parents and kids) is a recent invention. In fact, it's one of the biggest experiments in human history. Our ancestors always lived in *extended* families (near grandparents, aunts, cousins, etc.).

For thousands of years, parents had the village to help them. In fact, when people from more traditional cultures hear about our spread-out families, they're usually stunned. "You can't be serious!" they say. "How can you raise a baby without your sisters, mother, aunts, and friends?"

More and more, we leave our hometowns, have fewer older children to help out, don't know the neighbors, and live in single-parent families or families where both parents work full-time jobs.

Sure, we have lots of modern conveniences (like cars and washing machines), but they can never make up for the loss of family, neighbors, and community. No wonder parents feel overwhelmed. We are! And when you add to that some other modern trends like drive-through restaurants, online shopping, e-mail, and telecommuting, it's plain to see that we live in little worlds that are increasingly isolated from one another.

What is the result of these changes? Amazingly, today's parents often work longer hours than most parents in past generations. That's because they either have to supervise their kids 24/7 without help or spend all day at work and then come home to a house full of undone chores.

The challenge of parenting is especially great today because, unlike parents in earlier generations who often cared for younger siblings or babysat the neighbor's children, most of us have little to no experience raising kids. We get training for our jobs, and we take driver's ed, but when it comes to parenthood, we're supposed to just figure it out on our own.

So please, give yourself a round of applause. You're not a wimp if you use a babysitter or a housecleaner. You're not selfish if you get away for lunch with a friend or take an exercise class. Too many parents undermine

themselves with guilt. Give yourself credit for all the good work you're doing ... and get yourself some help.

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## **Finding Your Village**

Whether you live in Manhattan, New York, or Manhattan, Kansas, you can find, or create, communities of child-rearing support all around you:

- Set up playdates with a friend who has a toddler the same age as yours.
  - Get to know your neighbors.
  - Enroll your child in nursery school or preschool, a Mother's Day Out program, or Mommy and Me-type playgroups. (Age two is not too young.)
  - Join a gym or activity group targeted to parents and toddlers.
  - Join a playgroup or babysitting co-op. (Check your pediatrician's bulletin board or a community newspaper or Web site.)
  - Look for online communities for moms of toddlers.
  - Invite an older neighbor to visit with your child.
  - Join a place of worship.
  - Move nearer to your family or move them nearer to you.
- 

**Parent Struggle #2: Daily Battles Can Make Us Feel Like Failures**

*“Perfection is only found in the dictionary.”*

—Old saying

*Lynne was in tears. That morning her 20-month-old, Josh, sank his teeth into a child at playgroup. It was the third time this week he had bitten someone, and this time he did it so hard the teacher asked Lynne not to bring Josh back. She sobbed, “What am I doing wrong?”*

We proudly take credit when our kids behave well, so it is only natural for us to feel responsible when they misbehave. But before you rush to judge yourself, remember that toddler limit-pushing is totally normal. Whether you're a CEO or a four-star general, your toddler is going to break the rules.

We all mess up sometimes, but failing every now and then doesn't make us failures; it's a normal part of parenting and can actually speed us along the path to success. So relax and learn to look at your mistakes with a sense of humor. Believe it or not, these toddler years will be gone in a flash, and one day you'll miss them terribly. Take a big breath, and know that your love, respect, and guidance will help you finish these years with a happy, confident, likable child at your side!

Here's one more bit of consolation for you: Toddlers save their biggest meltdowns for their parents. We're the people with whom they feel the safest. So you might consider your primitive little friend's tantrums a form of flattery.

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## **Bad Day? You're in Good Company!**

*“If at first you don't succeed, you're running about average.”*

—M. H. Anderson

Even the greatest geniuses fail ... many, many times! Dr. Seuss, America's beloved children's author, was rejected twenty-eight times before he found a publisher for *The Cat in the Hat*. Barbra Streisand's off-Broadway debut opened and closed the same night. Walt Disney was once fired because he "lacked imagination" and "had no original ideas."

Luckily, parenthood is chock-full of second chances. So if you're having a tough day, don't get stuck obsessing over it. To paraphrase Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*, tomorrow really is another day.

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## Parent Struggle #3: Our Toddlers' Actions Can "Push Our Buttons"

***"There are days when everything my boy does pushes my buttons. I end up feeling like I'm one big button!"***

—Peter, dad of three-year-old Andrew

Toddlers do have a way of pushing our buttons. Their actions can unleash from within us strong, often irrational *over*-reactions. Sometimes we get so angry we literally can't think straight or control what we say. And, the more stressed we get, the more *we* start acting like primitives ourselves.

What's the biggest reason we lose it with our toddlers? Their behavior triggers *demons* from our past.

Here's what I mean: Our kids' actions may release sudden waves of memory. Sometimes these can be wonderful. For example, watching your child lick the bowl may bring back a happy memory of you making cookies with your mom. But other times they can be

deeply upsetting. Fragments of painful past experiences dwell inside us all, waiting for a catalyst to bring them to the surface again. For example, being slapped in the face by your two-year-old may suddenly rekindle the anger you felt when you were slapped by your father (or, more recently, when you were insulted by a boss). If your child laughs when you accidentally spill soup down your shirt, that might bring back the deep hurt you felt when you were taunted by schoolmates or mocked by a sarcastic grandmother.

Often we react without any specific memory of a similar situation. But if you feel a sudden surge of anger, hurt, or resentment, that's a pretty sure sign that your child's action has tapped into some strongly upsetting early experience.

### ***Making peace with your past***

***Debby was proud to go out to dinner for Mother's Day with her husband, Andy, and their three-year-old twins, Sophie and Audrey. But her happiness turned to hurt when the girls started fighting over who would sit next to Andy: "I don't want Mommy! I want Daddy!" She unexpectedly felt the sting of rejection she remembered from when she was a child and kids on the playground wouldn't let her join in to play any of their games.***

Remember, when we get mad or hurt, our rational left brain shuts down and the emotional right side takes over. That's why, in the heat of the moment, it's easy to forget that your toddler isn't intentionally trying to hurt or humiliate you. Your tot's spitting, scratching, and defiance are just the primitive acts of an immature, uncivilized little person who has trouble controlling herself, and hasn't learned to anticipate—or care—how others feel.

## ***A better response when your buttons get pushed***

***Sara Jane said, “The other day, I got so mad I threw the remote control and broke it. I had angry parents, and I’m so afraid of losing my temper with Kimmie. But something inside me just snaps when she looks right at me and disobeys. It’s like she’s daring me to do something!”***

No parent *wants* to scream at her toddler, but sometimes anger just erupts out of nowhere. I don’t want you to ignore your feelings, but it is simply not okay to explode in front of your child. Your child can’t help acting like a caveman, but you can ... and must. It’s your responsibility to do your *utmost* never to lash out with physical violence or hurtful words.

Take a breath ... forgive yourself (we all have old pains that make us overreact) ... and try to understand why you got so upset. Review the outburst in your mind or write it down in a journal. Anger may be the initial reaction to your child’s misbehavior, but anger is usually just a shell that covers our deeper feelings, like fear, hurt, shame, or betrayal.

Try to find the hurt that’s *under* your anger. Your daughter’s words or actions might have made you mad, but she is not the one who hurt you in the past. Can you recall an early experience that triggered similar feelings? Remembering will allow you to use your adult ability to analyze these feelings and put them in proper perspective.

Once you realize which feelings lie *beneath* your anger, spend a minute to realize how unfair it was for you to have been treated in that way when you were a child. But you will be a happier person, and a better parent, if you can forgive those who caused you pain. Make your peace ... let go of the past ... savor the present.

Those are the first healthy steps to parenting thoughtfully instead of reactively.

So what should you do when your toddler does something that makes your blood boil? Here are a few options:

- Scowl, clap your hands hard a few times, and make a rumbling growl. Then, sternly say, “No!” (See [Clap-Growl Warnings](#): for more about this supereffective tactic.)
- Turn away for thirty seconds and take some deep breaths (see [magic breathing](#)).
- Put your child in a safe place, then go punch the mattress or scream into a pillow.

And if you find yourself getting flaming mad over and over again, here are some smart strategies to help you keep your cool:

- Talk about your painful feelings and memories with someone you trust.
- Get more help at home or put your tot in preschool.
- Don’t spread yourself thin. Look for ways you can lighten your load a little.
- Plan some fun little treats every day (even if it’s just a ten-minute break for reading a magazine).
- Get more sleep.
- Ask your doctor or spiritual counselor about support groups and other resources.

And if you do lose your temper with your child, use it as an opportunity to “turn lemons into lemonade.” Apologize as soon as you cool down. Then, later in the day, take a moment to calmly talk about how you wish



you and she had behaved, and remind her that you'll have plenty of chances to practice getting it right and that your love is way stronger than anger.

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## “Bedtime Sweet Talk”

Many of us take our daily accomplishments for granted, yet beat ourselves up over our mistakes. However, just as we praise our kids for their **baby steps** of progress, we need to do the same for our own baby steps of success. Here's a simple way to boost your optimism, resilience, and happiness that's almost like saying nightly prayers. I call it **bedtime sweet talk**.

Each night at bedtime, remind yourself of two or three of the tiny successes or happy experiences from the day that has just passed: “I had many blessings today, like meeting the new neighbor down the street; dinner came out great; I didn't yell at my child even once.”

Take sixty seconds to jot these down in a notebook. I guarantee they'll bring a smile to your face every time you look back at them ... for many years to come.

The amazing thing about bedtime sweet talk is that pretty soon you'll start noticing how much more is going *right* in your life than you thought. (Read more about using bedtime sweet talk with your toddler on [this page](#).)

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## Parent Struggle #4: Our Temperaments May Clash with Our Children's

*Is your child a chip off the old block—  
or a mutant from Mars? Are the two of*

***you peas in a pod ... or sparks and dynamite?***

In the last chapter, I discussed the large contribution your toddler's inborn temperament makes to her behavior. Now let's turn the tables and look at *your* temperament. (Yes, you have one too!)

***Judy was a "60 mph" kind of woman, but her kids were slow as molasses. In fact, Judy nicknamed Emily and Ted "Speed Bump #1" and "Speed Bump #2" because they forced her to switch from her normal fast pace to a turtle's creep.***

Few of us mesh perfectly with our children. Psychologists have a term for how well a parent's temperament matches up with his child's: *goodness of fit*. And, unlike with lovers, opposites don't always attract.

Do any of the following describe how you match up with your toddler?

I'm neat and disciplined.

I love to cuddle.

I'm athletic.

I'm the life of the party.

I'm soft-spoken.

My daughter is a little Pigpen.

My son pushes me away when I hug him.

My son is low energy and would rather read.

My son is timid and cries around strangers.

My daughter is opinionated, defiant, and wild.

We usually have the easiest time getting along with children who are similar to us. But not always. For example, stubborn parents with stubborn kids can be an explosive mix.

**What's Your Fit?** Check out the list of temperament traits on [this page](#). See how you rate on qualities like intensity, mood, and so forth. How do you compare with your toddler? Where do you complement each other and where do you collide? Half the challenge in parenting (and all close personal relationships) is being able to manage your personality differences.

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## Are You Your Toddler's Boss or

## Buddy?



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During infancy, we happily give our babies everything they want: milk, a clean diaper, cozy cuddling. We bend over backward and savor the sweet reward of their laughter and hugs.

Then, around the first birthday, something changes. Our child starts crawling, walking, and screaming out her strong opinions (“Gimme!!!”). We will still try to be “reasonable” and give 90 percent of what she wants, but 10 percent of the time we just can’t or don’t want to bend to our child’s request. And guess what? She’s not going to like that.

We lovingly acknowledge her feelings. She throws a fit!



We use reason. She throws a fit!

We distract ... we explain ... we warn. She throws a fit!

Pretty soon *we're* having a fit too. And the two of us are going at it like a couple of pro wrestlers.

So what *are* you supposed to do?

At my lectures, bewildered parents often ask what to do to get their kids to behave: "Should I be more lenient? More tough? Am I breaking her spirit? Giving in too much?" They're confused about teaching obedience because they don't have a lot of personal experience and they're bombarded with contradictory advice: Be giving! Be strict! Be a friend! Be the boss!

Most of us want to respond to our children's demands with kindness and generosity, hoping that they will

follow our lead and learn to be kind in return. But unfortunately, trying to be a “buddy” and repeatedly giving in to your primitive little friend’s demands may end up teaching her that whining works and turn her into a spoiled brat.

On the other hand, all parents are warned to back up their rules with swift, predictable consequences if they want to raise an obedient child and keep order in their home. But if that really worked, parenting would be a snap. You’d just command your child to stop ... and she would. Unfortunately, parents who try to be their child’s “boss” rely too much on threats and often end up *inflaming* confrontations rather than reducing them (especially with strong-willed, tenacious tots).

So what’s a parent supposed to do?

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## Be an Ambassador to Your Toddler



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The truth is we don’t live in a black-and-white world. Sometimes you’ll act like your child’s buddy and sometimes her boss, but the best way to understand your job is to think of yourself as an *ambassador* ... an ambassador from the 21st century to the “uncivilized” little munchkin living in your home.

I know what you’re probably thinking: *Ambassador? What the heck does he mean?*

Well, you know what ambassadors do, right? They go to foreign countries and build good relations by giving, giving, giving. They give aid, throw parties, and show respect. But they’re not pushovers. When there’s a

serious conflict, they put their foot down: *“My country will not tolerate this.”*

As parental “ambassadors” we do the exact same thing. We build good relations with our kids by giving, giving, giving. We give food, love, toys, backrubs—we’re forever giving. But from time to time we also need to put our foot down, set a firm limit and enforce it.

To build good relationships with dukes and kings, the world’s best ambassadors all must master two key skills:

- communicating with respect (to avoid ruining the relationship by accidentally offending their host)
- speaking the language of the country they’re visiting (Even the best ambassador will fail if she can’t speak the language of the people with whom she’s working.)

Similarly, to build good relationships with their tots, the world’s best parents must master the same key diplomatic skills:

- communicating with respect
- speaking the language a toddler’s immature brain can understand

In the next section, you’ll have some fun mastering these two powerful parenting skills.

## PART TWO



**Connect with Respect:**

Toddler Communication

Basics



**In Part One**, I discussed why it helps to think of a young child's mind as "uncivilized" and why toddlers are such a challenge for today's parents. Now, in Part Two, I want to teach you two of the most important parenting skills you'll ever learn.

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- ◆ **Chapter 3** will give you an extraordinarily simple way to communicate respectfully with anyone (especially someone who's upset): the Fast-Food Rule.
- ◆ **Chapter 4** will tell you how to translate your caring, respectful words into your tot's "native tongue," a very simple language I call Toddler-ese.

Within days, these two skills will bring about a huge jump in your tot's cooperation and a huge drop in tantrums. Best of all, by using the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-ese every day you will boost your child's health and happiness and set him on the path of kindness and confidence for the rest of his life.

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3



The “Fast-Food Rule”:  
The Golden Rule of  
Communication

***“When people talk, listen completely.  
Most people never listen.”***

—Ernest Hemingway

### Main Points:

- The secret to communicating with anybody who’s upset is the Fast-Food Rule (FFR).
- FFR Part 1: Whoever is most upset talks first; the other person listens, repeats back what they’re told, and only then do they take their turn to talk.
- FFR Part 2: What you say to an upset person is not as important as the way you say it (this is what I call finding the “sweet spot”).
- The best parents use the FFR instead of words that hurt, compare, distract, and rush to squelch feelings.

You smile, then your baby smiles, then you smile back. She babbles, you babble, then she gurgles with glee. This little “dance” is your child’s first conversation. The simple back-and-forth of patiently listening ... then responding is the basic turn-taking pattern of *all* human communication.

This little dance is simple and automatic when your toddler is happy. But when he enters *meltdown* mode it’s easy for you to get sucked in, lose your cool, and start to melt down, too (especially when *you* are the target of the outburst). This dynamic can lead to an explosive escalation.

But don’t worry! This is exactly when the Fast-Food Rule comes to the rescue.



## The What? The *Fast-Food Rule!*

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This silly-sounding rule is the golden rule for communicating with anyone who’s upset. I promise: You’ll be amazed how it works on *everyone*—from toddlers to teens to temperamental spouses.

In a nutshell, the Fast-Food Rule says: Whenever you talk to someone who’s upset, always repeat *his* feelings first ... *before* offering your own comments or advice.

### Why Is This Called the Fast-Food Rule?

Fast-food joints may have their problems, but they do one thing incredibly well: communicating with customers.

Imagine you're hungry. You pull up to the restaurant order window and a voice crackles over the speaker, "Can I help you?" You answer, "A burger and fries, please."

Now ... tell me what do you think the order-taker will say back to you?

- "What's the matter, too lazy to cook tonight?"
- "You should get two burgers, you look hungry."
- "That's five dollars, please drive forward."

The answer is *none of the above!*

The very first thing she will do is *repeat your order* to you. She does this because she needs to make sure she understands exactly what you want ("Okay, that's a burger and fries. Anything to drink?") before she takes *her* turn: "That's five dollars. Please drive up front."

I mentioned at the start of this chapter that normal conversations have a simple back-and-forth pattern. When we talk, we take turns ("I like chocolate!" "Me too! I *love* chocolate!"). But this pattern changes dramatically when one person is upset.



The rule for talking to someone who's upset is: Whoever is most upset *talks first* (and gets an extralong turn to vent). The other person listens patiently and repeats back his feelings with care and interest (“Wow! What she did really made you angry!”). Only then does the friend get a turn to say what *she* thinks about the situation.

At fast-food joints, the person who is hungriest gets to speak first. And with parents and children (or in any dialogue between two people), the person who is most upset—the “hungriest for attention”—goes first. This is Part 1 of the Fast-Food Rule.

Is it really so important to take turns like this? Absolutely! Here's why: Agitated people are *terrible* listeners. Big emotions (like anger and fear) turn our open minds into closed doors. But once we express our feelings—and they're acknowledged—our minds swing back open and we can again pay attention to the good suggestions of the people we love.

## And There Is One More Critical Point

When you repeat what a person has shared with you about her feelings, *what you say* (your words) is not as important as *the way you say it* (your tone of voice, facial expression, and gestures). This is Part 2 of the Fast-Food Rule.

Many Moms and Dads say that the Fast-Food Rule is one of the most important parenting (and life) skills they've ever learned. So now let's see how to use both parts of the FFR (the words you say *and* the way you say them) in some reallife situations.

## FFR Part 1: Restate the Upset Person's Feelings

Imagine that a woman is frantic because she lost a folder of documents she needs for work. Weeping, she calls her mother: "Mom, I feel so stupid! I left some very important papers on my seat at a restaurant! My boss is going to kill me!"

Immediately the mother interrupts. "It's okay, sweetheart. I'm sure he'll understand. Hey, listen to what happened to *me* yesterday. This will make you laugh...."

In frustration, the woman cries, "You just don't *get it*, Mom!"

This mother was in such a rush to soothe her daughter's pain she instantly tried to distract her and never even acknowledged her upset. That's like the fast-food order-taker jumping right to "That's five dollars, drive up front" before repeating your order so that you can confirm it.

Of course, we never want our loved ones to be sad. But failing to acknowledge their feelings only makes them feel unheard, alone, and even *more* upset!

What if the mother had handled it differently? What if she had first patiently listened to and repeated her

daughter's feelings before she offered a distraction?

***“Mom, I feel so stupid! I left some very important letters at a restaurant! My boss is going to kill me!”***

***“Oh, no!”***

***“My boss is so rude, I know he'll scream at me again.”***

***“No wonder you're so upset.”***

***“Yes, I'd been working on that report for two weeks!”***

***“Nooo! All that effort!”***

***“Thanks, Mom, for giving me a shoulder to cry on. I'll get through this somehow.”***

***“You know I'm always here for you. Hey, listen to what happened yesterday, this will make you laugh....”***

When we're upset the first thing we want from our friends is for them to hear us—lovingly and attentively. Like a waitress repeating our order (“So that's a burger and fries?”), a friend's close attention makes us feel understood and respected. Then we are usually much more open to offers of advice, reassurance, or distraction.

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## **Door Openers: A Quick Way to Show You Care**

A quick way to show an upset person that you care is by using a *door opener*.

Door openers are little gestures or comments you make in response to a person telling you his

problems. They encourage the person to share his true feelings with you.

Here are a few of the little things you can do and say to encourage your friend to open his heart:

- Raise your eyebrows in surprise.
- Nod your head repeatedly as he talks.
- Say any of the following as you listen:

“Uh-huh.”

“Sure.”

“Wow!”

“I see.”

“Oh, no.”

“You’re kidding!”

“Then what happened?”

“Tell me more....”

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## **The *FFR* Part 1 ... on TV and in Real Life**

The next time you’re watching TV, pick out one of the characters and watch her really carefully. Notice the normal turn-taking that goes on in the dialogue. Now notice, when the character gets upset, how the other characters respond to her. Do they: ignore? criticize? distract? immediately reassure? Or do they first respectfully acknowledge her feelings (the *FFR*)?

Notice, too, that good listeners never ask a person who is crying and obviously upset, “Are you sad?”

They just caringly describe what they observe: “I can see how upset you are!”

Okay, now on another day, watch some kids in a park. Notice when they get upset how their parents respond. Do they: ignore? criticize? distract? immediately reassure? Or do they first respectfully acknowledge the feelings (the FFR)?

This exercise will really make you more aware of the power of the right (or wrong) reaction. Pretty soon you will become your friend’s favorite person to talk to!

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## FFR Part 2: What You Say Is Not as Important as *the Way You Say It*— Finding the “Sweet Spot”

Most people think that *what* we say is the key to good communication. Of course, words are very important, but when you’re talking to someone who is upset (mad, sad, scared, etc.), *what you say* is much less important than *the way you say it*.

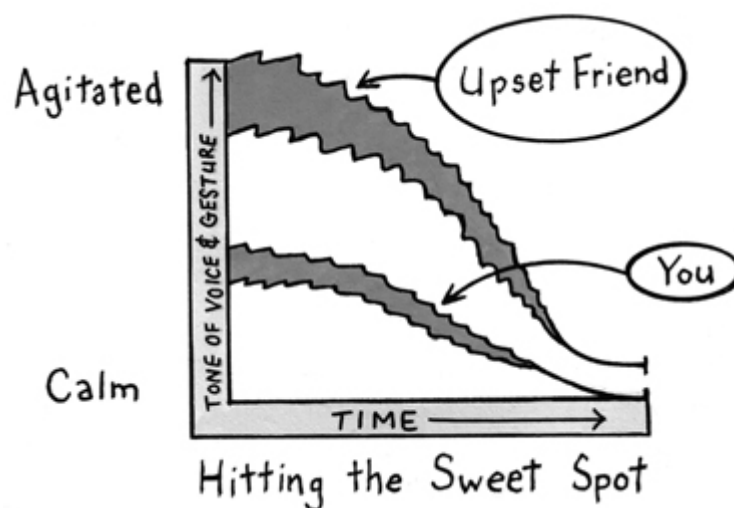
Big emotions trip up our brains! They make our logical left brain (the side that understands *words*) stumble and stall while allowing our impulsive right brain (the side that focuses on *gestures* and *tone of voice*) to hijack the controls.

So when we’re upset, we need someone to respond in a way that will get through to our right brain. That’s why if you pour your heart out to a friend and she just parrots back your words with a blank face and a flat voice, you’ll end up feeling even worse. Even if your listener’s words are totally accurate, if they’re spoken in an emotionless way, you’ll end up feeling like she just doesn’t “get it,” and that will make you feel even worse.



Now that you know how to echo an upset person's words (FFR Part 1), you're ready to learn how to put some emotion into your words so your friend feels understood and cared about. Mirroring the right amount of emotion is superimportant. Use too little and your friend will feel you don't really get it. Use too much and she'll think you're being hysterical or making fun of her. I call mirroring just the right amount of emotion "hitting the sweet spot."

To hit your upset friend's sweet spot you should try to reflect about one-third of her emotional intensity in your tone of voice, face, and gestures. Then, as she calms, you can gradually return to a more normal way of talking.



Here's an example to help illustrate the importance of hitting the sweet spot.

Imagine you just got fired and you go to see a friend so that you can pour your heart out. Which of these scenarios would make you feel the most cared about and comforted?

- Your friend, who happens to be a robot, sits perfectly still and mechanically acknowledges your troubles: "Carol ... that-is-ter-ri-ble.... You-must-feel-so-sad."

- Your friend, a drama queen, wildly waves her arms, eyes bugging out in horror, as she blurts, “Oh, no! That’s horrible! You’ll starve!”

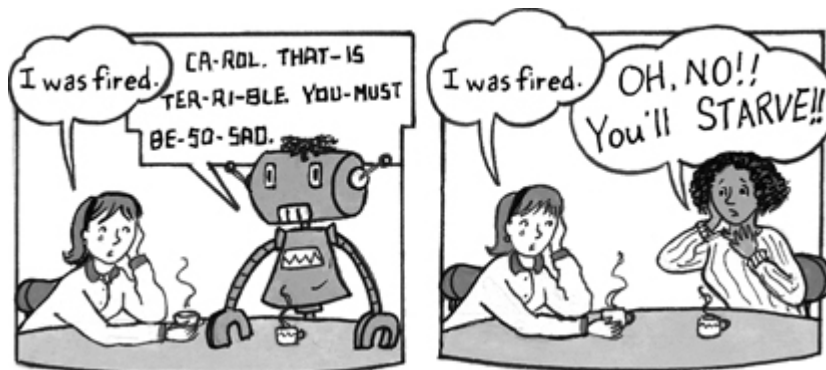
Probably neither! The robot’s emotionless delivery feels cold. The hysteric reacts with such a flood of emotion that she may make you feel even more lonely and misunderstood. Most of us prefer our friends to respond with words and gestures somewhere in the middle range of intensity.

- Looking concerned, your friend sighs and says sincerely, “Oh, noooo. Oh, Carol ... Oh, noooo.” That may not be terribly eloquent, but it’s deeply comforting because your friend’s tone and expression let you know that she is sympathetic and respectful of your pain. She has connected with your sweet spot.

With a little practice, you’ll find that hitting the sweet spot will become as easy and automatic as returning a smile.

### **Tips for Finding the Sweet Spot with People of All Ages**

In general, a person’s sweet spot is a couple of notches *lower* than her level of agitation. But it varies from one person to the next. For example:





- Toddlers have really big emotions, so they usually need us to be more demonstrative to reach their sweet spot.
- Shy kids and adult men tend to be less emotionally expressive and may even feel mocked if their feelings are mirrored too closely. They do better when we underplay our response and aim lower to find their sweet spot.
- Teens can be very dramatic, but they don't like *us* to be dramatic when we acknowledge their feelings. So "aiming low"—by being caring, but a bit subdued—is usually the best way to hit their sweet spot.

***Sylvia told Carla that she could see she was really, really mad, but she did it in a silly, singsong voice that made her three-year-old even madder! When she thought about it, Sylvia realized that by trying to distract Carla and make her laugh at herself for getting so upset, she had prevented Carla from feeling heard and respected. Amazingly, when Sylvia said the same words again, but in a tone that reflected just a bit of her daughter's upset, Carla quieted in seconds and looked up at her mother with real appreciation.***

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## Practicing the FFR

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The easiest way to master this new style of responding is to try it out with a friend who is just *a little* upset. Narrate your friend's feelings with a bit of caring emotion on your face and in your voice. Then, as you get more comfortable with the technique, try using it with someone who is very upset.

New habits take time to learn. So don't worry if you find you keep forgetting to use the FFR at first. Before you know it, you'll be amazed by how many compliments you get for being a great listener, a great friend, and a great parent.

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## Common Questions About Using the FFR with Children

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**Q:** Don't I get to speak first? After all, I am the parent.

**A:** Of course your child must respect you, and you'll have many opportunities to teach her that. But when she's upset, insisting that she wait for you to talk first will make her feel unloved.

We're forever reminding kids to wait their turn. Well, the best way to teach that is to practice what we preach.

**Q:** I find the Fast-Food Rule a bit unnatural. Will I ever get used to it?

**A:** Like any new skill, it takes practice. But most parents find that the FFR becomes almost automatic after just a

week or two.

**Q:** If my child falls and doesn't cry, do I have to use the FFR?

**A:** The FFR says to mirror a bit of your child's response. So if your child doesn't seem upset about the fall, just casually comment, "Wow! You fell. That was a big boom."

**Q:** Should I use the FFR when I think my son's complaints are unreasonable?

**A:** Initially, yes. You'll have an easier time getting him to respect *your* view if you first let him know that you see *his* side of things.

**Q:** Do I ever get to give my message first?

**A:** Sure. Remember, the FFR says, "Whoever is most upset goes first." Usually that's your toddler, but *you* go first if she's in danger, being aggressive, or breaking an important family rule (see [Chapter 7](#)). After all, in those situations you're the one who is most upset.

So if your daughter runs into the street when she's having a tantrum, *you go first!* Run and grab her and say, "No! No street! *Danger!* " Then, once you're safely back on the sidewalk, you should take a minute to acknowledge her feelings.

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**After the FFR ... It's Your  
Turn!**



Emotions and learning are like oil and water ... they don't mix! That's why the moment when your toddler is struggling to escape the car seat is *not* the best time to give him a lecture about deaths on the highway. Even adults become more unreasonable and illogical when we're upset. So it should be no surprise that your toddler can't hear you until the tidal wave of his emotions starts to subside. When your child enters *caveman mode*, energetically acknowledge his dismay, and then, once he calms a bit, you can try to distract him, reassure him, or solve the problem. Here are some other things you might do and say when it becomes *your* turn:

- **Be physical.** Offer a hug, tousle his hair, put a hand on his shoulder, or just sit quietly together.
- **Whisper.** Whispering is a fun way to change the subject and reconnect.
- **Give options.** “We can't have soda, but how about some yummy juice?”
- **Explain your point of view ... briefly.** Save important lessons for a calm time, later on, when he can pay better attention.
- **Teach how to express feelings.** “Make a face to show me see how sad you are,” or “When I'm mad, I stomp my feet, like this....”
- **Talk about how emotions feel, physically.** “You were so mad, I bet you felt like your blood was boiling!” or “When I'm scared, my heart goes *boom boom* like a drum.”
- **Grant your child's wish ... in fantasy.** (This is one of my favorites.) “I wish I could *vroom* up all the rain and we could go outside and play right now!”
- **Give a “you-I” message.** Once the dust settles and it's your turn to talk, *very briefly* share your

feelings using a “you-I” sentence to help your toddler learn to understand the feelings of others: “When you kick Mommy, I feel mad!” or “When you call me ‘stupid,’ I feel very sad inside.”



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## The Famous Parental “But”

“I know you want to leave, but ...” Parents commonly use the word “but” to mark the end of their upset child’s turn and begin their own. If your tot resists leaving the park, try first repeating her feelings for ten seconds or so: “You say, ‘No leave! No leave!’ You *love* the park.” Then, as she starts to calm, switch to your turn: “... *but*, we have to go. Let’s hurry! Then we can play with Daddy at home!”

First you respect your child’s feelings; *then* you use your enthusiasm to sweep her along to the next activity.

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# Emotions Are Great: They Make Us

## Healthy!



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Did you know that emotions make us healthy? In fact, the way in which you react to your child's expression of emotion will contribute greatly to his health—and happiness—for the rest of his life. That's why the Fast-Food Rule is so important.

However, there's a huge and important difference between *emotions* and *actions*. While many actions are unacceptable, *most* feelings are legitimate and should be promptly acknowledged (with the FFR).

Of course, you will often have to stop your toddler's unacceptable actions (fighting, rude words, etc.). But when his strong feelings (anger, fear, frustration, etc.) are ignored or squelched, they don't just *disappear*. They continue to simmer under the surface—sometimes for an entire lifetime.

Bottled-up feelings can lead to a profound sense of loneliness (“No one understands”/“No one cares”) or even bursts of hysteria (think drama queen or someone needing anger-management classes). Kids whose words of fear and frustration are repeatedly silenced may grow up *emotionally disconnected* (like the guy who snarls “I'm NOT angry!”, totally unaware that the veins are popping out of his forehead).

And that's not all. Unexpressed emotion can also contribute to headaches, colitis, depression ... perhaps even arthritis and cancer!

On the other hand, when we “have a good cry” we feel and think better. Venting anger with a good scream or punching a pillow can lower our blood pressure and help us recover, forgive, and move on. Laughter and



tears have even been shown to strengthen the immune system and help heal illness.

Children whose feelings are lovingly acknowledged during the toddler years grow up emotionally intact. They know how to ask their friends for help and how to support others in need. They seek out healthy relationships, avoiding bullies and choosing confidantes and life partners who are thoughtful and kind.

## Respect: As Important as Love

The magic of the Fast-Food Rule is that it conveys your sincere respect. Respect is not some modern, “airy-fairy,” politically correct concept. It is *essential* to good relationships. (Of course, love is important too, but disrespect can make even loving relationships crumble.) And to *get* respect ... you must *give* respect. That is why one of the first things all ambassadors are taught in their training is how to listen and speak with respect.

Respect does not mean letting your toddler run wild. You will often have to enforce your parental authority. But when you are both firm and respectful, you will be modeling to your child exactly the behavior you want to nurture in *her*.

Don't worry if it takes you a little time to get the hang of this new way of communicating. Even if you only do the FFR once a day ... that's a great start. And, like riding a bicycle, the more you practice it, the more comfortable you'll get. I guarantee that soon you'll feel like you've been using the FFR your entire life.



## Use the FFR to Replace Some Old Bad Habits

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Many of us would never make it as order-takers at Busy Burger. That's because too often, we *cut in line* in front of our little child to give *our* message without first acknowledging his feelings.

Perhaps we feel that our busy schedules—or our wish to make our toddlers feel better fast—justify our pushing their feelings aside and taking a turn first. We don't *mean* to be rude. But that's how it feels to a young child when we skip the FFR.

Throughout time, parents have used all sorts of techniques to stop their kids in the middle of what should be *their* turn. For example:

<b>Threatening:</b>	“Stop whining or we're leaving.”
<b>Questioning:</b>	“What are you afraid of?”
<b>Shame:</b>	“How dare you yell at Grandma!”
<b>Ignoring:</b>	Turning your back and leaving.
<b>Distracting:</b>	“Look at the pretty kitty in the window.”
<b>Reasoning:</b>	“But, honey, there are no more cookies.”

Did your parents say these things when you were growing up? How did they make you feel?

Here are the four most frequent bad habits we fall into when we “elbow” our tot's feelings aside so we can take the first turn :

- criticizing with hurtful words
- making unfair comparisons
- trying rude distractions
- rushing to “make it all better”

As you develop your skill with the FFR, you’ll drop these like four hot potatoes!

## Hurtful Words

***“Kimmie, you’re as stubborn as a mule!”***

***“You’re a scaredy-cat.”***

***“Why are you so hyper?”***

***“Don’t be dumb.”***

No parent gets up in the morning thinking of ways to crush his child’s confidence with ridicule and sarcasm. That’s why I’m always amazed to see parents assaulting their kids with words like “retard,” “idiot,” and “whiner”—words they’d *never* allow a *stranger* to call their child.

Name-calling becomes increasingly hurtful to kids around two years of age because middle toddlers are superfocused on words and they care a lot about what others think.

Often, angry words slip out on a momentary impulse ... perhaps echoing mean names thrown at us long ago. (Can you remember being called names when you were growing up? What were they? Does thinking about them still bring up feelings of anger or hurt?)

Verbal attacks can scar like knives. Insults can brutalize a child as much as slapping him. A few cruel remarks can wipe out a hundred hugs and trigger burning resentment or feelings of worthlessness. And what’s even more outrageous is that these names ... are always *lies*! Calling your child a “meathead” is a lie

because it focuses on a momentary screwup but ignores the fifteen times he did things well.

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## **Exaggerations Kill (... the Spirit, That Is)**

Sweeping statements like “You’re the *worst!*” “You *never* help!” or “You *always* whine!” are exaggerations, and as such, they are usually unfair and *always* untrue. They make a person feel insulted and demoralized and often lead to resentment and less cooperation!

I recommend you toss the words “always,” “never,” “best,” and “worst” right out of your vocabulary.

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So when you’re angry, please skip the yelling and profanity and instead tell your tot how his actions made you feel: “You broke my favorite picture frame, and now Mommy is mad, mad, *mad!*”

Remember: like an ambassador, you are building a longterm relationship. Can you picture a diplomat telling a king, “You’re so stupid!” or “Shut up!”? Diplomats keep a cool head and a respectful tone even when they’re mad, because they know that today’s enemy is tomorrow’s friend.

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## **Reframe That Name!**

Fortunately, compliments and kind remarks also live long in our minds. So replace mean labels that

tear your toddler down with descriptions that build him up. It's one of the best gifts you can give.

### **Labels that hurt**

bossy

defiant

hyper

nosy

picky eater

shy

slowpoke

stubborn

whiny

### **Descriptions that help**

a leader

brave

energetic,  
spirited,  
passionate

curious

discerning,

knows exactly  
what he likes

careful, looks

before she

leaps

thoughtful,  
deliberate

tenacious

outspoken

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## **Unfair Comparisons**

How do you feel when someone says, "Everyone else can do it, why can't you?"

Most of us hate being compared to others, especially when it's being done as a put-down:

- "Why can't you act more like your sister?"

- “Stop it! None of the other kids are making such a big fuss.”



Besides being unfair, there are two other big reasons why you should avoid using comparisons to make a point: Before you know it, you'll be trying to *stop* your child from imitating some of the *bad* things that other kids do. And goodness knows you'll hate it when she starts pointing out how her friend's parents are nicer than you!

### **Rude distraction**

Distraction works well with babies, so it's natural to want to use it with toddlers. But be careful. To an upset toddler distraction may feel like a disrespectful interruption or like you're saying, "Stop feeling your feelings."

*Tara, 14 months old, was thrilled with her new skill—walking. But she was not thrilled to be stuck in my exam room. She headed straight for the exit. “Unghh! Unghh!” she grunted, pushing at the closed door. Then she started slapping it. She wanted out!*

*Tara’s mom, Simone, briefly acknowledged her tot’s feelings, then moved directly to distraction: “No, sweetheart. I know you want to leave, but we have to stay here just a little longer. Hey, let’s look at this pretty book.” Unfortunately, Simone’s attempt was met with a beet-red face and a shriek that rattled the windows.*

*Regaining her composure, Simone tried to engage Tara with a cheery verse of “The Itsy-Bitsy Spider.” But again she was met with fiery protests and flailing limbs.*

*Frustration growing, Simone put her foot down. “Tara! No screaming! Shhhh!” But it was too late. Tara was hysterical. Embarrassed—and annoyed—Simone apologized, tossed her “little volcano” over her shoulder, and, avoiding the stares of the parents in my waiting room, sped out the door.*

To understand Tara’s reaction, imagine that you told your best friend about something that upset you, and she responded with a silly change of subject: “Hey, look. New shoes!” I bet pretty soon you’d be looking for a new best friend.

Toddlers also get annoyed when we answer their protests and upsets with distractions. But of course, they don’t have the option of switching parents. So they

either accept your distraction, pushing their hurt feelings deep inside, or scream louder, to try to *force* you to care.

I used to witness this parenting faux pas in my office every day. A toddler cried as I started to examine her ears and her mom instantly started jiggling a doll inches in front of her face, chirping, “Look! Pretty dolly!”

The response? More times than not, the child’s shrieks jumped an octave, as if to say, “*Dolly!? Are you kidding? Don’t you see I’m scared?*”

## Rushing to “Make It All Better”

We often interrupt our child’s complaints with positive comments like “It’s not so bad” or “You’re okay.”

It’s natural to want to comfort your upset child. You just want to “make everything better.” But when your little one is upset, immediately saying “It’s okay!” can actually make things worse. That’s because repeating “It’s okay” over and over again may inadvertently give your child the message that you want her to stuff her feelings deep down inside and *act* happy even if she isn’t. And that is absolutely *not* okay.





*Monica was preparing a snack for little Suzette—a smiley face made out of grapes, cheese cubes, and crackers.*

*One day, as a surprise, Monica got even more creative than usual. Instead of whole crackers for the body, she broke them into strips to make arms and legs. But when her 20-month-old saw the broken crackers, she went ballistic.*

*Monica was so stunned she forgot the FFR and rushed right into trying to make it better, saying, “It’s okay, it’s okay ... it’s okay!” But Suzette screamed even louder. With snack time skidding into chaos, Monica found herself repeating, “It’s okay, it’s okay” in an increasingly frustrated and angry voice. In response Suzette just kept shrieking, as if to say, “No, Mom! It’s NOT okay! It’s NOT okay!”*

Please, save your reassurance for *after* you respectfully reflect your child's feelings (FFR) and she starts calming down. Saying "It's okay" only makes sense once the child really is starting to feel okay.

Of course, you should immediately help your little one if she's in pain or terrified. But toddlers are not delicate flowers who need to be protected from all frustration. Challenging situations strengthen a child's character and resilience. As Wendy Mogel says in her book *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, a child's struggles have a valuable silver lining—they boost her ability to handle life's inevitable frustrations.

Don't misunderstand me: Distraction and reassurance are great—but *only when it becomes your turn*. Farmers have to plow before they can plant, and parents need to reflect their child's feelings (and wait for them to start settling) before taking a turn.



## Help Your Toddler Express Feelings

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*Young toddlers (12–24 months):* Model for your child how to vent her feelings. For example, when she's mad stomp your feet, clap your hands, and shake your head vigorously, and teach her to say "No!" ("Evelyn says, 'No, no, no! Mine, mine! Stop now!'")

*Older toddlers (2–4 years old):* When things are calm, have your tot practice different faces: "Show me your happy face ... your sad face ... your mad face." Point out pictures in books and say "Look at that sad baby. How do you look when you're sad?" Cut out magazine pictures of people showing emotions and put them on

cardboard cards or in a little “feelings book.” Demonstrate *your* facial expressions so she can see what you mean: “When I get mad my eyes get small and my mouth gets tight like this [make face].”

Teach your child the words to use when she’s upset. Use pictures in the “feelings book” as a starting point. Ask, “How does that boy feel? Why is that girl sad?” Enrich your child’s vocabulary by using different words. For example, for “mad” you might also use: angry, furious, miffed, boiling, red-hot, etc.

Amazingly, the more you practice these simple steps, the sooner your child will start to gain control of her emotional outbursts.

Now that you are getting the hang of the Fast-Food Rule, you’re ready to learn the second step in becoming the perfect “ambassador”: the perfect way to make the FFR work with any toddler ... the language called Toddler-ese.

4



“Toddler-ese”:  
A Talking Style That  
Really Works!

***“Pay attention to what you like and ignore or discourage the rest.”***

—Karp’s law of successful parenting

### **Main Points:**

- Toddler-ese is your toddler’s “native tongue.”
- You can translate anything into Toddler-ese with three simple steps: short phrases, repetition, and mirroring a bit of your child’s feelings (using your tone of voice and gestures).
- The more you practice Toddler-ese, the better you get at it.
- Amazingly, all of us automatically use Toddler-ese with our young children ... when they’re happy. But we often forget to use it when they’re upset.

If you were the ambassador to China but only spoke Greek, trust me, you’d have problems! Likewise, talking

with your toddler will be a hundred times easier once you learn the simple steps to translate your words into his “native” language: Toddler-ese.

I discovered Toddler-ese by accident. Like most pediatricians, I dealt with twenty tantrums a day from toddlers who hated being at the doctor’s. Then I began to notice that when I echoed a bit of the child’s upset feelings back—using a very simple style of language—I could usually convert their crying to laughter (or at least cooperation) in minutes ... or less!

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## **Toddler-ese—It’s Better Than Magic ... It’s Real!**

*Clare, a Toddler-ese fluent mom,  
said, “There are rare occasions when  
nothing settles my raging two-year-  
old, but my 95 percent success rate  
with the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-  
ese is nothing short of amazing!”*

Toddler-ese is better than magic—it’s real and it works! It helps children feel cared about and understood. And when you combine Toddler-ese with the Fast-Food Rule, you will be able to prevent up to 90 percent of tantrums before they even happen and you’ll settle more than 50 percent of the meltdowns that do occur ... *in seconds!* (You’ll be able to quickly handle the other 50 percent of tantrums by using the great skills taught in [Chapter 8.](#))

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Sound too good to be true? Fortunately, it’s not. In fact, most parents who try Toddler-ese usually see major

improvements in their child's behavior in just days.

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## Why Do Loving Words Often Flop with Fussy Tots?



*A pair of two-year-olds are fighting over a ball. Shelby, the mom of one boy, kneels down, and sweetly says, “Billy, Mommy knows you want the ball and you’re really mad, but it’s John’s turn and we have to share. Okay? Remember, we talked about sharing yesterday? You’ll get a turn, I promise, but first it’s John’s turn. Okay?”*

*Would you be shocked if I told you that Shelby’s wild toddler totally ignored her gentle words and lunged at the ball, scratching his friend’s face and shrieking, “Mine! Mine!”*

Most parents are taught to answer their toddler's screams with calm, quiet tones. It sounds kind. It sounds reasonable. Trouble is, it doesn't usually work very well.

A calm voice is great when kids are happy. But it often flops when they're upset because:

- **They can't “hear” well.** Remember, strong feelings zap the brain's language center. Crying kids see our lips moving, but our words sound jumbled to them, like gobbledygook.
- **They feel misunderstood.** Calmly refusing your tot the thing she's begging for makes her think you don't understand how much she wants it! So what does she do next? Blasts her message—louder and harder—to get the point across!

*Hmmm. Daddy doesn't "get it!" I better yell so he knows exactly how I feel!*

Shelby got *steamrolled* because her sentences were too long, complex, and emotionally flat. She would have been much more successful had she delivered her message in Toddler-ese.



## **Toddler-ese: It's as Easy as 1, 2, 3**

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Toddler-ese turns adult language into simple messages that our little cave-kids understand ... even during a frenzy.

You can translate *anything* you want to say into Toddler-ese with just three simple techniques:

- short phrases
- repetition
- mirroring—a bit—of your child's feelings (with your tone of voice and gestures)

Let's look at these one by one.

### **Toddler-ese Step 1: Short Phrases**

Toddlers are uncivilized little people. And primitive people have primitive languages. Remember those Tarzan movies? "Come, Cheetah, come!" "No, Jane, no eat."

Even adults get primitive when we're upset. That's why we say that someone who got really mad "went ape!" Strong feelings, like fear and anger, make us drop down an emotional elevator. And the more upset we get, the more primitive we become: *Ding! Going down!*

Well, the same thing happens to toddlers. Except the left half of the brain in young children starts out immature and primitive, so when they get upset, their behavior often gets absolutely *prehistoric!*

That's why the first principle of Toddler-ese is to use very short phrases. The more upset your toddler is, the more simple your words need to be.

For young tots, or very angry older kids, start with one- to two-word phrases (using just the key words). For example, for an upset two-year-old:

Instead of:

“I know you feel mad about it.”

“Did that doggie scare you?”

“You really want that candy, don't you?”

Say:

“You're mad!  
Mad! *Mad!* ”

“Scared!  
Scared! Big  
doggie!”

“Candy!  
Candy! You  
want it ...  
*now!*”

These “bite-size” bits of lingo are perfect for a child's stressed-out brain. (Of course, as your tot recovers, you will stretch your phrases back to normal.)

## Toddler-ese Step 2: Repetition

Repetition is just as important as short phrases. That's because upset toddlers often miss our initial words. You know the saying that adults go *blind* with rage? Well, toddlers go ... *deaf* with rage.



Words whiz by your toddler's brain too fast for her to handle when she's in an emotional tangle. And the more upset she gets, the deafer she'll seem. That's why you'll need to repeat the same short phrase three to eight times ... just to get your upset toddler's attention. Then, it helps to say it a few more times, to convince her you really understand.



Does this sound excessive? It's not. In fact, *many* parents fail to soothe their child merely because they think acknowledging their child's feelings just one time

is enough. But when emotions slam shut the door of your child's mind, you have to "knock" many times just for her to hear you and "let you in."

Here's how to do it: Imagine it's raining, and your two-year-old, Sam, is desperate to go splashing in the mud. He's crying at the door, struggling to reach the knob. In response you:

- Get down on his level and point to the door.
- Say: "You *want* ... you *want* ... you *want outside!* Outside *now!* Sammy says, 'Go ... go ... go! ' "

If he keeps fussing, repeat your words a few more times. Soon he'll turn to you, as if to say, *Huh? You talkin' to me?*

As his crying lessens, stretch your sentences back to normal: "Sammy says, 'Outside now!' You really want to go out! You say, 'Let's go play, Mommy!'"

If you have voiced his feelings accurately, he'll turn to you, look you right in the eyes, and think to himself: *Bingo! That's exactly what I want. Mom "gets it!"*

As he calms a bit more, it becomes *your* turn to give a message (explanation, distraction, etc.; see [this page](#)):

"But no, sweetheart, noooo. It's raining! *Raining! Wet ... yucky!* Come with me! Let's have a pillow fight. *Come on! It's fun!*"

## Toddler-ese Step 3: Mirror *a Bit* of Your Tot's Intensity in Your Tone and Gestures

The first two parts of Toddler-ese are a big help, but the third is the *magic key!*

Your little one may not understand all your words, but she's *brilliant* at reading your voice and face (a right-brain specialty). That's why mirroring *a bit* of your

child's emotion with your tone of voice, facial expression, and body language lets you connect perfectly with her sweet spot!

- **Voice.** Use more *oomph* than normal, but speak at a lower volume than your child is using. Reflect some of the fear, frustration, and other emotions you hear in her tone of voice, at about a third of her intensity. (If your child is very shy or sensitive, you will probably have to use a bit less intensity.) Gradually bring your voice back to normal as she begins to calm.
  - **Face.** Be expressive. Raise your eyebrows, shake your head, open your eyes, furrow your brow, purse your lips.
  - **Body language.** Use lots of gestures. Wag a finger, wave your hands, point, shrug, stomp the ground.
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## A Gesture Is Worth a Thousand Words

Toddlers are really attentive to hand gestures, probably because they can gesture well before they can speak. In fact, their first communication (besides crying, giggling, and facial expressions) usually consists of pointing at something to indicate “I want it!” or “What’s that?” Most 9-month-olds *wave* bye-bye, but it often takes another year for them to *say* “Bye-bye!”

In English, the pointer finger is called the *index* finger. The word “index” comes from the Latin verb *dicere*, meaning “to say.” This ancient use of the hands to communicate is also reflected in Serbia, where the pointer is referred to as the *kazhi perst*, which translates as “talking finger.”

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## Some Tips for Mirroring Emotion



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### Don't Go Overboard

Some parents mirror *120 percent* of their toddler's tantrum, really hamming it up. Exaggerated displays may stop a child's crying, but they work through distraction and mockery. That is *not* what I recommend. The goal of Toddler-ese is to calm children through understanding and respect. That happens by mirroring just a bit of their feelings.

### Level the Playing Field

Kneel just *below* your toddler's eye level. This simple gesture shows her you respect her and you care. If you want, you can ask your child to look you in the eyes ("Give me your eyes!"), but don't try to push the issue. Children who are angry or ashamed often avoid meeting our eyes. Remember, the goal isn't to break your child's spirit. So don't force the eye contact. If you treat your toddler with respect she'll be able to look you in the eyes and return the respect to you by the time she's school-age.

### Tailor Your Response to Your Child

Your child's temperament matters! Spirited kids are more emotional, so they need us to mirror more of their feeling—up to 50 percent. Shy kids are self-conscious and need us to mirror a bit less. In fact, they may feel mocked if we mirror their feelings too strongly. Age

matters too. Generally, older toddlers need to be mirrored less dramatically than younger toddlers.

*Fran tried Toddler-ese with her irate three-year-old, but she did it in a silly, singsong voice that made Camille even madder. When she thought about it, Fran realized that she was trying to make Camille laugh rather than make her feel heard and respected. Amazingly, as soon as Fran changed her tone to reflect the genuine distress Camille was feeling, Camille quieted in seconds!*

## Be a Spokesperson

When toddlers are upset, their left brains get unbalanced and they have trouble finding words for what they want to communicate. One way to help your child overcome this *speaker's* block is for you to talk *for* her. Say what you think she'd say if she could. For example:

*If your child resists having his teeth brushed, you might say: "Siena says, 'Me do it! Me do it!'" If your child cries when the juice spills, you might say: "Brenda says, 'My juice! My juice! I want my juice!'"*

## Be a Sportscaster

Another way to help your tot calm down is to describe what she is doing, as if you are a TV sportscaster "calling the action." For example:

*If your child is having a fit, you might say: "You're sooo mad!! You're on the ground ... kicking! And your face is really sad! You wanted that toy and now you're mad at Mommy!"*

Good listening is your secret weapon. Successful parents, like successful ambassadors, build great relationships by communicating with love and respect (not power and put-downs).

Think of the FFR + Toddler-ese as the “Rescue Team” that helps you save your child when she’s lost in the *jungle* of her emotions. Instead of trying to *coax* her into calm with quiet tones, use some spirited Toddler-ese to connect with her. *Then*, as she begins to settle, gradually use a more normal voice to guide her back to “civilization.”

Now that you know the fine points of Toddler-ese, let’s go back to Shelby and the struggling two-year-olds (on [this page](#)), and let’s imagine what might have happened had she used Toddler-ese:



*Kneeling down to her son’s level, Shelby put on a serious face, pointed at the ball three times in quick repetition, and using a strong voice said, “Ball! Ball! Ball! You want it! You want it now!” Her son calmed a bit and turned to look at her and Shelby continued in an energetic but caring voice, “But, noooo. No ball, honey.*

*It's John's turn. John's turn." Billy was still frowning, but his shrieks had mellowed into whining. At that point, Shelby distracted them both: "Look! Wow! A jungle gym you can climb on! Wow! Come on, guys, let's play with that."*

Of course, not all struggles end so easily, but more than half do ... and that will make you feel pretty darn smart. (See "Stop Tantrums" on [this page!](#))



## Toddler-ese in Action

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Sounds good in theory but what about in practice? I've seen the FFR + Toddler-ese help countless parents smooth their toddler's ruffled feathers. Here are a few of their stories:

*When Paris, a 20-month-old, whined for a cookie, here's how his dad handled it:*

*Paris: I want! I want! I waaaaant!!!!*

*Joe (kneeling down, with a serious but caring look, points two to three times to the jar and says with in animated voice):*

*You want! You want! You want! You want cookie now!*

*Paris (reaches toward the cookies, grunting with impatience): Unh! Unh!*

*Joe (points to the jar two to three times in rapid succession and echoes the grunt):*

*Unh ... unh! You want! You want! (Paris looks right at his dad.)*

*Joe (in a calmer voice): Cookie ... cookie! I know, Paris ... but, no ... no! No cookie now. (Opens eyes wide and, in a happy voice, changes the subject.) But, hey! Let's*

*play ball! Come on! Here it is ... catch it!*

*Here's how Iris helped her 2½-year-old reduce his tantrums:*

*“When Jason starts to scream, I jump in and describe why I think he's upset. If I imitate a little of his feeling in my voice and face he sees I 'get it' and he usually settles ... quickly.*

*“However, if I stop the Toddler-ese too soon, his wailing starts again, and I have to go back and do a little more. 'Jason is still mad, mad, mad! He's angrrrrry! Jason says, No, no ... no!' Your face is really mad!” When he starts to quiet and look at me, that's the signal for me to take a turn to talk and offer my point of view or some solutions.*

*“Initially, his tantrums would last for five to ten minutes. Now, they end in seconds! He still needs a minute to two of my attention when he's upset, but he gets back into a good mood much faster!”*

*For Leslie, Toddler-ese was her magic charm for surviving the “diaper-wars”:*

*“Last night at a restaurant, Nathan, 15 months, pooped, and I had to take his flailing little body out to the car to get a fresh diaper on him. As he screamed in protest, I tried to lovingly acknowledge his feelings: 'I know you don't want to leave the restaurant. I know you don't like it.' But he was so mad and squirmy that I couldn't even change him.*



*“In desperation, I gave Toddler-ese a try. I made fists and started to sort of beat the air, mirroring a bit of his frustration in a strong voice (but not too loud), ‘You say, “No! No! No! No change, Mommy!” You hate it! You hate your pants down. It’s COLD!!! You’re maaaaad!’*

*“Then the coolest thing happened. He suddenly looked at me, half amused and half mischievous, and began playing with the mobile hanging from the ceiling light. (I had earlier tried to get him to look at it ... without success.) As I changed him, I distracted him with a continuous dramatic narration about everything I was doing. He stayed happy the whole time! Then I sang a little song and I danced him back to the restaurant ... feeling like a perfect parent!”*

Worried that this sounds like a lot of work? Relax! Toddler-ese is actually a lot less work. Once you get the hang of it you’ll be able to shorten or eliminate so many struggles that you’ll save time ... energy ... wrinkles ... and gray hairs.

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## **Toddler-ese May Seem Hard ... but You’re Already an Expert!**

I know Toddler-ese can feel odd at first. But would you believe that you already use Toddler-ese *all the time*? Almost all parents automatically use “Toddler-ese” when their child is ... happy!

Imagine you’re in the park and your three-year-old bravely climbs to the top of the slide ... for the

very first time. Beaming a huge grin, she shouts, “Look, Mommy! *Look!* ”

Which of these two responses would feel more natural for you to make to her?

To flatly say, “Very good, mother is proud.”

To applaud and chirp in your best cheerleader voice, “Yea!

You *did* it! *Good* climbing! *Wow!* ”

For most parents the first is too stiff, but the second feels pretty normal. Well, that’s Toddler-ese! Amazingly, we instinctively automatically speak Toddler-ese when our kid does something to make us proud and happy! Too often, however, when she gets scared, mad, or sad, we suddenly become serious and stiff. Our voices get flat and ultracalm and we sound like emotional zombies, because we think that acting calm will calm our child. But this often backfires, because if we display no emotion when our child is really upset, she may feel misunderstood and alone just when she needs a friend.

It can take a little time and practice to get the hang of Toddler-ese. So, if you’re just learning and still feel self-conscious talking like that, no worries—just start out slowly. Use it first for the little ups and downs. Once you get more comfortable with it, gradually start using it for more turbulent upsets. I guarantee that you will love using it.

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## Watching Parents and Kids ... in the Wild!

Here's a fun way to help you see how other parents handle their toddlers' struggles. Go to a park and look for kids who are upset (if it is a busy park, you should easily be able to find several). When a child cries, listen to what the mom (or dad) says. Does she repeat back her child's upset (like the order-taker saying "Burger and fries?") or does she jump too fast to her turn, using distraction, explanation, or name-calling?

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## "But Dr. Karp, I Sound Demented!"

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*Ernst and his Danish wife, Katrina, are the parents of two-year-old Rolf. A few*

*months after explaining Toddler-ese to them, I asked if they'd tried it. Katrina said, "Toddler-ese feels funny for us—a little too dramatic. The Danes don't like to go 'over the top' like that."*

Don't be surprised if you too feel a bit awkward—okay, down-right *weird*—when you start using Toddler-ese ... wherever you're from. But I hope you'll open your mind and try it anyway. I promise that your child will quickly become more patient, less defiant, and much happier.

But in case you are still feeling skeptical, here are some answers to common parental concerns that may help to ease your mind:

### “It Feels Like Baby Talk.”

Toddler-ese isn't baby talk. It's *toddler* talk! Sure it's immature, but when our uncivilized little kids “go ape,” their language-loving left brains temporarily stop working well. That's why this simple speaking style is the best way to make them feel understood and loved.

Think of it this way: When you read to your little toddler, do you start out with books like *War and Peace* or even *Charlotte's Web*? I doubt it. The books that most tiny tykes love usually have a literary style that's no more complex than “Mmm, yummy apple” or “See Spot run!”

And besides, you'll only be using Toddler-ese during times of upset. The rest of the day you'll be chatting away with your little one in your normal style of speech. So don't worry about stunting your child's language skills; you won't.

### “I Worry I'll Turn My Child into a Drama Queen.”

I know that some experts warn parents that paying attention to a child who's acting up will only reinforce the misbehavior. They say we should turn away from the crying and turn back only when she stops, rewarding her self-calming with some loving attention.

I agree that kids who engage in prolonged periods of whining often need to be briefly ignored to avoid accidentally rewarding their behavior (see the Law of the Soggy Potato Chip on [this page](#) and **kind ignoring** on [this page](#)). But even if your child is overdoing it and “yanking your chain,” the best response is to start out by using the Fast-Food Rule—aimed at the sweet spot—to sympathetically acknowledge her feelings, and only resort to ignoring if the FFR doesn't calm her down.

The world is tough and often disrespectful or uninterested in a child's feelings. If you ignore your little one each time she's very upset, she may come to believe that you're not interested in her true feelings and learn to keep them buried deep inside.

## “It Feels Like Teasing.”

In the past, you may have heard people mirroring someone's feelings to mock or ridicule them. But Toddler-ese is actually the opposite of teasing. That's because the mirroring is never overdone (remember the sweet spot) and is understated and performed with genuine compassion, sincerity, and respect.

## “It Feels Like I Am Giving In to Bad Behavior.”

*Absolutely not!* Respectful listening doesn't mean caving in or being a wimp. You can be both understanding *and* a tough disciplinarian: “Shari, I know Richard took your block and you're mad, *mad, mad!* But, *no scratch! No scratch!* Stop now!”

Remember, there's a huge difference between angry *feelings* and angry *actions*. Yes, you have to discourage misbehavior, but it's superimportant that your child know that you understand how she feels, and you care, even if you disagree. Toddlers whose parents always acknowledge their fears and frustrations grow up emotionally healthy, feeling comfortable in their own skin.

## “It Feels Embarrassing!”

Okay, I admit Toddler-ese *is* embarrassing! However, when your primitive little friend has a hissy fit in aisle six at the grocery store you're going to be embarrassed no matter what. So, really, you have only two choices:

You can be embarrassed *big-time* as you drag your child out of the store (as she's screaming and hitting and knocking things off the shelves), leaving your shopping undone and both of you mad.

Or, you can be embarrassed on a lesser scale as you get down on her level and mirror some of her upset for a minute. But with this second option, the tantrum will probably end fast, you'll avoid lingering resentment, and you can get on with your plans.

Toddler-ese may draw stares from surprised passersby, but it *works*. And when other parents see how quickly your child calms, they'll be asking you for pointers!

## “It Feels Unnatural, Like I'm an Actor.”

Some parents say Toddler-ese feels unnatural, artificial, overly dramatic.

But in truth, we *rarely* talk to toddlers in a normal adult style. For example, do you matter-of-factly ask your tot, “How was breakfast?” Or do you sweetly chirp, “Mmm! Yummy, huh?”

When our kids are happy and excited we naturally reflect that in our voice and expressions. And when they're a little bit sad we instinctively mirror that back in perfect Toddler-ese. So in most situations this approach feels totally comfortable. But when our kids are very upset, suddenly we forget our Toddler-ese and start speaking to them in an overly flat tone of voice because we think it will calm them down. But as far as they're concerned, *that* is what's really unnatural. And it's not usually calming or reassuring anyway.

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## What Do You Do If Toddler-ese Doesn't Work?

Toddler-ese is highly effective, but no single technique works 100 percent of the time. So, if you have tried the FFR + Toddler-ese and your child is still in orbit:

- First, make sure you did it right: If you missed your toddler's sweet spot (too many words, too much or too little feeling, etc.) your toddler may keep on yelling. Try repeating her feelings again (three to eight times, depending on her age and level of upset) in your best Toddler-ese to see if that will make her whining abate.
  - Next, consider another strategy: If she's crying, but not being disruptive, try offering a hug, a quick solution to the upset, or kind ignoring (see [this page](#)). However, if she's so mad that she's breaking the rules, she may need a **consequence** (like a **time-out**, see [this page](#)).
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# The FFR + Toddler-ese: The Perfect Consolation Gift!

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Interestingly, this approach often calms toddlers *even when we don't give them what they're screaming for*. That's because the caring and respect we show by speaking with the FFR + Toddler-ese is a gigantic consolation prize.

Here's what I mean: We must all learn that there will be thousands of things we want in life that we'll never get. That's disappointing, but we all eventually learn to deal with it. However, a much greater disappointment is to be deprived of the kindness, sympathy, and respect of the people we love.

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## Mastering Toddler-ese



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### Practice Toddler-ese When Your Child Is in a Good Mood

When your tot asks you for something (that you're happy to give), repeat his request using your best Toddler-ese. For example:

*Your one-year-old opens her mouth and points up to your juice. You simply narrate his request in simple words, "Juice! Juice! You want juice. Okay, sweetheart, juice ... here it is."*

### Imagine How You Would Use Toddler-ese in an Upsetting Situation



Some parents find it helpful to practice Toddler-ese in front of a mirror or in their mind. For example:

*Imagine your toddler is in the sandbox howling because his friend pushed him down. What would you say? (Remember the spokesperson and sportscaster techniques on [this page](#).) What kind of voice would you use? How would you use your hands and face? Once he calms down, what might you say?*

## Rehearse with a Toy

After your child recovers from an upset, let him “overhear” you telling his teddy bear what just happened ... in Toddler-ese. For example:

*“Psst, hey, Teddy! Juan was sad! Sad! Juan’s ice cream fell. Gone-gone! Ice cream gone! Then I hugged him ... like this (demonstrate hug). Now Juan is happy!”*

Please be patient. All new skills feel odd at first. But the more you practice, the better you’ll get. Stick with it for a few days and soon your little one will look at you with delight, as if to say, “Yea! You understand! You’re awesome!”

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## When Does a Child Outgrow Toddler-ese?

Actually, Toddler-ese is *not* just for toddlers. It also works with older kids (and even adults), because when anyone gets really upset their eloquent left brain *shuts down* and their impulsive, impatient right brain *takes over*.

Here's how you might echo the feelings of a frustrated six-year-old: "You say, 'Go!' You're finished with being here. Finished. You want to leave right now! And you're not kidding." This would definitely get her attention and help defuse the situation. Then, once she calms, you would return to the more mature language you usually use.

Older kids and teens (and adult men!) are particularly self-conscious about their feelings, so you only need to mirror a little bit of their emotion to hit their sweet spot.

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### ***Patty's Story: A Parental Triumph***

***"The idea that our 26-month-old was a bit of a 'cave-girl' made perfect sense to my husband and me. So I tried Toddler-ese:***

***"One day, when Kira's shower was over, she went ballistic! I love showers, so I could sympathize. With wide-open eyes and lots of nodding I pointed to the showerhead and said, 'You want! You want! You want!! You want shower ... now!' She continued yelling, so I continued a tiny bit stronger. 'You want shower! You want shower! You want it! You want it, now!' Almost like magic, Kira responded immediately.***

***"Her crying stopped and she looked at my face with a hopeful glance. Then I softly said, 'You want to stay! But no, nooooo. I'm so sorry, sweetheart, we need to go to school! And your dolly wants some yummy breakfast. So come on! Come on! Let's get some food! Do you want eggies or crunchies [cereal] today?'***

*“After one more fake cry, Kira let me dry and dress her while I discussed our exciting plans for the day.*

*“Now whenever Kira resists getting dressed and shouts, ‘Me do!’ I turn on the Toddler-ese: ‘Kira says, “Me do! Me do!” You want to do it yourself!’ Kira totally gets it. She nods her head and smiles with relief. And as she struggles to put on her shirt, she just lets me slide on her pants and socks.*

*[“A bonus gift that we’ve gotten from Toddler-ese is that we have more fun together. It has made me feel like a genius!”*

Now that you know these effective communication basics, it’s time for a few more skills! The next part of the book will teach you how to increase your child’s good (green-light) behaviors and how to stop the bad (yellow- and red-light) ones ... fast!

## PART THREE



### **Behavior Basics:**

Raise a Great Child the *Green-  
Yellow-Red-Light* Way



**Over these next three years** you'll constantly be molding your child's behavior, encouraging the good and discouraging the bad. I find it helps to think of your job as being a bit like a traffic light: Flash a *green light* (Go!) to behaviors you want to continue; flash a *yellow light* (Warning!) to behaviors that are annoying; and flash a *red light* (Stop now!) to actions that are seriously unacceptable and/or dangerous. Some parents I know refer to green-yellow-red behaviors as the Good, the Bad ... and the Ugly!

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- ◆ **Chapter 5** will cover green-light behaviors and give you specific tips for boosting your toddler's good actions and manners.
  - ◆ **Chapter 6** presents fast, effective, and loving ways to curb your toddler's annoying yellow-light behaviors.
  - ◆ **Chapter 7** teaches you "take-charge" consequences that are perfect for quickly putting the brakes on your child's aggressive, dangerous, or disrespectful red-light behaviors.
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Green-Light  
Behaviors:  
How to Encourage  
Good Behavior

***“A child is fed with milk and praise.”***

—Charles and Mary Lamb, *Poetry for Children*, 1809

## **Main Points:**

The best way to help your toddler behave better is to flash a green light of encouragement every time you see him being *good*. Here are five enjoyable ways to do this:

- **Time-ins:** Boost cooperation with bits of fun (includes **attention, praise, gossip, rewards, hand checks, star charts, play**).
- **Build confidence:** Respect—plus some silliness—makes kids feel like winners (includes **giving options** and **playing the boob**).
- **Teach patience:** Give your child two surefire ways to build self-control (includes **patience-stretching** and **magic breathing**).
- **Create daily routines:** Simple routines help kids feel smart and secure (includes **bedtime**

sweet talk, special time, loveys, and pacifiers).

- **Plant seeds of kindness:** Teach manners and character through the “side door” of your child’s mind (includes **fairy tales** and **role-play**).

Parents often think that if their tot has several calm days in a row, the era of outbursts must be over. (“I know she can be cooperative.... She did it yesterday.”) Not so fast! Although your toddler’s desire to be good *does* grow as she grows, Bamm-Bamm doesn’t turn into Bambi overnight. You’ll be teaching your child the niceties of civilization for years to come. Part of the secret of helping your child become happier, better behaved, and more fun to be with is figuring out how to encourage her good (green-light) behaviors.

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## **How to Raise a Toddler You Love to Be With**

By the 1920s, Andrew Carnegie was one of the richest men in the world. When asked his secret of success, he said life was like a gold mine: Ignore the dirt ... focus on the gold and keep every scrap you find. Soon, you’ll have pockets full of treasure.

Success with a toddler is also like mining gold. If you worry less about the “dirt” (punishing his bad behavior) and focus more on the “gold” (all his good acts), you’ll soon find you’ve raised a child who shares, cares, and treats people with respect.

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You’ll notice that this is the longest chapter in the book. That’s because there are so many effective techniques for boosting desirable behavior. And the

more time you spend encouraging the good, the less time you'll have to spend dealing with the bad.

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## Feeding the Meter Gives the Green Light to Good Behavior



You are the rock star in your child's life. And because she loves spending time with you so much, you'll find that giving her many short periods of focused attention throughout the day will soon dramatically boost her good behavior. I call this feeding the meter.



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## Your Toddler Wants to Be Good—Really!

Some days it's hard to see your tot's sweetness under all the grunting and pushing. But around 15 months, your toddler will develop some great new



traits that “stack the deck” in your favor:

- **Developing a more mature brain.** Between 18 and 36 months, your child’s reasonable, sentence-speaking, impulse-controlling left brain will start to kick into gear. Increasingly, the blessed trait of patience will appear and his behavior will improve from *take and take ...* to taking turns!
- **Wanting to imitate you.** You are supersmart and cool in your toddler’s eyes. That’s why your 18-month-old loves to watch and imitate *everything* you do, from sweeping the floor to showing kindness. (Be careful, they imitate swearing, too!)
- **Caring how others feel.** Your toddler’s desire to hug an upset friend is a big growth step from self-centered baby to caring child. He now wants to do the “right thing” to please you. And his new love of pets, dollies, and friends will eventually grow into true compassion.

*Sara was crying because of bad news she’d just gotten on the phone. When her two-year-old, Max, saw her sadness, he offered Sara his teddy bear and patted her back. Sara was amazed.*

- **Liking order (even rules).** Your tot may be a wild child, but now he’s a wild child with a plan! For example, around 18 months, kids start to enjoy putting all the cars in one pile and the horses in another. Unfortunately, this love of order can also get quite rigid. At this age, some kids scream if they’re given a cracker with a broken corner, and they often insist on reading

the same books—in the same order—every single time.

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Here's where the name comes from: "Feed" a parking meter with a coin every thirty minutes and you'll *never* get a ticket! Likewise, when you "feed" toddlers dozens of little bits of fun and attention all day long, you'll rarely have to deal with bad behavior. They just automatically behave better.

*After dinner, Mary used to spend 40 minutes cleaning the kitchen before playing with her two-year-old, Ethan. But he started to get more and more cranky waiting for his playtime. Mary solved the problem with a flash of genius! How? By "feeding his meter"! She stopped her chores after just 20 minutes, before he got upset, played with him for five, then finished the dishes and spent another 15 minutes of cuddly fun with her son before bed.*

Feeding the meter flashes a big green light to a child, saying, *I like what you're doing... Keep it up!* And the more you encourage cooperation, the more you get.

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## **Green-Light Skill #1: Time-**

**Ins**



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*Boost cooperation with bits of attention, praise, and play.*

I'm sure you've heard of **time-out** (where a misbehaving child is made to sit alone). Well, **time-in** is just the opposite. It's when a well-behaving child is given tiny bits of play and encouragement. Experienced parents and teachers know that a steady stream of time-ins is a much more effective way of raising a happy, cooperative child than a steady stream of time-outs!

There are many types of time-ins. I'd like to talk to you about three of my favorites:

- attention
- praise
- play

## Time-Ins: Attention

When we think of encouraging good behavior, we naturally think of praise. Praise is great, and I'll discuss it in just a minute. But even more important is just paying a little attention!

**What It Is:** Showing your child you're interested in what he's doing makes him feel great. (Remember, you're his rock star! How would you feel if your idol watched you do something with genuine interest?)

**Best Used For:** All toddlers, all day long!

**How to Do It:** Think in terms of bite-size bits. (You don't have to stay glued to your toddler's side 24/7.) Here are ten easy ways to feed the meter with just a look, a touch, or a few words:

- Sit with her and quietly watch ... with interest.
- Wink.
- Smile.

- Raise your eyebrows and nod your head in pleasant surprise.
  - Give a thumbs-up sign.
  - Give a hug.
  - Touse her hair or touch her back.
  - Shake hands or give a high five.
  - While watching him, say, “Hmmm” ... “Uh-huh” ... “Wow.”
  - Briefly describe what she is doing.
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## **Massage (A Very Special Type of Attention)**

Lavish your toddler with loving touch! Touch is a rich “food” for growth. Your toddler could easily live without milk, but he’d be scarred for life without loving touch. (I agree with the noted psychologist Virginia Satir, who said we all need four hugs a day for survival, eight to stay calm, and twelve to grow stronger.)

*“When Abigail was one month old, we began using massage to calm her fussies. Soon she became happy as soon as she heard me rubbing the massage oil into my hands!”*

*“We’ve massaged her almost every day since then. Now at 18 months, she says, ‘Rub, rub!’ after her bath. It’s our special time. Best of all, a little massage helps even the wildest days end on a loving note.”*

The skin is the body's largest body organ, and it's deliciously sensitive. So a nightly massage is a precious gift to your child. It soothes muscles, boosts immunity, prepares for sleep, and teaches gentleness and intimacy. (And, as an extra bonus, giving a massage automatically lowers *your* stress, anxiety, and depression.)

Massage is not just a mechanical act. It's an exchange of love. Cherish this time. It will become a treasured memory for you both.

## **Build Your Child's Brain ... Through Massage**

A study at McGill University in Montreal showed an unexpected benefit from massage: higher intelligence. The researchers looked at two groups of baby rats. Half had "touchy" mothers, who stroked them a lot, and half had "reserved" moms, who gave little touch affection.

As the rats grew, the cuddled animals were found to be extra smart. This was because the learning center of their brains—which is very similar to the child's learning center—had formed healthier, richer connections.

The moral of the story: Cuddling not only feels good and lowers stress—it may even boost your child's IQ!

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### ***Example:***

***“Hmmm, you're pushing the truck! Bang!  
Right into the teddy bear.” (You can even  
add a dash of praise: “You're good at***

*playing with trucks!”) Then go about your business for a little bit while he happily continues to play.*

## Time-Ins: Praise

Sprinkling praise throughout the day is a great way to boost green-light behaviors. But praise can backfire if it's done incorrectly. Here's how to make your praise really count:

- **Give a “balanced diet” of praise.** Think of praise as a yummy casserole you feed to your child: lots of plain noodles (calm attention) and a big cup of tasty sauce (mild praise and encouragement) topped with a sprinkle of tangy cheese (cheers and celebration).



Kids need a balanced diet of praise, because parents who always hype it up (“You’re the *best* boy in the world!”) may end up with toddlers who either mistrust praise or need constant applause to feel a sense of self-worth.

- **Praise the action you want to encourage ... not the child.** When you help with the dishes, would you rather hear “Thanks for scrubbing the pots, that was really helpful” or “You’re my best helper ever!”? I recommend the first because, “You’re my best helper” may be true one day but false the next (when your child refuses to help). On the other hand, “Scrubbing the pots really helped” is 100 percent true and it highlights *exactly* the behavior you want.
- **Praise good *tries*.** Cheer your child on when he tries, even if he doesn’t quite succeed (“Good try pouring the milk!”). You’ll see steady progress, and he will feel like a success every step of the way.
- **Don’t give praise ... then yank it back.** “Good. You picked up your toys. Now, why did I have to nag you to do it?” Ugh! Psychologists call this “praise spoiling,” and we all hate it. It’s like getting a gift, then having it yanked right back. It teaches kids to never trust a compliment.

## Time-Ins: Gossip

Gossip is one of my favorite ways to green-light good behavior.

**What It Is:** Gossip means saying things out loud near your child, so he overhears. It works so well because all of us (kids and adults) are more likely to believe something if we *overhear* it than if it’s told directly to us. Gossip makes your praise five times more effective. (And it makes your words of criticism have five times more impact too.)

For example, if a friend says, “You look beautiful,” you might just brush it off as a polite remark. But if you

accidentally overhear her saying this to someone else, you'll probably grin and take it to your heart. (After all, you overheard it, so it wasn't said to "butter you up.")

Not only do we tend to believe things we overhear, but when those comments are *whispered*—like a secret—we believe them even more.

**Best Used For:** Toddlers once they have reached the age of 15 to 18 months. That's when they begin to understand that people whisper when they're saying something extra important.

**How to Do It:** Let your child overhear you praise him ... *in a loud whisper*.

*One day Louise brought her three-year-old to me for a sore throat. Rather than battling Turner to open his mouth, I used gossip. Leaning toward Louise, I loudly whispered, "I really like it when Turner opens his mouth and shows me his big lion teeth."*

*As I spoke, I cupped my hand next to my mouth, like I was telling a secret (I kept my fingers spread a bit to let him see my open mouth, so he knew what I wanted him to do). A few seconds later, when I switched on my light, Turner immediately opened wide ... like magic!*

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## Gossiping

- With your toddler nearby, whisper some praise about her to someone else. You can whisper it to



anybody—even a doll, or someone you pretend to be talking to on the phone. Don't wink or look at your child when you do this. Gossiping *only* works when he thinks you don't want to be overheard.

Cup your hand alongside your mouth and, in a loud whisper, say to the birdies outside, "Psst ... hey, Mr. Birdie! Lauren ate *all* her peas! Yeah ... every one!" Then turn back to your child like nothing happened and give her a little understated praise. "Good eating, Lauren!" Even if your tot doesn't understand all your words, your admiring tone of voice will make her feel valued!

- If your child leans in to listen, whisper more quietly ... like you're telling a juicy secret. For an older toddler, mumble some of the words so he can't hear them all. This really makes it seem like you don't want to be overheard. If he gleefully exclaims, "I hear you!" just say, "Oh, it's nothing. I'm just talking to Mr. Birdie."
- Later on, repeat the *same* compliment to someone else. Your child will be pleased and think, *Wow, this must be true, because I'm hearing it a lot lately.*

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## Time-Ins: Little Rewards

Small gifts can grease the wheels of cooperation. Some critics disapprove of giving kids "rewards." They say, "Children should obey simply out of respect." Nice idea, but expecting toddlers to cooperate purely out of respect is like expecting patience from a baby. It's not going to happen.

**What It Is:** Little rewards (incentives) are small gifts we give to acknowledge when a child does something

we like. Rewards are not the same as bribery. Bribery is done to discourage *bad* behavior ... incentives encourage good. Of course, *you* are your child's number one reward. His favorite gift will be a little roughhousing, an insect hunt, playing tag, or story time. But occasional small incentives like stickers, poker chips, hand stamps, or a bit of candy can have a magical effect.

*Wait! Did he just say "candy"?*

Sweets used wisely—and infrequently—are a powerful reward for toddlers. But please don't worry. Using a lollipop or animal crackers as an *occasional* treat won't cause obesity or lead to a life of dessert-mania.

**Best Used For:** All toddlers.

**How to Do It:** Say changing diapers is a daily struggle. Stand your tot on the table and take out a little reward, like a special "diaper cookie" (only given during changings). Offer half the cookie when you start the change and half in the middle. Usually, within days, the struggle will diminish.

A few days later, begin to withhold the second piece until after the diaper change is complete. After another week, reduce the reward to just a half-cookie when you're done. Eventually, you won't need the cookie any longer. (Of course, you will still have to change that diaper as quickly as possible ... after all, half a cookie will only keep a caveman still for so long!)

In addition to giving the cookie, reward his cooperation by feeding his meter with some cheery praise and a minute or two of play right after the diaper change. Your loving time-ins will be the top reward for him long after the cookie tactic is phased out and forgotten.

## Time-Ins: Hand Checks

**What It Is:** You know how kids love hand stamps and tattoos? Well, child development whiz Dr. Barbara Howard suggests rewarding toddlers with a pen check mark on the back of the hand when they do something good.

Hand checks are great because kids notice them all day and are reminded of what a good job they did.

At bedtime, count the checks and recall what he did to earn each one. He'll end his day feeling like a winner! (Also see bedtime sweet talk, on [this page](#).)

This idea is easy and effective, and it doesn't cost a penny.

**Best Used For:** All toddlers.

## Time-Ins: Star Charts

**What It Is:** A star chart is a great way to use a little reward to feed an older toddler's meter.

**Best Used For:** Ages two and up.

### How to Do It:

- **Pick three behaviors to focus on.** Pick two your child already does (like washing his hands or brushing his teeth) and one he's not doing (like eating some broccoli or picking up his toys). Choose goals that are very specific. For example, telling him to say thank you is much clearer than saying "Be polite." And "No fighting at school" is clearer than "Be nice to the other children."
- **Explain your plan.** During a calm moment, sit your child down and discuss some things that

he's done well lately; then mention your plan for helping him do even better: "Honey, I love lots of things you do, but I want to help you do some other things." Tell him the three things you want him to do each day. Let him know that every time he does one, he'll get a star.

- **Prepare for success.** Draw a two-week calendar on a large piece of paper. Let your child help decorate it with his drawings or pictures from a magazine. Then take him shopping and let him choose his favorite stars or stickers. Involving your child in the project will get him excited about succeeding ... and it makes it *his* star chart.

When your child meets a goal, let *him* put a star on the chart. Boost the effect of the chart by gossiping about your tot's success.

Give bonus stars for special cooperation, and ask your child what his special little reward should be for every ten stars he earns (funny stickers, poker chip, cookie, etc.).

Kids are proud of their charts. Display yours where your child (and everyone else) can see it. He'll get a dose of "visual praise" every time he walks by and *sees* his success.

Redo the chart every two weeks and add new behaviors to be rewarded as your child does better and better with the old goals.

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## Praise for Different Ages and Stages

Let your praise style "grow" as your child grows:

- **Early toddlers (12 to 18 months):** Be generous with praise. Use lots of smiles and a little applause and a few happy words (repeated over and over).  
Example: Cheer, “Yea! You came so fast ... so fast! Yea! Sooooo fast!”
  - **Middle toddlers (18 to 36 months):** Scale back the over-the-top praise. Occasional applause is fine, but mostly you’ll smile, nod your head, and toss out bits of modest praise.  
Example: “Hmmm ... you built a *tall* tower.”  
Gossip, hand checks, and stickers are like gold and jewels to middle toddlers.
  - **Older toddlers (36 to 48 months):** Older toddlers are more self-conscious. They may feel mocked or patronized if you make too big a fuss. Keep it understated and boost the effect with gossip, hand checks, poker chips, and star charts.  
A special type of praise older toddlers *love* is comparing them to something smart or powerful. For example: “Thanks for getting the keys. You did it fast as a tiger!”
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## Time-Ins: Play

**What It Is:** One of the biggest myths about childhood is that play is just frivolous entertainment ... a “waste of time.” Actually, play is much more important than academics during the toddler years. Play is a top toddler nutrient. When you give your child a big daily dose of “Vitamin P,” you:

- thrill his senses
- help him master movement
- sharpen his thinking

- encourage his language use
- boost his people skills
- teach him about the world
- stimulate his immune system
- build his self-confidence
- improve his sleep

Do you see why play is such a brilliant way to feed your child's meter? Happy, healthy toddlers have their days filled with chasing, pretending, rolling, and tinkering.

**How to Do It:** There are three types of play that you should try to give your child *every day*: **outside play, creative activity, and reading.**

**Outside Play: Kids “Go Ape” When They’re Cooped Up** Some of my happiest childhood memories are of playing outside: rolling down grassy hills, kicking heaps of fallen leaves, making snowmen. (Many of us *still* revel in these activities.)

But while adults enjoy the fresh air, toddlers don't merely like it—they *need* it. A two-year-old cooped up in an apartment all day may feel as trapped as Tarzan stuffed into a tight tuxedo.

And don't be afraid to go out in “bad weather.” Rain, wind, and snow add to the fun. Just get the proper clothes and shoes for yourself and your toddler and run out and have a ball!

## **Creative Play: Your Child's Favorite Toy—His Brain**

*“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”*

—Albert Einstein

Imagination is the key to mankind's greatest advances, from the arts to the sciences. That's why I am so sad about art classes being dropped in schools across our nation. Science and math are important, but, as the complete quote from Einstein reads, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. *For while knowledge defines what we currently know and understand, imagination points to all we might yet discover and create.*" (I know it well, because it's printed on my computer mouse pad!)

Feed your toddler's creativity with:

- **Art materials:** Go for variety: crayons, Play-Doh, collage materials, watercolors, finger paint.
- **Real—or replica—household items:** Toddlers love "monkey see, monkey do." As the months pass, they want to imitate you more and more. Use household goodies like pots/pans/wooden spoons, a toy phone, or a small broom and dustpan.
- **Props for pretend play:** Dolls and dollhouses, action figures, toy dinosaurs, and lots of costumes and dress-up clothes. By age three, a child's interest expands from imitating Mom and Dad to trying on new identities—such as princess, ballerina, firefighter, and cowboy.
- **Sensory materials:** Molding clay, a sandbox or sand table, a splash pool, a watering can, pouring toys for the bathtub, swatches of different materials (satin, velvet, corduroy, sandpaper)

### **Book Play: Reading Is Feeding**

Want your child to have a healthy brain? Feed it ... by reading! The key to reading with toddlers is to do it *with*

them. Reading makes kids smarter, *and* it's a sweet opportunity to snuggle close and join your hearts.

- **Early toddlers (12 to 24 months):** These tots are active! So pick a reading time when your child is tired. Use books with cloth or cardboard pages. Talk *a lot* about what you see: "Look, a doggie! What does a doggie say? What do doggies eat?" Turn the book into a game: "Hey, you be the doggie. Can you bark? Wow! What other animals can we find?"
- **Middle toddlers (24 to 36 months):** Two-year-olds like things "just so." Your child may howl if you skip part of a story he's learned by heart. "Do it right!" he'll protest. As you turn each page, offer your child a chance to be smart by asking, "What's going on now?"
- **Older toddlers (36 to 48 months):** Older toddlers love stories about animals and people (and trucks!). And they love to compare what's happening in the story to situations they've experienced. "Oh, honey, Bigelow the rabbit dropped his ice cream.... That's like when you spilled your beans at lunch." Older toddlers repeat lines from books to their stuffed animals and even make up their own stories. Now they're at the stage when they love it if you "accidentally" make a silly mix-up of the words. They giggle with joy when they catch *you* making a "mistake."

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## Is TV a Good Time-In?

Today's parents have it tough. We have lots of demands on our time, but little family support. So



it's understandable when some parents flip on the TV to entertain their toddlers while they get things done.

I think of TV like candy: A little is okay every so often, but not a steady diet of it. I recommend you limit your toddler's TV-viewing time by following these guidelines:

- **Keep the TV out of your child's room.** Sadly, one in five children under age two and half of all four-year-olds have TVs in their bedrooms. This leads to too much TV watching and too many inappropriate programs.
  - **Put a cap on total TV time.** Less is better! Limit your toddler's TV time to a maximum of thirty to sixty minutes a day (including videos and DVDs). And when possible, try to watch the programs with your toddler and talk about what you see.
  - **Be picky.** Let your little one watch only gentle, nonviolent cartoons; toddler-oriented nature videos; and slow-paced, educational children's shows.
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## Green-Light Skill #2: Build Confidence



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*“Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.”*

—Helen Keller

We all know how tough it is to raise a toddler, but not many people realize how tough it is to BE a toddler. Toddlers lose *all day long!* They're weaker, slower, shorter, less verbal, and clumsier than almost everybody they know. That's why they love stomping in puddles (to make a big splash) and showing off their "massive" muscles. It's also why they can be so darn stubborn, refusing to listen or to give in.

*They just want to win a few!*

You can't protect your child from all the defeats he'll suffer while he's growing up. (And you wouldn't want to. They build character.) But you can help your little one become more self-confident and resilient so he bounces back from disappointments more easily.

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## Helping Your Toddler Feel Triumphant

This is one of the most important parenting concepts you'll ever learn: If you fill your child with many little triumphs and successes throughout the day, he'll automatically become more respectful and cooperative. Why? Because even primitive little toddlers understand the rule of fairness: *After I win a bunch ... you get a turn.*

Think of it this way: Say you go to Las Vegas and win a million dollars. You feel great. Like a winner! Your pockets are bulging with cash. Then, on your way out, you pass a person begging. You might give him \$100, maybe even \$1,000. Why not? You won so much, you feel in a generous mood. It's no big deal to you. On the other hand, if you've lost your life savings, you may not even give the beggar a

penny. Why? Because when you feel like you've got *nothing*, you've got *nothing* to give.

That's *exactly* how it is with your toddler. If your toddler feels like a loser all day long, he is much less likely to cooperate with you. But if you let him "win" little victories all day long, he's much more likely to let *you* win a few little struggles (such as trying a tiny piece of broccoli). He'll be thinking, *You know what, Mom? I'm such a winner today, I'm gonna let you win this one.*

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Respect—and some silliness—makes kids feel like winners. That's why the best parents look for ways to help their toddlers feel smart, fast, and strong. It might be as simple (and *fun*) as letting him win a pillow fight or allowing him to choose which plate he wants to eat from.

Here are two fun ways to build your tot's confidence: Show that you believe in him, and (my all-time favorite) playing the boob.

## Building Confidence: Show Your Tot You Believe in Him

The more your child knows you believe in him, the more he'll believe in himself. Here are some easy ways to boost your toddler's self-confidence ... fast!

**Listen with Respect.** When you listen to your child with patience and respect, you send him the message that you really value him as a person.

**Ask for Help: "Can You Carry This for Daddy?"** Asking your tot for help tells him, *I know you*

*can do it.* He'll beam with pride when he shows you how capable he is. For example, say, "Honey, my hands are sooo full, can you please help Mommy and carry my purse?"

**Offer Options: "Which Ones Should We Get?"** There are so many decisions to make every day; let your child make a couple of them. One-year-olds aren't great decision-makers. But by two, your tot will love being asked to choose: "Which flowers should we buy, the pink or the yellow?"

Asking your child his opinion shows him that you think he's smart and you have confidence in his choices.

Two big rules about choices:

- **Don't offer too many options.** Your toddler's immature brain may get overloaded with too many choices. "Do you want milk in the red cup, yellow cup, green cup, or purple cup?" Thirty-nine flavors of ice cream? *Tilt! Tilt!*
- **Never ask your child's choice if you plan to disregard it.** For example, don't ask him which flowers to get if you've already decided to buy the pink ones no matter what.

**Let Him Work It Out: "You Can Do It!"** It may take your toddler five minutes to do something you can do in five seconds, but don't rush him! Put your hands in your pockets, zip your lips, take some slow, deep breaths, and encourage his efforts. ("Wow! You're really trying hard!" "Good job, you've almost got it!") If you can refrain from hovering and jumping in, your patience and body language will give your little one the message *I trust you to figure out even tough things.*

Let him work at it, even if he gets a little frustrated. Of course, offer some help if he's really getting upset.

## Building Confidence: Playing the Boob

We all pretend to be klutzes sometimes when we are playing with our kids. It makes them laugh, feel clever and strong (by comparison to their inept parent), and makes them want to be more cooperative.

Sound odd? Embarrassing? Unnatural? Well, actually it's a silly idea that's supersmart and I bet you're doing it already! Do you ever:



- Pretend you're startled when your child roars like a tiger?
- Have a little race and intentionally lose?
- Have a pillow fight and let your tot topple you with each swipe?

If you answered yes to any of those, then you're already playing the boob (and, you know how much your child loves it)! Playing the boob makes kids feel like winners—and that helps them give in faster on issues that we care about!

*Twenty-two-month-old Alice loves to “blow her dad over”: She puffs really hard on his chest ... and he teeters ... then falls onto the couch while she howls with laughter.*

I play the boob again and again when I do a toddler checkup. It usually wins a child's cooperation in minutes, or less (see story on [Green-Light Behaviors](#)).

I beg you to spend time learning this one. This goofy-sounding idea is one of the most effective tools I know for increasing toddler cooperation and diminishing tantrums.

**What It Is:** The basic idea is to make your child feel smart/strong/fast/etc. by making yourself seem, well, like a bit of a "boob."

**Best Used For:** All toddlers, dozens of times a day. Once you get the knack, playing the boob will become your toddler's all-time favorite game. (Yours, too!)

**How to Do It:** Here are just a few of the wacky ways to play the boob:

- **Be a baby.** Pretend you want something your toddler has. Reach out and whine like a baby saying, "Mine, mine ... pleeease!" Let her easily defy your pitiful request. One of my favorites is to say, "Gimme five," but then pretend to be afraid. Then I let the child give me five. If she does it gently, I thank her for being so nice. But if she whacks me hard, I hop around yelping in mock pain, "Ow! Ow! Ow! You tricked me! You tricked me! You're not fair." Then I blow hard on my hand to take away the sting. Kids howl with delight and want to do it over and over.
- **Be blind.** Pretend to search for something that's right next to you. Say, "Book! Where is my book?" When your child giggles and points to it, ham it up and exclaim, "Where? Where? I don't see it." Then finally look where she's pointing

and say, “Yea! You found it! You’re a good finder! Thank you.”

- **Be a klutz.** Ask your child to hand you something, but “accidentally” drop it (over and over again), saying “Uh-oh! Uh-oh!” Before I examine a worried two-year-old, I always place a toy right on the edge of the exam table so that it falls as soon as I let go. As it drops I exclaim, “Noooo! Dooooon’t fall!” I do this over and over, each time pretending to be ever more careful in putting it down. I “command” the toy (or plead with it), “Pleeease don’t fall!” Of course, when I let go it always falls again. Pretty soon, the child relaxes and looks quizzically at his mom, wondering *Is this the guy you meant to take me to, Mom? Because I can do the thing he’s bumblng with.* Usually the child laughs and wants to play with me because he sees I’m such a *boob* he doesn’t need to be afraid.
- **Be confused.** Put your shoe on your hand or wear your hat upside down. Announce that you need to see if your child’s hands are clean ... but inspect her *foot* instead. Then protest, “Hey! You’re *tricking* me! That’s not your hand!” Now demand, “Give me your hand!” But look in her *pocket*.
- **Be forgetful.** Ask your child: “Do you want your green pants or the blue ones?” After he says “green,” immediately act like you forgot, “Huh? What? Did you say the *blue* ones?” Point at your child’s foot and fumble for the word. Say, “Give me your ... ummm ... your ... uh.” Frown as if you just can’t remember the word “foot.” Keep fumbling and pointing. In seconds, your toddler

will lift up his foot and gleefully finish your sentence, “Foot, FOOT!”

- **Be pompously incorrect.** Loudly sing the wrong lyrics to a song, “Happy *elephant* to you!” “Happy *elephant* to you!” Your child will love to correct you ... but act like you’re *sure* you’re right. (“No, those are the right words!”) Or like she didn’t hear you correctly, “No way! I didn’t say *elephant* ... I said birthday.” Then sing the song with the *wrong* word again and if she corrects you again, pompously proclaim, “No way! I’m the best singer ... IN THE *WORLD!!!*”
- **Be a pushover.** Ask your child to do something you know he won’t want to do ... and let him win. Point to the shoes on his feet and say, “Give me your shoes, pleeease! I want shoes!” When he refuses, “beg” him, “Please! Pleeease!” Then, when he refuses again (with a mile-wide grin) throw down your hands and whine, “Okay, okay ... *you* win! You *always* win! You win me a *hundred* times!! You never do what *I* want!”

*I once made a house call to see a baby. There, I met her big sister, two-year-old Noa. Noa was drinking juice and I playfully put out my hand and asked, “May I have your sippy cup? Pleeease?” She scowled and said, “No!” Then she turned away from me and wedged herself between her dad’s legs for protection.*

*I begged like a baby, “Please? Pleeeeeease? Pretty please with sugar on top?” She protested, “No! My cup!” I saw she was looking worried, so I backed away, smiled, and chirped, “You say, ‘No! Go away, Man.’ Okay, Noa ... *you* win, you*



*win! That's your sippy cup! You keep it! You keep it!"*

*Noa beamed and puffed out her chest. She felt like a winner! And she felt that I had treated her with fairness and respect. I know that because a minute later she took my hand and introduced me to all her dollies!*

- **Be ridiculous.** Say something absurd in a sincere voice, "Want some delicious ... mud?" or "Okay, it's dinner time.... You have to eat your shoe!" This will make your toddler grin and feel smart because even *he* knows people don't eat mud.
- **Be weak.** Pretend a little toy is too heavy to lift. Struggle at it, then ask for help. Or wrestle, but let your child keep wriggling out of your grasp even as you boast, "I've got you now! You'll never get away!"

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## **Is It a Bad Idea to Let Your Toddler Think You're a "Boob"?**

Not at all. Your child knows you're not *really* weak or a baby. You're his ultimate hero. You'll never lose his respect just because you goof with him a little bit. In fact, he'll love you even more for it.

Think of playing the boob as an ancient form of flattery (a fundamental tool of diplomacy). It's like buttering up the king: "*Oh, Your Lordship, you are sooooo strong!*"

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## Green-Light Skill #3: Teach Patience

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Teaching patience is another phenomenal parenting skill that's worth its weight in gold. Patient toddlers are more reasonable, less impulsive, and slower to go on the rampage when they don't get their way.

Patience is like a muscle ... it gets stronger with exercise. It actually strengthens the left half of the brain and speeds its development! Also, as you'll see in the next chapter, teaching patience is a great tool for eliminating annoying behaviors, like whining and nagging. Practice these skills every day and you'll be astounded at the rapid improvements you'll see.

Here are two surefire ways to boost your toddler's self-control:

- patience-stretching
- magic breathing

### Teaching Patience: Patience-Stretching

All kids start out impulsive. But, amazingly, you can s-t-r-e-t-c-h your toddler's patience in just days ... if you do it right.

**What It Is:** Patience-stretching is a superfast way to help grabby tots learn to be patient by expecting them to wait a teensy, tiny bit ... then a bit more ... and then even more.

Believe it or not, most parents teach patience in exactly the *opposite* way from the method that works the best. For example, say you're busy and your two-year-old pulls at your skirt for attention. Most of us lovingly respond, "Just a second, sweetheart," and finish what we're doing. Trouble is, this often makes your child bug you even more!

**Best Used For:** All toddlers (even under one year of age).

**How to Do It:** *Very important:* To teach patience-stretching you *must* have something your child wants (food, a toy, etc.). Once you have that, follow these simple steps:

- **First, *almost* give her what she wants.** Let's say your one-year-old interrupts you, asking for juice. Stop what you're doing and repeat back, "Juice! You want juice!" Start to hand her the juice ... BUT ... then suddenly hold up one finger and exclaim, "Wait! Wait! Just one second!" as if you just remembered something important. Turn away and pretend to look for something.
- **Next, the "payoff."** After just a few seconds, turn back and immediately give your child the juice, praising her, saying, "Good waiting! Good waiting!" Quickly rewarding your child's patience teaches her that waiting isn't so bad and that *Mommy always keeps her word*. Little by little, stretch the waiting time more and more (5 seconds, then 10 ... 30 ... 60, etc.). If you practice this every day, your child will be able to wait a minute or two (or more) within a week. Patience-stretching will build your tot's self-control ... one baby step at a time.

Timers help older toddlers practice patience. During a calm period, show your toddler how the timer works: “See! And when Mr. Dinger says *ding!* (make it chime) then Mommy comes back fast!”

Later, when your three-year-old starts bugging you for something, say, “Sure!” and almost give it to him, but then suddenly announce, “Wait, wait! Just one second, sweetheart! I have to go see Daddy. As soon as Mr. Dinger rings I can give you the \_\_\_!” (You might suggest that your child play or look at a book until the timer dings, but don’t insist on it.)

Initially, set the timer for twenty seconds. When it rings, come right back, give your child a little praise (“Hey, good waiting!”) and a check on the hand, and immediately keep your promise.

Gradually increase the waiting period to a minute or two. But every once in a while surprise him by: 1) setting the timer for just ten seconds (he’ll think, *Wow, that minute goes by really fast*). 2) Giving a double reward (“*Hey, you waited so well ... here are TWO cookies!*”).

He’ll think, *Wow, waiting is cool.... Sometimes I even get more than I expected!*

Later in the day, gossip to his teddy bear about his “great waiting” and at bedtime, remind him what a good job he did being patient that day.

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## **Isn’t It Teasing a Child to Almost Give Something ... Then Take It Away?**

There is a huge difference between patience-stretching and teasing. Teasing is when you taunt a

child by offering the thing he wants with no intention of giving it. “You want this, but you can’t have it!”

But, with patience-stretching you *will* give your child what he wants, you’re just delaying it a bit. Toddlers find this totally reasonable.

Think of it from the adult point of view:

Imagine you’re approved for a \$1,000,000 loan and just as the banker starts to hand you the check, he gets a phone call. So he pulls back the check and says, “Sorry, I’ll be right back.”

Are you angry? Probably not. You don’t yell, “Where’s my money!” because the banker might change his mind. And besides, you have every reason to believe that you’ll get the check in a minute. So what do you do? You sit patiently, hands in your lap, *and wait*. And when you get it, you feel very appreciative and offer a heartfelt “Thank you.”

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### **Dr. Harvey in Action: How I Teach Patience in Less Than Five Minutes**

At checkups, I love demonstrating how easy it is to teach patience-stretching. First I warm up the child by playing the boob (for example, by repeatedly letting him “slap me five” and yelping in pretend pain).

Once he’s having fun, I say, “Give me five again,” and I put out my hand, but right before he whacks me, I remove the hand and hold up one finger, saying, “Wait! Wait!” Next, I turn away and make him wait for a few seconds as I pretend to look at something, Then I turn back, I praise them (“Good waiting!”), and perhaps I reinforce the praise by gossiping to his mom (“Bobby’s a good waiter!”). Finally, I let the child “give me five”

again and repay his patience by hopping around yelping, “Ouch! Ouch!”

Usually in just a few minutes, I can teach even a one-year-old to patiently wait for ten seconds.

## Teaching Patience: Magic Breathing

**What It Is:** Have you ever been so upset that someone told you to “take a deep breath”? When we are stressed, frightened, or in pain, we automatically tighten up and hold our breath. Over time, that can lead to headaches, anxiety, even high blood pressure.



Learning how to stay calm is a very important life skill. Unfortunately, many people in our culture *never* learn it (or can only calm by eating, sleeping, watching TV, or using drugs and alcohol). Yet all adults—and children—have a powerful natural stress-reducer: simple breathing!

Just a few sloooow breaths (magic breathing) can quickly bring a sense of peace. Magic breathing helps impulsive toddlers learn to *turn their motor off*. With a little practice, your little friend can learn how to use this superb self-soothing skill anytime he’s frustrated, scared, hurt, or mad. It is a self-control tool your child can use forever.

**Best Used For:** Toddlers over two (who can already wait patiently for a minute).

**How to Do It:** This skill is as simple as breathing, but before you teach your bouncy little tyke, it's important for *you* to learn it.

**First, *You* Practice:**

- Relax your face. When the house is quiet, turn off the phone and take two to three minutes for yourself. Sit in a comfy chair, uncross your legs, put your hands in your lap, drop your shoulders, and—most important—let the tiny muscles around your mouth and eyes get very soft and relaxed.
- Take a few slow breaths. Slowly inhale through your nose (as you silently count to five) then slowly exhale through your nose (for another silent five counts). Make a little whooshy sound as the air flows in and out, and never hold your breath.
- As you breathe in, let one hand slowly rise and as you breathe out let it slowly drop.

Practice where your child can watch. He may get curious and want to imitate you.

**Now, You're Ready to Teach Your Little One:**

When he comes to watch you:

- Say, "Breathe with Mommy." Start by leading him through a couple of fast breaths (two counts in, two counts out), using your whooshy sound and hand motion to guide him. Don't get frustrated if he can't do it right away. It may take a dozen tries for him to get the hang of it.
- Reward *any* breathing with encouragement: "Good breathing!" "Good following my hand." Give a hand check and immediately follow it up with a little play. (Later in the day, gossip about

his good breathing to your spouse, his teddy bear, or a birdie outside.)

- Gradually, lead your child through more and slower breaths (aim for at least five breaths at a sitting). Once he gets good at magic breathing, practice it in different places and at different times of the day.

### **Extra Tips for Magic Breathing**

- **Be a role model.** Your child will learn magic breathing faster when he sees you doing it every day.
- **Time it right.** Do it before a nap or after eating, when your tot's already a bit relaxed.
- **Pick a "magic" place.** Kids love the word "magic"! Pick a "magic" spot to sit and "magic" pillow to sit on. (It will be even more special if you tape pictures of "magic" trees or butterflies on the wall of your "magic" spot.) He'll instantly relax as soon as he sits and starts to breathe.
- **Don't be pushy.** If he resists, offer to do something fun after his magic breathing. If he still refuses, say, "No problem." Then get busy with something and ignore him for a few minutes. Try offering the breathing again later that day and the next. If your child refuses every time, wait a month or two and try again.
- **Practice often.** Kids who practice magic breathing every day quickly become little experts at self-calming.
- **Combine breathing with play.** Even wild kids will take a few breaths when they know they'll be rewarded for it. So do a couple of slow breaths, followed by something fun, followed by a final breath or two after the play stops. This is



a great way for your uncivilized little friend to learn how to *self-soothe* even after hectic play.

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## **Green-Light Skill #4: Create Daily Routines and Stick to Them**

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***Help your toddler feel safe, happy, and smart.***

Doing the same thing every day may be boring to grown-ups, but for toddlers predictable routines lower stress, increase confidence, and even make them feel smarter.

Routines give little children:

- **A sense of security.** Predictable routines give toddlers a sense of security amid the chaos of the day. As any experienced preschool teacher will tell you, too little structure to the day makes toddlers feel overwhelmed and cranky.
- **A feeling of being smart.** Toddlers often encounter things they can't control or understand. It can make them feel frustrated and left out when they see that everyone else in the family knows what's happening. Daily routines, however, level the playing field. Tots who do the same things every day feel smart because they know what's going on ... just as well as their older siblings and parents.

***Joan groaned when Phillip, 22 months, awoke at six A.M. and begged to watch his tractor video—every single day. But to Phillip the***

*repetition made him feel like a genius. You could almost hear him telling himself I knew that was gonna happen! when he watched the tractor go through its familiar paces.*

- **A sense of “time.”** Predictable routines are your toddler’s “wristwatch.” They help her keep track of the day: *After I wake, I get dressed and eat breakfast. After lunch, I take a nap.*

Do you have little routines that raise your comfort level during the day, like a morning tea break or a call to your mom? Well, here are two fabulous routines that will make your tot feel extra-loved and extra-safe: bedtime sweet talk and special time.

## Teach Your Child the Power of Positive Thinking: Bedtime Sweet Talk

Some of the sweetest moments of parenthood are our presleep snuggles with our kids. They reduce stress, build love, and provide a perfect transition from a tiring day to ... Slumberland. You can make this period even sweeter—and more useful—with a routine called bedtime sweet talk (mentioned on [this page](#)).

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## Routines for Different Ages and Stages

- **Early toddlers (12 to 24 months):** By his first birthday, your child will recognize the patterns of the day (a diaper when he wakes up, lunch when he sees you take out his special plate, a little massage before bed). Your consistency builds his sense of security, and that gives him the courage to go off and explore the world.

- **Middle toddlers (24 to 36 months):** Middle toddlers hate unexpected changes because they work so hard to figure things out (“C’mon! I just finally *got it*... Don’t go changing it on me!”). That’s why routines are such a huge bonus at this age. They fill your two-year-old’s need for things to “follow the rules” and be “just so.”

*Mina, two and a half, wore a princess outfit complete with wings, crown, and ballet slippers to playgroup ... every day.*

*Thirty-month-old Arnie loved his fireman hat so much that he insisted on wearing it to sleep for almost a year!*

So don’t be surprised when your little kid rigidly demands the same food, same shirt, or same song every day; explodes if the peas touch the carrots or a guest sits in Daddy’s chair; and insists you start over—from page one—if you’re interrupted in the middle of reading her *Good Night, Moon!*

- **Older toddlers (36 to 48 months):** It’s common for three-year-olds to suddenly notice they’re weaker than almost *everybody* else. (That’s why they love to point out that they are faster and stronger than babies!) Realizing that they are vulnerable can trigger new fears and worries. Routines help these kids feel safe and secure. Despite their worries, older toddlers no longer demand rigid sameness. In fact, they love it when we throw silly variations into their routines (adding a crazy verse to a favorite song, making up new words as you read a beloved

bedtime story, having a “picnic” lunch on a blanket in the living room).

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**What It Is:** A wonderful routine that allows you to appreciate some of the good things your toddler did today and to consider all the wonderful things that might happen tomorrow.

During the twilight moments right before sleep, your child’s mind is like a little sponge soaking up your loving words. Bedtime sweet talk helps your child drift into sleep feeling smart, loved, and like a winner!

**Best Used For:** All toddlers. Start this loving habit as early as you can. Don’t worry if your child doesn’t understand all your words.... Even your one-year-old will be comforted by listening to your kind, soft voice.

### **How to Do It:**

Cuddle in bed until your child is nice and relaxed, then:

- Softly retell some of his good deeds from the day (acts of kindness, fun experiences, etc.). Keep your voice gentle and understated—more like a candle than a sparkler.
- Describe the love that fills you when you watch him (“When I saw you reading, I got as happy as a puppy!”).
- Count his hand checks and mention what he did to earn each one (see [Time-Ins: Hand Checks](#)).
- Look forward to tomorrow by mentioning a few of the wonderful things that *may* happen: “And tomorrow, at school, perhaps you’ll play trains with Seymour or have fun climbing on the

monkey bars. It might even be your most fun day ever! You may even do some things that are a big help at school.... Teacher Kris likes it when you help pick up toys.”

Here’s an example of how bedtime sweet talk might sound:

***“Today was a great day. You helped water the flowers ... and said ‘Hi!’ to the mailman ... then we held hands and went to Jack’s house.***

***“And look, you got so many hand checks. One ... two ... three! Three checks. Do you remember what they were for? This one was for using the potty all by yourself. Oh, and this one was when you carried the mail for Mommy! And this one was for coming to the bath superfast when I called you ... remember?***

***“Hey, you know what I also really liked about today? When you helped Jack put away all the blocks so fast, I was so amazed, you made my heart zoom up like a big balloon!***

***“Tomorrow could be fun too. You know, I wouldn’t be surprised if Grandma shows you her watering can.... I bet you’ll show her what a fast picker-upper you are too!”***

## **Pack Loads of Fun into a Little Time: Special Time**

Despite the many hours of time we give our kids, they often bug us the moment we start to make dinner or answer the phone. It’s as if they’re thinking, *Well, what have you done for me lately?*

Toddlers don't mean to be unfair. It's just that they live in the "now" and quickly forget the "before." But there's an easy, fun way to help your child remember and appreciate your time together: special time.

**What It Is:** Special time is a little gift of five to ten minutes of your *undivided attention*. No phone calls or baby brothers allowed! Special time feeds your child's meter with a tasty little helping of the "you-you-you" he's so hungry for.

**Best Used For:** Toddlers two years old and up.

**How to Do It:**

- **Make special time a routine.** Set aside one or two short periods every day to give your child a bit of fun. If you can, do it at the same time every day.
- **"Promote and advertise."** Kids appreciate special time even more when you stoke their anticipation and excitement. A few times a day, announce that special time is coming. "Pretty soon it's going to be special time. What fun things should we do today?" Let your tot overhear you gossiping about special time to his toys.
- **Kids get to choose.** Special time is fun because your child gets to choose the activity. If you need to, give prompts: "Ooh! Do you think we will paint or have a tea party this time?" You might read, draw, dance, hunt bugs, or have a "snowball" fight with crumpled pieces of paper. (If he wants TV, gently say, "You love TV, but TV isn't special time. Let's think of some fun things we can do together.")

- **Have a clear beginning and end.** This nugget of fun-time works best when you keep it short (about five minutes ... set a timer). Start each session with a peppy little jingle: “It’s Tony’s *special* time! Special, special ... special time!” And wind it up with a nice little ritual that you repeat every time. (For instance, say “Bye-bye, special time. See you later!” Then give a little special-time hug.)  
If your child demands more time, you could give an extra minute, or you might just say, “Aww ... I’m so sorry, honey. You love ... love ... *love* your special time.... It’s really fun. But you know what? You get *another* special time later on [or tomorrow].” Then distract him and busy yourself with something else.

Think of your beginning song and ending hug as the *gift wrap* for this nugget of extra fun. It marks this time as a really special treat!

### **Tips for Special Time:**

- **Don’t do it right before naps or bedtime.** It’s too fun and exciting.
  - **Don’t think of special time as a replacement for time you currently spend together.** It’s a bite-size time-in that’s offered *in addition to* the usual attention you give.
  - **Don’t punish your child by taking away special time.** In fact, special time can be a big help to get you and your toddler back on track if the two of you are having a rough day.
  - **Don’t allow interruptions.** Turn off your beeper and the phone if possible.
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## “Rituals” Make Routines Even More Fun

You can make routines even more fun by adding some little *rituals* to them. Rituals are small but very specific actions that add a dash of extra sparkle to your routines (like ornaments on a Christmas tree).

Here are a few rituals you might try:

- **Bedtime:** Sing a special song each night at bedtime.
  - **Dinner:** Ring a bell or chime before you say grace.
  - **Car ride:** Play the same song *every* time you enter the car.
  - **Opening the garage:** Let your child say a “magic word” before you press the remote. (“Open sesame!”)
  - **Getting dressed:** Each night, put out the next day’s clothes in the shape of a person.
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### A Daily Routine Your Kid Can Cuddle: Loveys

Linus has his blanket; Calvin has his tiger, Hobbes; Christopher Robin loves his teddy, Winnie-the-Pooh; and your child probably has his own lovey. Think of a lovey as a little “routine” your child can cuddle every day.

I’ve seen kids cling to diapers, silk scarves, wigs, and *all* sorts of toys. For years, my little patient Alex was “hooked” on sleeping with his Captain Hook’s hook!

To some parents, cuddlies seem “babyish.” But actually they are stepping-stones to maturity and



independence. They help kids deal with stress (illness, trips, scary situations, etc.). And they give kids the courage to take **baby steps** from their moms and dads into the great big world. (That’s why they’re called “transitional objects.”)

### **Tips on Loveys**

- **Make it easy for your toddler to love a lovey.** Keep a teddy or satiny blanket near your young toddler day and night. Touch and cuddle it yourself to give it your comforting scent and invest it with *magic Mommy power*.
- **Always have a backup!** Lost loveys happen, so always have a backup that’s identical to your child’s *main squeeze*. (If the lovey is a blanket, cut it in two and hem it. If it’s a toy, buy an extra one.) Every week or two, replace the one she’s using with the spare one. That gives you a chance to keep them clean and helps them both develop the same comforting feel and smell.
- **Don’t remove a lovey as punishment.** Never threaten to take away a lovey. Far from making kids behave better, it makes them resentful and insecure.

### **More Comforters: Pacifiers, Thumbs, Breasts, and Bottles**

Sucking is another terrific, comforting “routine.” It helps toddlers calm themselves—especially those who are shy or under stress. Worried parents sometimes ask me if sucking is a sign of anxiety. Not usually. Interestingly, a love of sucking is genetically passed from one generation to the next, just like hair color or freckles.

#### **Tips on Bottles, Breasts, and Pacifiers:**

- **Don’t make sucking the answer to every little frustration.** You can offer a bottle, breast,

or pacifier several times a day to provide some comfort, but also leave your child with daily opportunities to find other methods of self-soothing.

- **Bottles and pacifiers may cause ear infections.** That's because strong sucking can create pressure inside the ear. If your child is prone to ear infections, cut back on the bottles and pacifiers, and when she is drinking from a bottle, be sure to keep her head up a bit. Consider switching her off the pacifier to a cuddly lovey, like a blankie, or an "auditory lovey" like a soothing-sounds white-noise CD that can be played all night long.
  - **Go easy on the juice.** Fruit juice has tons of sugar. Sucking on a bottle of fruit juice for twenty minutes may cause cavities. So, if your baby loves juice, keep the sucking time short. You can also add a bit more water every day to gradually dilute it. Or better yet, switch to a naturally sweet, caffeine-free tea like mint or chamomile.
  - **Wean your toddler off the pacifier by three to four years.** Sucking (especially thumb-sucking) may eventually cause buckteeth. So from time to time, mention to your tot, "When kids turn three, the pacifier fairy flies away with their old pacis and brings them back a *new toy*! I wonder what cool toy she'll bring you." (Don't say she gives pacifiers to babies. Your child might resent the next baby he sees who's sucking on what he thinks is his "old friend"!) Prolonged pacifier use doesn't always cause dental problems. Ask your doctor or dentist to check.
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# Green-Light Skill #5: Plant Seeds of

## Kindness



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*“Civilization is just a slow process of learning to be kind.”*

—Charles Lucas

Experienced parents know that toddlers often tune out our explanations and sermons (messages delivered to the “front door” of a child’s mind) but pay sharp attention to what they see us do or overhear us say (messages delivered to the “side door” of the mind).

Side-door lessons allow us to sneak into our children’s minds and plant seeds of kindness and good character without our little ones feeling lectured to. And practicing good behavior, over and over, through pretend play is just as powerful a teacher to your young child as actual experience.

### Plant Seeds of Kindness: Fairy Tales

For thousands of years, fairy tales like “Little Red Riding Hood” have been told around the campfire to entertain children and adults. More than mere entertainment, these little stories teach life lessons like courage, honesty, and not talking to strangers (or “wolves”). The enormous popularity of these stories in every human culture on Earth testifies to their effectiveness.

With *The Happiest Toddler* version of fairy tales, you create your own special stories tailored to your child’s particular needs.

**What It Is:** Making up stories to teach our children lessons about right and wrong and good and bad. Think of it as planting seeds of character and kindness that slowly take root in your child's spirit. It is no exaggeration to say that for young children *hearing* is believing.

**Best Used For:** Kids over 24 months. They love them because they're so much fun.

**How It Works:** When I teach parents about fairy tales, they're often afraid that they won't know what to say. Please don't worry. Think of what you want to teach your child—for example, a lesson about not getting upset when you have to go off to work every day, then use this simple three-step recipe to cook up a great fairy tale. Just think about the beginning, the middle, and the happy ending.

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## Telling the Tale

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### The Beginning: “Once Upon a Time”

Your goal at the beginning of a story is to capture your child's imagination ... with lots of description. Start out by saying a few sentences about what the little animal hero of your story is doing and feeling (think of both her emotional feelings *and* her five-senses feelings).

*What does the pony princess see, smell, wear, sing, eat for lunch?*

*How does the sun feel on her face? How do the flowers smell?*

*Is she happy, sad, curious, silly?*

***What does she see on her walk home  
from school?***

Within a minute, your tot will start feeling snugly and interested and her mind's trusting *side door* will swing open.

**The Middle: “But Then”**

Now weave in a little lesson about a specific behavior or value that you want your child to learn—sharing, helping others, telling the truth, saying thank you, et cetera. This is where you introduce the “problem” that has to get resolved by the end.

***But then, when she got home from school,  
the little pony wouldn't take turns; or told  
her mommy she washed her hands ... but  
she hadn't; or teased her baby brother till  
he cried, etc.***

***Why did she do it?***

***How did her mommy feel about it?***

***What did her mommy say or do  
(remember to use some of your Fast-Food  
Rule and Toddler-ese at this part).***

***What did the little pony finally do that  
made her mom happy?***

**The End: “Happily Ever After”**

Toddlers love happy endings, so always finish your stories with the problem being solved, the animals being safe, and everyone living “happily ever after.”

***... And then the princess came home safe  
to hugs, kisses, and her favorite macaroni  
and cheese and broccoli for supper. And***

*everyone lived happily ever after!*

### **Tips to Make You a Star Storyteller:**

- **Make the main characters happy little animals.** Pick names like Steven the Mouse or Mimi the Moose. Don't use children as characters. They may seem too real for the under-five set.
- **Tell stories where the weak triumph over the strong.** Kids love the three little pigs defeating the wolf or Jack outsmarting the giant because the little, weak guys win in the end.
- **Be a ham!** Embellish your story with whispers, funny voices, dramatic faces, and some waves of your hands to keep your child's attention.
- **If your child is more verbal, ask for suggestions.** While you tell the story, ask: "And what do you think she said then? Why do you think he was mad?"
- **Have fun adding little "helpers."** Kids love angels, fairies, talking toads, or friendly trees who come to the hero's rescue.
- **Include an animal who is grouchy and mean (but not too scary).** Include some characters who are a little ill-mannered and have them keep messing up (like "boobs") but they ultimately learn how to behave and become the hero's friend.
- **Toss in lots of special words.** Toddlers love words like "party," "secret," "castle," "princess," "superhero," "flying," "magic," "presents," "toys," "surprise," etc.

One mother shared the fairy tale she made up to help her toddler have less trouble separating from her in the

mornings when she had to go to work:

*“Once upon a time there was a little girl froggie named Hoppy. She was as green as peas and loved to eat cereal for breakfast with crunchy flies in it!*

*“Poor little Hoppy was worried every time her mommy hopped off the lily pad to go to work. But she had a talking teddy bear, and whenever she got sad she cuddled him tight and they would sing her favorite song together (‘Old MacDonald’!) ... and play house ... and sometimes even have a tea party!*

*“That helped Hoppy be happy. She was also happy when she put her hand in her pocket and touched the magic handkerchief that her mom gave her to help her smile when she was sad.*

*“Then, before she knew it, her mommy always always always came hopping back home to the lily pad with kisses and lots of yummy, sweet, crunchy flies to eat ... and they all lived happily ever after.... The end!”*

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## **Plant Seeds of Kindness: Catching Others Being Good**

Another “side-door” way to teach your child good behaviors is to comment when you see other kids (and adults) doing them. I call this **catching others being good**.

You will have many chances to use this skill. When you're driving you can comment on how nicely the drivers wait at the red light ... or take turns at the stop sign. At stores, notice how people buy yummy food but keep it closed until they get home. At school, notice how the big kids eat with forks or how they rub their hands really hard when they wash them.

This is not a big lecture, just some casual comments on things you see people doing in books and magazines. Parenting magazines are chock-full of photos of kids doing nice things ... and bad things. (You can use this same technique to talk about behaviors you *don't* like too.)

Later that day, let your child overhear you whispering to Daddy about what you saw and about how it makes you feel: "We saw a lot of people waiting quietly at the bank. I like it when people don't keep pushing me when I am on line."

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You know you're really succeeding when your child wants you to tell her more of the adventures of the characters you've created. (So do try to remember what you say!) Story by story, you will be creating a beloved childhood memory.

## Plant Seeds of Kindness: Role-Playing

*"Pretend you're the mommy and I'm the little kid..."*

Around your child's second birthday he'll start having his toys engage in little conversations and he'll like pretending to be other people (or things)—Batman, a truck, a talking duck. **Role-playing** is a way to use these fun activities to plant more seeds of kindness through



the “side door” of his mind.

**What It Is:** In role-playing, you and your child act out a situation (or use dolls to act out situations). Role-playing is great because there’s no pressure. Kids get to be silly, make mistakes, and have fun, even as they are learning.

Like actors who practice a lot to learn their lines, the more you role-play important life lessons with your child, the faster he’ll learn what is right and wrong and remember it and do it in the future.

**Best Used For:** Children around two to three years of age. That’s the time they become interested in pretending to be other people. (You can role-play with younger toddlers too, but you will have to play all the parts.)

**How to Do It:** As with fairy tales, you want your story to have a beginning, middle, and end to make it interesting. But besides that basic rule, you can create endless variations on role-playing and use anything that comes to mind.

### **Extra Tips for Role-Playing Fun:**

- **Old stories:** Act out a familiar book or fairy tale.
- **New stories:** Make up a story based on an experience that you or your child just had: someone who wasn’t nice; a friend who refused to share; a little boy who wouldn’t get dressed.
- **Puppet show:** If your child is too young, or too shy, to play a role, pick up a couple of dolls (puppets work well too) and use them to play the parts. For example:

*Dog (Mom in doggie voice): “Hey, Giraffe, I don’t like it when you take my toys. You always grab and I say, ‘No! No!’ But when you say ‘please’ I am HAPPY!”*

*Giraffe (Mom in giraffe voice): “Oopsie! I mean pleeeeeease can I play with the ball?”*

*Dog (Mom in doggie voice): “You said ‘please’! YEA! I like it when you say ‘please’.... Okay, here it is. Can I play with one of your toys too? Please.”*

- **Use gossiping:** Have the dolls whisper back and forth (loud enough for your child to “overhear”). Make them talk about the behaviors that you want to encourage or discourage. (*“Hey, Mr. Teddy, did you see Mommy’s face when Marley picked up her toys as quick as a bunny? Mommy was really happy and smiled big ... like this!”*) Don’t look at your child while you gossip; it may make her suspicious that you are trying to manipulate her. Even though gossiping is done in a whisper, kids get the message loud and clear through the wide-open “side door” of their minds.
- **Make a doll act like a boob.** It’s easy to teach your lesson—and entertain your tot at the same time—if you have his doll act like a boob (confused, weak, silly, wrong, etc.).

*“Hi! I’m Mr. Teddy, and I’m the smartest bear in the whole, entire, big, huge world! And I can walk in the street anytime I want!” Then have*

*him pretend to walk in the street and have a little toy car screech out and knock him down.*

Here's how one dad used a minute of role-playing to teach his two-and-a-half-year-old the importance of hand washing—and prevent thirty minutes of struggle:

*“One day before lunch, Jack and I were engaged in our usual battle over hand washing and I suddenly got the idea to see whether he might cooperate better if the hygiene advice came from his stuffed toy, Magic Bunny, instead of me. So I said, ‘Wait, Jack, wait! I need to ask Magic Bunny something.’ Then, I loudly whispered, ‘Hi, Magic Bunny, please help us. Lunch is ready and I said “Jack, let’s wash hands,” and he said “No way!” and I said “Okay, let’s ask Magic Bunny.” So, Magic Bunny, what do you think? Should Jack wash his hands?’*

*“Then I put my ear near the bunny’s lips, pretending to strain to hear his response. ‘What? What did you say? Oh ... sure ... okay. He should wash his hands, but then he should give me five ... really hard? Okay!’*

*“Jack watched me, fascinated. I nodded my head and continued, ‘But can he do it fast? He wants to eat now? Okay, Magic Bunny, I’ll tell him. Thanks! I love you, too!’*

*“Then I turned to my son and relayed the message. ‘Hey, Jack, Magic Bunny said he wants you to wash your hands SUPERfast and then give me five ... really*

*hard! Then we can eat some yummy-licious food.'*

*“My son complied, and after lunch I gossiped to Magic Bunny about what a great job Jack did.”*

Now that you're becoming an expert at flashing a green light to signal all-systems-GO to good behavior, you're well on your way to having fewer problems. But there will always be *some* problems. And in [Chapter 6](#) I'll discuss simple, effective ways to flash a yellow warning light to discourage the annoying things your toddler does.



***“You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.”***

—Old adage

## **Main Points:**

- Yellow-light behaviors are annoying things kids do, like whining, pestering, and dawdling.
- You can curb your toddler’s yellow-light behaviors with four smart parenting skills:
  1. **Connect with Respect:** Using the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-ese (plus a few other tricks) to help you detour around potential conflicts.
  2. **Make Your Limits Clear and Consistent:** Easy ways to help your child know when you *mean business*.
  3. **Forge Win-Win Compromises:** Using your toddler’s sense of fairness (and a little

smart bargaining) to turn a *won't-won't* into a *win-win* ... so both you and your child can feel triumphant.

- 4. Enforce Mild Consequences: Clap-growl warnings and kind ignoring** are two persuasive ways to show your child that annoying behaviors are a dead-end street.

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## The Terrible *Almost-Twos* and Tantrummy Threes

Toddlers are fun with a capital *F*! They're lively, silly, and curious. But by 18 months an unmistakable shift occurs; they become more demanding, rigid, and aggressive.

No wonder a common question doctors hear at the two-year checkup is “How bad are the terrible twos going to be?” Nervous parents who have just narrowly survived the 18-month struggles worry, *Is this going to get even harder?*

Fortunately, a toddler's *screaming meanies* usually peak at 18 months. By the second birthday the “terrible twos” are almost over.

But even if your child is past his second birthday ... don't break out the champagne just yet. Shortly after the *third* birthday, many kids have a spurt of demanding, disrespectful behavior—the “tantrummy threes.”

Interestingly, older toddlers (three to four years of age) have a lot in common with ... tumultuous teens. Teens get *emotional whiplash* as they swing between wanting adult rights (“Everyone else can stay out late! ”) and

reverting to childish irresponsibility (“I hate cleaning my room!”). Similarly, older toddlers swing between demanding the rights of “big kids” (“Let *me* do it!”) and clinging to infantile excuses (“No, it’s yucky!”).

Your upset toddler is as much the victim of his intensity and immaturity as you are. But the skills I teach in this chapter will help you discourage his yellow-light behaviors ... fast!

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## **Yellow-Light Behaviors: Annoying Little Things Your Child Says and**

**Does**

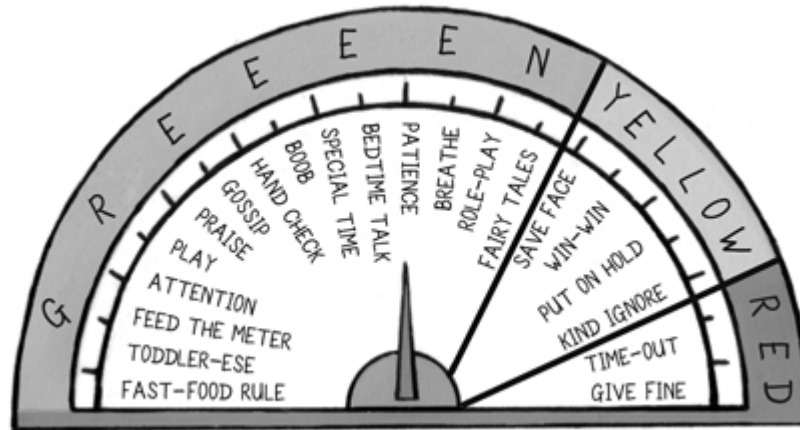


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In the next chapter, I’ll teach you how to put the kibosh on really bad (red-light) behaviors. But in this chapter we’ll be talking about the dozens of toddler shenanigans that are not terrible ... just terribly annoying. These are the yellow-light behaviors: whining, begging, clinging, pouting, interrupting, teasing, dawdling, grabbing, yanking, screeching, fussing, and mild defiance, to name a *few*!

Like a tiny pebble in your shoe, yellow-light behaviors can bug the heck out of you, especially if you are tired or stressed. Your child’s annoying and defiant behavior may call up bad memories from your own childhood, causing you to overreact and your temper to flare.

Fortunately, the four simple skills mentioned above can quickly turn these minor conflicts back into cooperation. Study them well. I predict you'll use them daily for years to come.



## Yellow-Light Skill #1: Connect with Respect

*It's not just what you say, it's how you say it.*

Many parents, wanting put a quick end to their child's whining and defiance, try to stop their behavior with:

- distraction—"Hey, look at this!"
- ridicule—"Don't be such a baby!"
- threats—"Stop now or I will stop you!"
- yelling—"Stoooooop! "

While these responses may seem like the fastest way to stop the nagging, they can often backfire and quickly escalate the fight from whining to screaming, spitting, and scratching.



Like the mom and dad in the next cartoon, we all want to reach the *treasure chest of good behavior* as fast as possible. But parents who think they can go straight for it risk falling right off the cliff. *Splat!* We can all have well-behaved, respectful children, but the only sure way of achieving that is to stay on the path of good parenting. This takes a bit more effort at first, but it will save you tons of time as your child's yellow-light behaviors end faster and occur less often.

As you can see in the cartoon, the journey to good behavior starts with two skills you've already learned: the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-ese. Echoing your child's feelings (using the Fast-Food Rule) with short phrases, repetition, and mirroring (the essence of Toddler-ese) often ends annoying behavior fast because it acknowledges the *underlying* reason for the child's misbehavior: frustration, fatigue, disappointment, boredom, etc.



**What It Is:** Connecting with respect means using the Fast-Food Rule +Toddler-ese Chapters (3 and 4) to show your child that you can see the world from her perspective and you really care about her feelings. Then, once she starts to settle, it's your turn to respectfully redirect her (by offering options, distracting, giving what she wants in fantasy, etc.).

**Best Used For:** Any age toddler.

**How to Do It:** Get a little *below* your child's eye level, to show respect, and use the Fast-Food Rule +Toddler-ese. If you're not sure what to say, just use one of these easy tricks (first described on [this page](#).)

- Be her “spokesperson”—say what you think she would if she could:

*Helen was busy cooking dinner when her two-year-old, Janie, came into the kitchen, dolls in tow, wanting her mom to play. Helen sweetly told her, “Not right now, honey, Mommy is making dinner.” But Janie was persistent and kept yanking on her mother’s dress. So Helen acted like Janie’s spokesperson:*

*“Janie says, ‘I’m mad ... mad ... mad!’ She says, ‘Play with me now!’ She says, ‘I want to play dolls with Mommy!’ ”*

- Be her “sportscaster”—narrate what you see:

*Had she wanted to, instead of speaking Janie’s words, Helen could have chosen the sportscaster technique:*

*“Janie’s brought her doll to Mommy. Her face is sad and she keeps pulling and pulling on Mommy’s dress!”*

**Key Point:** Janie’s mom does not *start* by saying “No!” or “Stop!” (even if it’s what she’s thinking). That would be like the fast-food order-taker blurting out, “Five dollars, drive up front” instead of first repeating the customer’s order.

Once your child starts to calm a bit, then it’s *your* turn.

*As soon as Janie stopped pulling on her dress, Helen said, “Good stopping, honey.*

*I know you want to play now, now, now!  
But I have to make dinner superfast, first.  
So you bring all your dolls and put them  
right here on your little table. Then, after  
dinner, we'll have fun playing dolls  
together."*



## Tips for What to Say *After* You Connect with Respect

Once your child starts to calm, it's your turn. There are several things you can do to help her get happy again or tell her what you need her to learn.

**Offer Options.** Kids love to choose. So if your child is insisting on using a breakable glass you might say, "No glass! No glass, sweetheart. Let's get one of your cool superhero cups. Which one has more supermojo, Spider-Man or Batman?"

If whining is a problem, you might say to your three-year-old, "Hillary says, 'Mommy *listen ... now!*' I know you want Mommy to listen, sweetheart. So, do you want to use your big-girl voice or a baby voice? You pick. But

my ears can't listen to that yucky whining voice. It's too yucky."

Give your tot many chances a day to pick what she wants and she'll give in much faster when you want her to go along with *your* choice.

**Give Her What She Wants *in Fantasy*.** When your tot can't get what she wants, at least spend a minute *pretending* she could (see the cartoon on [this page](#)). For example, if your three-year-old is whining for a doll in a store, say, "You l-o-v-e those dolls! I wish I could give you *a hundred* of them. One hundred dolls would be sooo much fun! We could cover your whole bed with them! Which ones would you pick? Would you give some to your friends, too?"

This may sound like a tease, but it's not at all. It's a fantastic way to make your child feel heard. Remember, more than anything in the world—including those dolls—your child wants your respect, love, and caring. Your willingness to play this little game is a huge consolation prize to her: I can't really give you what you want, but I *can* give it to you in *fantasy*. It will go a long way toward comforting her even though she doesn't actually get the thing she craves.

**Share Your Feelings with "You-I" Sentences.** Once the dust settles, *briefly* share your feelings with a "you-I" sentence (discussed on [this page](#)). That will help boost your child's ability to see things from *your* point of view. For example, frown, shake your head, and say, "When Sally throws flowers on the floor, it makes Mommy sad ... sad. Mommy says, 'No hurt the flowers!'"

**Offer a Distraction.** After using the Fast-Food Rule + Toddler-ese, acknowledging your child's feelings, help

her focus on something else.

*Maisy, 18 months, toddled over to the bookcase and began flinging books off the shelf. Her dad, Bryan, said, “No! That’s not nice!” Maisy looked right at him, smiled, then knocked a few more to the floor.*

*Bryan was tempted to yell, “No! No!” (the way his dad used to do), but then he remembered connecting with respect. So, in excited Toddler-ese he bubbled, “You want book! Books! Books!!” Maisy paused and Bryan continued. “You want books! Books!!!” Then as she began to quiet, he said, “But noooo! Be gentle! No throw! No throw!” Then Bryan offered a little distraction. His eyes widened with excitement and he whispered, “Psst! Hey, come quick! I have a special book we can read together! It’s FUN! It has a pussycat in it! ”*

**Teach Values.** When a three-year-old took a ball from her little sister and made her cry, her mother narrated back to the older girl her desire to take the ball, but then asked, lovingly: “Did you want to make your sister cry? Is that the kind of person you want to be?” The little girl shook her head “no.” And the mother continued, “Can you think of a way to make her happy?” The toddler returned the ball and the mom told her, “Hmmm. That was a good idea. That was exactly what she wanted to be happy!”

**Use Words of Criticism as “Reverse Praise.”** Praise tells your child the behavior you like. Criticism points out what you dislike, and it’s like *reverse praise*

because it uses the same rules you learned for giving your child compliments and encouragement:

- Criticize the behavior, not the child. Say, “No picking flowers” rather than “Bad boy.”
- Teach your child the results of his behavior: “Chasing the dog makes him scared and mad, and he might bite.”
- Gossip your disapproval to a stuffed animal or to Grandma on the phone. Gossiping dramatically boosts the attention your little one pays to your criticism:

*Jessica hated it when her 3-year-old shoved her 9-month-old, Camille, and then refused to apologize. It was futile trying to make Lucy say she was sorry. So instead, as soon as Lucy pushed Camille, Jessica would turn her back on Lucy and gossip to Camille (loud enough so her big sister could hear): “It makes you sad when Lucy pushes you,” Jessica said. “You say, ‘Pushing hurts! I don’t like it!’ But if Sister says she’s sorry, it will make Mommy very, very happy!”*

*Amazingly, Lucy began to say she was sorry. And when she did, Jessica would immediately turn to Lucy and quietly say, “Hey, nice*

*apology, honey. Thanks.” Then she would turn to Camille and whisper, “Camille, did you hear? Lucy said she’s sorry. Yea, Lucy! I like that.”*

*Finally, Jessica would toss out a tiny reward to both of them and*

*chirp, “Hey, come on, everybody,  
let’s go get some lemonade!”*

*When little Melodie kept forgetting to  
put her socks in the hamper, her  
mom, Marta, showed her how to  
make the dirty socks march  
themselves there ... and jump in.*

*Rick uses a “camp counselor” voice to  
avoid whining and delays when it’s  
time for his three-year-old twins,  
Bethany and Brittany, to prepare for  
bed. “Okay, all you rugrats,” he says  
enthusiastically, “it’s time for the  
thrillin’, chillin’ pajama race! Racers’  
pj’s on in one minute.... Start your  
engines! On your marks, get set, GO!  
Rrrrrrrrrrrrr!”*

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## Keep It Positive

You can often avoid power struggles with one simple trick: Tell your child what *to* do, rather than what *not* to do. For example, “Chairs are for sitting” rather than “Stop standing on the chair.” Or “Slow down, now!” versus “Don’t run!” Or “You usually keep your feet off the new sofa, but I guess today you forgot.” Correcting behavior with positive statements makes kids feel more respected.

Another way to keep it positive is to be a little playful. For the child who is dawdling when you need to rush, try whispering what you want her to do or challenge her to a race to see who can get shoes on fastest. (During the race, play the boob by



repeatedly dropping your shoes, so your child can win.) A fun way to help a child who has trouble making transitions is to make a trumpet sound to announce what's coming next.

Once you start thinking about how to get your message across effectively, you'll probably come up with dozens more ways that will make your rules seem more like play than like orders.

Sandwich your demands *between* two fun activities. For example, say, "Let's play with your trains. After that we can pick up your toys. Then it'll be time for a snack! What yummy-licious food should we eat for snack today?"

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**Role-Play or Tell a Fairy Tale to Illustrate Good Behavior.** The technique of **planting seeds of kindness** through the side door of your child's mind can also be used to curb annoying behaviors by teaching your tot a better way to act. Here's an example of how to use a little fairy tale to teach manners:

*Once upon a time, there was a really smart piggy princess, Penelope the pig. She loved to wear pink sneakers and to eat toast with cinnamon and sugar for breakfast. But whenever she wanted something, the little piggy always whined and hurt everyone's ears, so much that Mommy Pig had to put cotton in her ears and a big hat on her head so her ears wouldn't hurt from the little princess's sharp, whiny voice. [Imitate the whiny voice.]*

*Then one day, the little piggy's friend, Betty the bunny, taught her how to use a quiet-as-a-bunny voice when she wanted to ask for something. She said, "Penelope, try it this way and everyone will like the way you sound!" [Imitate the nice voice.] Penelope tried it that very day when she wanted to go outdoors—and it worked. Even though Penelope still didn't get everything she wanted every time she asked, Mommy Pig was so happy that Penelope had learned a nice bunny voice that she took her to the park and they played her favorite piggy game—rolling in the mud—and they lived happily ever after.*

*When Roarke, a proud little three-year-old, threw cards on the floor for the tenth time that morning, his mom, Amy, demanded, "Pick them up!" Roarke pleaded for help, but Amy refused. "You threw them. You pick them up." Roarke begged, "No! I can't! It's not fair! I need help!"*

*Now Amy had an escalating battle on her hands. But fortunately, she knew the way out. Amy saw that Roarke had "painted himself into a corner," so rather than confronting him with threats, she offered him a few words of understanding and a compromise: "You're mad! You hate picking cards up by yourself. You say, 'Please help. P-l-e-a-s-e!' You threw them, but you want me to help. Hmmm, okay, if you pick up the first one, I'll pick*

*up, hmmm, how many? Two? Three? How many do you think I should pick up?"*

By Roarke's fifth birthday, Amy can expect much more responsible behavior from him. But during the toddler years, her wise goal is to respectfully validate his feelings while reminding him that he's expected to make a few baby steps of cooperation.

The connect-with-respect approach will stop many, many irksome behaviors. But, if it's not doing the trick, try offering a **win-win compromise**. (Of course, if your tot's actions or attitude are *totally* bugging you, you can immediately administer a **mild consequence**; see [this page](#).)

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## The Ancient Art of Saving Face

Have you ever heard the term "saving face"? Here "face" means "self-respect." Saving face means allowing someone to keep his dignity, even when he doesn't get his way.

Ambassadors know that shaming and disrespect are so tough to take that they can even trigger a war! That's why master diplomats *always* help their opponents *save face*. They know that allowing dignity in defeat is important because it builds forgiveness and friendship.

Saving face is important to all of us, but it is superimportant to *primitive peoples* like our upset toddlers!

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## Yellow-Light Skill #2: Make Your Limits Clear and Consistent

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Your first job as a parent is to give your child love, food, and shelter. But the instant she starts toddling, a new task falls on your shoulders: *limit setting*.

Limits teach toddlers the difference between right and wrong, politeness and rudeness, safety and danger, and so on. In essence, they're the walls that you will use to guide your toddler down the path of life. You may be a parent who sets up strict limits (like very close walls) or loose limits (like walls that are far apart). But once you set the rules, don't expect your tot to immediately obey all of them. While your job is to *set* limits, your little friend's job is to *push* the walls (your limits) to see if you really mean them.

If you're consistent, your tot will soon give up and go along with your demands. But mushy limits often backfire and make kids defy us even more. They push until the "wall" topples over (in other words, we give in) or until the "wall" stops moving (we hold firm).



Setting clear limits is superimportant. You must raise your children with humility and kindness, but you also need courage and resolve. Your family is *not* a democracy! Start each new day with love, but don't cave in on important limits. When push comes to shove (and shove to bite), you must respectfully use your power to keep order.

Here are four tips for effective limit setting:

1. **Be reasonable.** Unrealistic expectations are a recipe for frustration. Remember, toddlers have limited impulse control, so remove dangers and temptations (like fragile items) and make your home fit your child, rather than vice versa.
2. **Set limits with a KISS (Keep it short and simple!).** Long sentences ("Debbie, come here, please. It's time to put your crayons away. I don't want to have to ask you again. Please

don't make me nag.") are too tough for your toddler's immature left brain. Simple statements work better ("Crayons stay in the den.").

- 3. Be consistent.** Consistency helps kids learn a clear sense of right and wrong. Of course, no one is 100 percent consistent. There will be times when you forget or get too busy to enforce a limit. Also, there will be times when your child is whinier than usual (because of being over-hungry, tired, sick, or having a tough day), and you will choose to bend the rules. But when you do break your own rules you should clearly state that you're making a temporary exception. ("You know the rule, we only eat in the kitchen. But today is special ... it's Daddy's birthday! So let's have a picnic in the living room. It will be fun, but we can only eat on the blanket.")
- 4. Avoid mixed messages.** Speaking too sweetly or smiling while you set a limit confuses kids. It unintentionally gives a green light to your toddler's annoying acts. If you want your child to know you mean business, crouch down (staying just a bit *above* your child's eye level) and give your message with a deep voice and a serious face.

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## Pick Limits You Can Enforce

Some limits are hard to enforce. For example, it may be impossible to make a child eat broccoli, poop on the potty, or overcome fears. Picking battles you can't win may challenge your child to be *more* rebellious ("You can't make me!"). So when you sense you're getting into a struggle that you can't win, it's time to switch from giving warnings

to using some good old charm, compromise, and ingenuity (discussed later in the chapter).

In truth, a bit of defiance is not so bad! Most parents want their kids to learn that being tenacious in their beliefs and skilled in their ability to persuade others is a good thing.

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## Yellow-Light Skill #3: Forging Win-Win Compromises



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### *Turning a won't-won't into a win-win.*

We're often told we should force our kids to obey. Sure, you *are* bigger and stronger, but trying to *crush* your child's acts of defiance can backfire, stunting her confidence or triggering her desire for *revenge*. Please remember, parental bullying is not a *win-win*—it's a *lose-lose*. Your child loses dignity and you hurt your relationship.

Your ultimate goal as a parent is not to win any one particular fight or another, but rather to win your child's love and respect for a lifetime. That's why, even when you disagree with her, it's best to acknowledge your tot's desire and then try to find a way you *both* can win!

In fact, even toddlers know that fairness is a two-way street: *You want this? Then give me that!* That's why little kids love win-win deals.

Sound hard? Actually, it's pretty easy ... and fun!

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## Baby Steps—Finding a Good Compromise ... One Step at a Time

Toddlers have trouble with giant leaps, but they're great at baby steps.

If you get into fights over tooth brushing, for example, you'll be much more successful if you break your goal into some smaller baby steps. For example, consider it a tiny success when your child lets you touch the toothbrush to his lips or teeth. Cheer, "Yea! All done. Gimme five! Let's go read some fun books!" Promptly reward this mini-cooperation with a quick dollop of fun. (I know you can't do a good cleaning in a second, but that's okay. It's a good baby step of progress.)

Over a few days, gradually increase the time you are touching to a fast count of three, and within days you'll be able to brush the teeth for a few seconds. Your next baby step is to increase the brushing to several seconds. Always end with a cheer and a little reward of fun ("feeding the meter").

But what if your toddler won't let you get a brush anywhere near his mouth? Don't fight! This is *not* a battle you can win. Instead, take even *smaller* baby steps and connect with respect. Aim for his "sweet spot" so he knows you really get his message: "No mouth ... *no* mouth!" And throw in some playing the boob. "Okay, you win! You always win! No more brush. Let's get pj's on. Oh, wait! I forgot. I have to brush your knee really fast. Let's count: One, two! All done! Uh-oh ... silly Mommy, I forgot. I have to brush your foot superfast too." (Throw in some extra boob fun by searching around for his



foot in his pockets, asking, “Hey, where’s your foot? Pleeese, help me find your foot!”) Then, when you’re finished, cheer, “Yea! All done! Let’s read a book.”

Now—this is important—practice this a few times every day, adding new baby steps little by little. “Okay, now the other knee. Now we brush this arm. Oh yeah, and that arm. And fingers. Now your thumb. Where’s your thumb? Other thumb. Ear. Other ear.” Briefly touch the brush to each place. Then say, “Yea! All done! Gimme a hard five!” And play the boob by howling and hopping in pretend pain when he does it. Within a week or two, you’ll be doing some top-notch tooth brushing!

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**Win-win compromise** is one of the top tools in this book. You’ll use it again and again during the toddler years—and beyond.

All over the world, people hash out agreements by hard bargaining. Haggling over a price feels foreign to many Americans—we like straight talk—but toddlers *love* to negotiate. (Many of them could bargain the pants off a used-car salesman!) They are naturally good at bargaining tactics like begging (“Please? P-l-e-a-s-e!!!!”), exaggeration (“You *never* let me!”), pouty protests (“You’re not fair!”), and noticing inconsistency (“But you let *her* do it!”).

And they use these tools of persuasion to get what they want ... every single day.

*Whoa*, you might be thinking, *doesn’t compromising mean caving in or spoiling my child? Shouldn’t I demand obedience?*

Of course, *always* giving in could spoil a child. But *demanding* obedience—“Because I say so!”—actually

ends up teaching kids bad lessons (*what you think is unimportant* and *might makes right*). On the other hand, finding reasonable compromises teaches kids to be more fair and flexible.

Remember, you're strong and smart and your toddler is weak, short, slow, and can't speak very well. So he feels like he is losing over and over and over again. Win-win compromises will teach him that both you *and* he can be winners, that people who love each other can each give in *a bit* and still be strong.

If you want your child to grow up fair-minded and respectful, the best way to teach him is by *your* example.

**What It Is:** Finding a win-win compromise is a big part of the ancient art of negotiating: "I'll trade you one of these for two of those." It shows fairness, respect, and good listening. Most kids do this automatically, from a one-year-old trading kisses to a teenager negotiating for a bigger allowance.

Win-win compromises give kids practice at being fair and teach them that solutions can be found that allow both parties to give in a little without losing dignity.

Some parents ask, "Why should I compromise? I give my child plenty! She isn't running the show! " You're correct to expect your child to be more grateful by five or six. But younger children have not yet mastered the fine points of civilization, like appreciating someone's generosity ... especially when they're upset. (Even many adults have trouble with *that!*)

**Best Used For:** Toddlers age two and up.

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## **The 90-10 Compromise: Your Toddler's Idea of What's Fair**

We all want to be treated fairly ... especially toddlers! They can deal with frustrations and demands much better when they feel like they're getting a fair deal. (On the other hand, unfair treatment can make resentment harden into bitter memories and ruin relationships.)

But who's to say what is fair?

Most grown-ups consider a 50-50 compromise to be pretty fair: half for you, half for me. But that's not the way your toddler sees things. His idea of a reasonable compromise is probably around 90-10. (You get a tiny piece and he gets the 90 percent!)

Now, this may sound unfair to you, but take a moment to see things through your little friend's eyes and you'll see that for him an even split feels terrible. That's because toddlers tend to focus on what they *don't* get. (*Hey, I want that, too!*) Their primitive, cave-kid minds are kind of greedy and have trouble sharing.

Clever parents know that if they let their tot win many "small" struggles (things they really don't care about), their kids give in more easily on the issues they do care about.

Of course, there are some situations where you will not be able to compromise—situations that involve danger, aggression, or important family rules. But you'll have fun using the win-win approach for the dozens of situations each day when you *can* compromise.

At first your compromises will be 90-10 in your toddler's favor. But, once you've used this system for a while, you'll gradually teach him that sometimes he has to give in more. As he grows

older, you'll get him to make 70-30 deals ... and eventually even 50-50 compromises.

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**How to Do It:** The win-win technique can be boiled down to three easy steps:

**Step 1.** Connect with respect. Use the FFR + Toddler-ese to acknowledge what your child wants.

**Step 2.** Make a “crummy” offer. Offer a 90-10 compromise (where *you* get 90 percent and your child gets only 10 percent of what she wants). You offer a “bad deal” so your tot can immediately reject it. Sound odd? It’s actually one of the oldest bargaining tricks in the world! You make an offer you’re prepared to allow her to reject so that she can feel like a tough negotiator, like she’s driving a *hard bargain*.

**Step 3.** “Reluctantly” give in. When she refuses, come back with an offer that gives her *most* of what she wants ... she gets 90 percent and you get 10 percent.

Act like she’s the toughest negotiator you’ve ever seen.

Pretend to be a bit reluctant to agree

(“Okay ... okay ... it’s not fair, but I guess you win.”).

This makes your child feel like a *winner*—like she’s getting the best deal possible. (Ham it up a little!)

Imagine you want your child, Sam, to eat ten peas and he refuses, demanding instead his favorite crackers. Here’s how you might put the 90-10 compromise idea into action:

**Step 1.** Connect with respect: “Sammy says, ‘No, *no!* No peas!’ Sammy says ‘no peas!’ Sammy wants crackers!”

**Step 2.** Make a “crummy” offer: Remove two peas from the plate but keep eight in front of him and say, “Okay, okay. You win! You can have crackers, but first you have to eat this many peas. Okay? Come on, eat them up!”  
Sammy turns up his nose saying, “No!”

**Step 3.** Now give in 90 percent ... and seem defeated: Pout and wave your hands (as if to indicate *I give up*). Then say, “Okay! Sammy wins! Sammy wins! I *never* win! You win a *hundred* times! You say, ‘No peas!’ Okay! Here are your crackers....” But a second after showing him the crackers, take them back and say, “Uh-oh! I forgot. First, eat just one teeny, tiny, baby pea ... then, you get a bunch of crackers! ”

All good negotiators know when to *talk* ... and when to *walk*. If your toddler totally refuses your best offer, turn your back and ignore him for a minute before trying again.

For example, if Sammy totally refuses to eat any peas (or even to touch one!), acknowledge his refusal but then have him leave the table so that he doesn’t get to eat the food he does want. This puts a pause on the negotiations—so *you* can save face—and helps him see that stubbornness won’t get him what he wants.

“You say *no* peas! Not even *one*! That makes Mommy sad, but okay ... you win. So no crackers for now and you go play; I’ll check on you in a little bit. Bye-bye.”

Speed your child’s learning by giving many opportunities to compromise. For example, offer peas a few days in a row, even during lunch. Most kids will eventually accept a 90-10 deal. And, gradually, life will get easier as your tot starts to like making “win-win” deals with you. This may seem like a big effort, but all your

extra work now will soon lead to you having a happier—and fairer—child.

*Jack, age three, hated shoes and socks but loved sandals. That was okay with his mom, Shaya, on most days, but this day it was raining badly. After his mom's Toddler-ese failed to persuade him to put on shoes, Shaya offered a "crummy" 50-50 compromise: "Wear the shoes now, and you can have the sandals after school." Jack flat-out refused: "No way!"*

*Then Shaya sat on the floor and pretended Jack was just too tough a bargainer for her. "Okay! You win! You win! You always win!" Then she offered another deal: Jack could either wear one shoe and one sandal now and put the other shoe on at school, or he could wear sandals to the car and put shoes on when the car arrived at the school. He accepted the latter and Shaya made a little pen check on his hand for being so helpful.*

I find 90-10 compromises are a big help when I'm examining unhappy toddlers. For example, I start by "losing" several times in a row. With the child on his mom's lap and me kneeling just below eye level (to be a little less threatening), I beg for something he has: Putting my hand out, I plead, "Please, can I have your shoe? P-l-e-a-s-e?"

When he refuses, I continue playing the boob by sounding even more pitiful. "Okay, but can I have your teddy? Please? Pleeeeeease?" When he refuses again I say, "Okay! You win. You *always* win me. But what about your shirt? I really, really *need* it! Can I have your shirt? Pleeeeeease?"

I usually ask for several things in succession, sulking and pouting with each rejection (“You win, you always win!”). By then, even the most reluctant child feels like a winner: safe, strong, and triumphant! (And besides, they think it’s kind of funny.)

Next, I ignore the child for a minute while I talk to the parent. By this time, the child knows he’s “beaten me” so many times that it’s only fair to let me win a tiny bit! After a few minutes, I turn back to the child and ask for something very simple: “Can I listen to your *shoe*?” Most kids don’t resist this. Then, I immediately reward the cooperation by letting him hold one of my little toys.



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## Put Annoying Behavior “On Hold” ... with Patience-Stretching

I love persistent kids. But, if your tenacious tyke runs over your rules like a steamroller, try this little twist on patience-stretching to put her annoying behavior on hold:

First, practice patience-stretching ([this page](#)) several times to teach your toddler that when you hold up a finger and say, “Wait! Wait!” she has to be patient.

Now you are ready to use this great technique to discourage her pestering. For example, your child is nagging you to let her play with her ball, but you don’t want her to play with it inside the house:

1. Connect with respect: Use the FFR + Toddler-ese to acknowledge her feelings.

***“You want! You want the ball! You say, ‘Mine! Mine!! Give it to me!’ You really, really want it!”***

2. Next, *almost* give her what she wants ... but then *stop and turn away*: Reach for the ball, but then suddenly act like you need to do something important. Then ignore her for five seconds as you pretend to do something else.

***“Sure, honey. I’ll get it. But, uh-oh! Wait! Wait! One second, one second!”***

3. Now, turn back and again *begin* to get the ball, but suddenly stop and tell her you remembered you “can’t” give it to her ... but you can offer a good compromise. It sounds like this:

***“Good waiting, sweetheart, here’s the ball.” Then, suddenly look surprised and exclaim, “But ... wait! Wait! I almost forgot, no balls in the house ... noooo balls. I’m so sorry, honey, but you know the rule. We can play with the ball outside or we can play with your dolls inside. Which one would you like?”***

With an older toddler, you might use a timer:



*For five miserable minutes, three-and-a-half-year-old Jackson nagged his dad to play. Craig resisted because he was making dinner. Then he remembered the tip of putting whining “on hold”: “Okay, you win. You win. I’ll play a tiny bit,” he said. But just as Craig started to leave the stove, he put up one finger and announced, “Wait! Wait!!” as if he suddenly remembered something.*

*He reached for the timer, set it for twenty seconds, and said, “I’m sooo sorry, Jackster! I forgot ... I have to do one more thing. Mr. Dinger will ding really soon and then we can play and have fun!”*

*Jackson paused his rant and waited quietly. The instant the timer went off, Craig clapped and said, “Good waiting. Now tell me what you want.”*

*“Play with me,” Jackson said in a calmer tone, holding two cars in his hand.*

*Craig chirped, “Sure, buddy.” He sat down with his son, but a few seconds after starting to play Craig suddenly stopped, saying, “Oh, wait! Wait! Oh, silly Daddy, I almost forgot I have to make the salad. Just one more minute.” And he got up and set the timer again.*

*Craig briefly worked on the salad until the dinger rang again, then stopped to offer a compromise: “Good waiting. We can play for one little*

*minute right now, or we can play for five big minutes later if you wait nicely while Daddy makes salad.”*

Just like the parents in the cartoon on [this page](#), this *long way around* will require some extra effort from you, but you’ll find that over time, it will keep you from *falling off the cliff* into endless conflicts and fights.

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## **Reverse Psychology: Get Your Child to Do Something ... by Telling Her *Not* to Do It**

From 18 months on, our little cave-kids love to defy us. It makes them feel powerful and independent. **Reverse psychology** is a playful way to take advantage of this natural tendency to rebel by telling your toddler she can’t (or shouldn’t) do something that you really want her to do. Then she can defy your “order” and still end up doing exactly what you *wanted* her to do in the first place.... Everybody wins!

For example, if your three-year-old hates kissing you, surprise her by ordering her *not* to kiss you. (Ham it up a little.... Don’t sound serious.) Cover your face with your hands and say in a pretend-begging voice, “Pleeeeee don’t kiss me! No, no! Don’t do it!” Then as she “defies you” to give you kisses, act unable to push her away, and complain, “Bleah ... bleah. Yucky!” as she gleefully plants hugs and kisses all over you.

Reverse psychology doesn't teach kids to be disobedient. It's really just another way of playing the boob. Toddlers know it's a game, that's why they love it. They get to be their own boss, defy you a bit, and still end up cooperating. It's great!

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Finally I ask him if I can to listen to his stomach, his knee (for another little joke), and then his heart.

The idea of negotiating with your toddler may seem odd, and of course you can't compromise on some issues (running into the street, slapping a friend, etc.). But you'll be amazed how often negotiating can smooth over the myriad minor troubles that arise in a day. And by the time your tot is a teen (and a *truly* wily opponent), you'll be a world-class expert on negotiations and finding respectful win-win compromises!

Communicating with respect, setting limits, and finding win-win compromises can stop many annoying behaviors. But if you've done your best and your child is still defying you, it's time for you to use the next tool: **mild consequences.**



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## Yellow-Light Skill #4: Mild Consequences



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*How to deliver clear warnings ... and mild penalties.*

If all else fails and your child's yellow-light behaviors are just not stopping, it may be time for a mild consequence. Here are the two that I use the most: **clap-growl warnings** and **kind ignoring**.

### Clap-Growl Warnings: Get Your Child's Attention Fast

If your toddler continues the annoying behavior even after you respectfully acknowledge her and offer an option or compromise, try clap-growl. Even a one-year-

old will get the message that you're out of patience and a real penalty is coming if she doesn't stop ... fast.



For example, if your two-year-old threatens to dump spaghetti on her head, what do you think would stop her faster: saying “No” with a big grin on your face, or frowning, clapping your hands hard, and growling, “Nooooo!”?



**What It Is:** All kids (even uncivilized tots) understand that a few hard claps and a low grrrrrrrrrowl mean “*Stop ... now ... or you won't like what happens next!*” (Bonus: A few hard claps also help us vent a bit of anger, without resorting to spanking or yelling.)

I admit this sounds, well, undignified. But as you know by now, kids who are upset rely on their right brain, which is not good at words but is great at understanding non-verbal communication, including voice, facial expressions, and gestures. Clap-growl warnings can quickly connect with upset toddlers and

often stop annoying behaviors in seconds!

**Best Used For:** All toddlers, starting at 9 months.

**How to Do It:**

Step 1: Clap. Clap your hands three to four times, hard and fast. (It's meant to be a little startling.) As you clap, you can stand or kneel, but you must remain a bit *above* your child's eye level (to emphasize your authority).

Step 2: Growl. Put a scowl on your face and make a deep, rumbling growl. If it works and your child stops quickly, immediately do a little FFR + Toddler-ese, and then feed the meter a bit (with hugging, attention, play, or playing the boob) to show you appreciate your little one's cooperation.

*Warning:* The first time you growl, your child may smile or even growl back! Don't worry. That may mean your growl was too *sweet* (she thinks it's a game) or she wants you to smile ... so you won't be mad. Simply answer her growl with a couple of **double takes** (see box below) and *then* growl again.

*“Benjamin knows I’m serious when I growl,” says Claudia. “I start out with ‘Gentle, gentle’ or ‘Use your words.’ But if that doesn’t work I rumble out a growl and it works immediately. He knows I’m done putting up with his behavior. I feel like a mama bear teaching her cub. In fact, now when he’s mad he growls instead of biting.”*

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## Do a Double Take to Show You're Serious

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**What It Is:** A double take is a neat little trick that emphasizes to your child that you're not kidding around.

**How to Do It:** After a few seconds of clap-growling, raise a finger (as if to indicate "Wait a second") and look away for two seconds, keeping your finger up the whole time. Then, look back, growl, scowl, and repeat your message. ("No! Stop *now!*")

I recommend adding a double take to your growl if:

- Your child ignores your clap-growl.
- You and your child are stuck glaring at each other (long glaring often backfires and pushes kids to be *more* defiant).
- You want to emphasize your frustration and underscore that you are the boss.

A double take can also help if you accidentally smile while growling (even misbehaving toddlers can look so cute!). Bite your lip, hold up a warning finger, and look away for a moment—to regain your composure—then turn back and say in a serious voice, "I'm *not* happy! I say, *No!* No putting jelly in your hair."

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I often use clap-growl with young children who ignore my kind requests to stop. I clap my hands hard and *g-r-*

*o-w-l* a warning deep in my throat. That usually stops them fast ... the way we immediately slow down when a police car's light flashes in our rearview mirror!

As your child matures, you'll growl less. But you'll probably continue clapping and/or using a silent cue like a frown, raised eyebrow, or straight index finger as a warning that your patience is up.

***“When my mom got angry with me, she would glare, raise her right eyebrow, and then hold up a warning finger. I quickly learned to stop—pronto—or else I wasn't going to like what came next.”***

***—Hillary about her mother, Mary,  
who raised seven kids***

***When 18-month-old Aaron was about to whack his pal Tomas over a disputed toy, Aaron's mom, Joy, frowned, stomped her foot, shook her head, and growled. Then she waved her hands as if to indicate “The deal's off! ” and gruffly said, “Mad! Mad!!!! Aaron mad!! Aaron says, ‘No, Tomas! No truck!’ Aaron mad ... mad!!”***

***In an instant, Aaron lowered his hand. Joy said, “No hit. Good boy! Come on, kids ... let's get some juice!” Later in the day, when tempers cooled, Joy “gossiped” about the incident to Aaron's teddy: “Mr. Teddy, I said, ‘No hit, no hit!’ And Aaron stopped fast. Aaron was a very good listener! ”***

When your child heeds your warning, reward him right away with a smidge of attention, praise, or play. This teaches him, *You be good to me and I'll be good to you*. However, if his annoying behavior continues, it's time for a slightly stronger consequence (kind ignoring).



## Kind Ignoring: Give Your Tot a Little Cold Shoulder

When your child is scared or hurt, you should do everything you can to soothe her. But there are two situations where your attention actually prolongs upsets:

- With a child whose tears keep flowing because she's in front of an audience—*the drama queen scenario*.
- With superstubborn kids who are so *proud* that they're forced to continue their protests as long as you are watching them.

In both of these situations, you need to remove the “spotlight” (your attention) and do some kind ignoring.

**What It Is:** Kind ignoring is giving your child a teensy *cold shoulder* to nudge her back to cooperation.

Now, when I say “ignore” I don't mean you should be rude or cruel or turn your back on really bad behavior. This type of ignoring also shouldn't be done when your child is frightened, hurt, or genuinely sad. But when you feel your child is being unreasonable and stubborn, a little kind ignoring can be perfect.

**Best Used For:** Toddlers of any age.

*Sadie, 15 months old, found a fun thing her voice could do: screech! She blasted her new sound whenever she wanted attention. “At first we rushed right over,” explained her dad, Bill. “But we soon realized that Sadie had learned to do this for any little frustration.” I suggested to Bill that rather than hurrying over, he try kind ignoring.*

*The next day, when Sadie screeched to get a book, Bill narrated her strong feelings by jabbing the air with his finger, pointing to the book, and exclaiming, “You want book! Sadie wants book, now! But no screech! Ouch! Ouch! (He covered his ears with his hands and shook his head.) Indoors voice, please!”*



*When Sadie continued screeching, Bill frowned and continued, “You want book. Book, book, book! But ... ouch! Ouch! That hurts my ears! You find your nice voice ... and I’ll be right back.”*

*Bill turned his back briefly, pretending to be busy. “It was amazing,” he reported later. “After ten seconds of shrieking even louder, she just stopped and said nicely, ‘Book ... book!’ And I immediately got the*

*book and sat down with her to reward her for using her indoors voice.”*

**How It’s Done:** Kind ignoring has three steps. You should expect that it will take a little practice for you to get the hang of it ... and for your tot to realize that whining doesn’t work anymore.

**Step 1: Connect with respect.** Narrate her actions and feelings like a sportscaster (don’t forget to aim for her sweet spot). “You’re sad ... sad ... *sad!* Your face is sad and you’re *mad!* You want to jump on the table, but Daddy said, ‘No, no, *no!*’ So now you’re on the floor crying.”

**Step 2: Lovingly turn away.** If your tot continues whining, withdraw your attention with kindness. “You’re crying and *mad!* Daddy loves you so much, you go ahead and cry and I’ll be right back!” Then walk to the other side of the room or sit right by your child, but pretend not to look at her.  
Now act busy for twenty seconds (not so much to make her panic but enough to make your point).

**Key point:** As soon as your child stops the annoyance, promptly return, lovingly echo her feelings again, and then offer *your* message of reassurance, explanation, etc. Finally, feed the meter (hug, give attention, play, or play the boob) for a minute to reward her cooperation.

**Step 3: Return ... and try again.** If your child continues the yellow-light behavior, return when the twenty seconds are up and repeat steps 1 and 2 a few times until your uncivilized friend starts to calm down.  
If your child is particularly stubborn, her crying may persist despite several attempts at kind

ignoring. In that case, turn your back for a longer time—a minute or two—until she quiets. Once she calms, return and try to engage her in some play. (Don't be surprised if she resists at first. She may need to ignore you for a few minutes to save her pride.)

If the misbehavior persists, or escalates, despite kind ignoring, you are now in a red-light situation. This requires a stronger “take-charge” consequence, like time-out, described in the next chapter.

Other behaviors that warrant a “take-charge” consequence include any actions that are dangerous or aggressive or that break an important family rule. I discuss all of these situations and how to deal with them in the next chapter.

*Warning:* When you first try kind ignoring the pestering may temporarily get worse before it gets better. Psychologists call this an *extinction burst*. Your child thinks, *Hmmm ... whining always worked before. Maybe Mom just didn't hear me. I better follow her into the next room and yell louder so she hears me!* But stick with it and you'll soon see big improvements.

7



Red-Light Behaviors:  
How to Put the  
Brakes on Bad  
Behavior

*“Spare the discipline, spoil the child.”*

—T. Berry Brazelton

### Main Points:

- All toddlers do “bad” things ... sometimes.
- Acts that are dangerous or aggressive or that break important family rules are red-light behaviors.
- Red-light behaviors require prompt and clear limit setting.
- Put the brakes on your toddler’s red-light deeds with a “take-charge” consequence: **time-out** or **giving a fine**.
- Time-outs work the best when started early and done exactly right.
- For older toddlers, giving a fine (losing a valued privilege or possession) is a useful penalty.

- Effective discipline does not require resorting to spanking, intimidation, or humiliation.

When we respectfully reward good acts and punish bad behaviors, our kids learn the rules ... fast! So, now that you know how to boost good (green-light) behaviors and reduce annoying (yellow-light) ones ... you're ready to learn how to stop the totally unacceptable (red-light) ones.



## Three Red-Light Behaviors You Must Stop ... Fast

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There are three types of bad behaviors that go beyond the “annoying” category and need to be stopped in their tracks.

- **Dangerous acts:** Running into the street, grabbing hot coffee, playing with knives—any behavior that puts your child (or someone else’s) in harm’s way.
- **Aggression:** Hitting, spitting, kicking, biting, and other mean acts.
- **Breaking key family rules:** These are rules *you* get to choose. Some of them might fit just about all families (like no drawing on the walls), but others vary from home to home, for example, no eating in the living room, no touching the computer, no calling your brother an idiot.

All of these behaviors demand swift action, often with a “take-charge” consequence: time-out or giving a fine.

Stopping bad behaviors doesn’t mean rolling up your sleeves and fighting your child *mano a mano*. Like the

world's top ambassadors, you can stop most conflicts by establishing clear consequences in a respectful manner. So put away your boxing gloves, and read on to sharpen up your diplomatic skills.

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## Flash a “Red Light” on Bad Behaviors

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*Susan is at her wit's end. Her 18-month-old, Shane, used to be so easy. But now he gets furious when he can't have his way. "Lately Shane hits when he's mad. Distraction doesn't work anymore. I don't want to spank him, but what should I do when he looks right at me ... and disobeys?"*

If you've mastered the yellow-light techniques, but your primitive little buddy is still plowing right through the limits, you must either fix the problem that's making your child so ornery (see avoiding problem situations on [this page](#)) or back up your words with a clear negative consequence: punishment.

Punishment is merely a negative response that tells a child when she has crossed a boundary. In truth, it's your responsibility to take control of her behavior when she is unable (too upset or too mischievous) to respect your rules. Remember, this is not something you are doing to your child; she is the one who's bringing the consequences upon herself.

## Why Good Kids ... Do Bad Things

It's hard to be good *all* the time ... even for adults! No wonder our little tykes have days when their impulsive,

primitive nature takes control and makes them do things they shouldn't. Here are some of the reasons why good kids do bad things:

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## The Classical Roots of Discipline and Punishment

Parents often find it eye-opening to discover that the word “discipline” comes from the Latin verb *discere*, meaning “to learn,” and the word “punish” comes from the ancient Greek word for “payment” or “penalty.”

Some parenting experts say that discipline and punishment are harsh and demeaning, that they consist of big people forcing their will on small people. I understand their point. Too many adults try to stop their child's misbehavior in a rough and insulting way. However, when done respectfully, discipline and punishment are a positive experience for little children because they help them to learn. They back up our limits with consistency and reassure our kids that we're in charge. In my experience, children who know that their parents won't allow their “wild side” to rule the family or put them in danger grow up healthier and happier.

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- **Toddlers can't explore without testing the rules.** Your tot is an ace explorer—persistent and gutsy. His job is to touch, bang, and pull everything. That is annoying to you because it makes him constantly push the limits. However, from his point of view, you are irritating because you're trying to stop his greatest joy—discovery.



- **Toddlers are impulsive.** You can't expect an 18-month-old, or even a three-year-old, to use good judgment (like not eating medicine, or holding hands in a parking lot). Toddlers live in the "now," and their immature brains don't focus much on the consequences.
- **Our threats paint kids into a corner.** Trying to force defiant tykes to obey often backfires. Our pressure makes them feel painted into a corner, unable to give in without feeling humiliated. That's why threats often trigger *more* defiance (and hurt the relationship we work so hard to build), especially in toddlers who are temperamentally challenging and stubborn to begin with.
- **Our limits are inconsistent and confusing.** Mushy limits invite kids to push against them. (Your child thinks, *Sometimes this is allowed and sometimes not. Let's see if I can do it now.*) They get especially confused when our limits make no sense ... to them: *What? I love jumping on the sofa more than anything in the world—and you want to stop me? Don't you love me anymore?*
- **Our rules are unrealistic.** Many toddlers act "bad" if our expectations are too high. Would you demand good table manners from a six-month-old? Of course not! Well, similarly, it's unrealistic to expect an 18-month-old to share, a two-year-old to never lie, or a three-year-old to sit still in church.
- **Toddlers are overexposed to aggression.** Little kids love to imitate, and that includes bad stuff like shouting and hitting. Make it your job to protect your child from seeing violence on TV, in your community, and between the members of your family.

- **Toddlers have too many stresses.** Stress can turn a *kind kid* into a *cave-kid*. When your child is acting up, ask yourself: Is my child hungry? Bored? Tired? Overloaded with rules? Sick? Teething? Surrounded by temptations? Cooped up? Wild from something in his diet (cola/chocolate/iced tea/sugar/decongestants)? Jealous? Are there extra stresses at home (new baby, new sitter)?
- **You're giving too little play and attention.** Busy parents accidentally teach their little ones to be defiant or disrespectful by ignoring them when they are good. Thomas Gordon in his book *Parent Effectiveness Training* calls this the Law of the Soggy Potato Chip (just as kids would rather have soggy potato chips than none at all, toddlers would rather be yelled at than ignored).

When your child is engaged in red-light behaviors, there are two “take-charge” consequences you can use to put on the brakes: time-out and giving a fine. Let’s look at each of them in detail....



## Time-Out: A Parenting Classic

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Time-out is a classic discipline tactic. It is *not* a sign of failure—yours or your child’s. Toddlers are *supposed* to push the limits. But we need to be ready to give clear signals when they push too far.

Toddlerhood is the most dangerous period of childhood—at least until your child gets his first dirt bike! And it is *your* job to teach your tot to be careful.

Time-outs train toddlers to take our words seriously and to heed our warning *before* a catastrophe occurs.

Take running away from you in a parking lot, for example. Perhaps your child dashes off the instant you start putting groceries in the trunk. Of course you'll run after him, but that may make him run even *faster* ... thinking it's a game of chase. What you really want is a special signal that your child always listens to, one that means *Stop, now! Or you won't like what happens next.* Time-out is the way of teaching your child that your warnings must be heeded.

During the months after a child's first birthday, I recommend doing time-outs several times a week. That helps your tot learn your *I'm not kidding!* signal. Your serious tone of voice, disapproving frown, and counting to three will make him remember, *Uh-oh ... when my mom counts like that I always get grounded... I better stop!*

**What It Is: Time-out** is a “take-charge” consequence where you *very briefly* deprive your child of two precious things: freedom and the privilege of being with you.

**Best Used For:** All toddlers! (I advise teaching **time-outs** at the one-year checkup and strongly recommend that parents use them many times over the following months.)

**How to Do It:** Time-out requires one piece of equipment—a timer—and has three simple steps (Note: For dangerous or really bad behavior you can skip right to step 3):

**Step 1: One last warning.** Use clap-growl and connect with respect one last time, to get your child's attention and show that you care. If the

problem stops, silently congratulate yourself—you sidestepped a conflict.

For example, if your two-year-old is having a meltdown at the dinner table because you won't let him play with the sugar bowl, clap-growl, frown, and shake your head “no” (even do a double take). Once you have his attention say, “Mad. *Mad*. Jamie's *mad* at Daddy. He's mad, mad, mad! Jamie wants the sugar, now!

But ... no sugar! *No* sugar! But you know what? Daddy's gonna let you hold something else. Do you want to hold a piece of bread or your police car?”

**Step 2: Count to three.** If your child ignores your warning, put on a serious face and *calmly* echo his desire; then say “No,” and count to three. (Wait one to two seconds between each number and count on your fingers too, so your child can see and hear you at the same time. “Jamie says, ‘Sugar, now!’ but Daddy says, ‘No way.’ Does Jamie want a time-out to get calm again? One ... two ... three ...”)

You want your child to learn that the time-out is something he's doing to himself (not something you're doing to be mean). Think of it like a sports time-out ... a short break in the action: “I guess you want a little time to cool off.”

If your child stops misbehaving before you get to three, *don't* do a time-out. Reward his cooperation with some FFR and feeding the meter with a little time-in, playing the boob, or a hand check. Later on, compliment his good listening with a bit of praise and gossip, and a little bedtime sweet talk before you turn out the lights.

**Step 3: Put your child in isolation.** Now the time for talking is over. Calmly lead him (or, if you have to, carry him) to the time-out place: “Come with Daddy so you can get calm again.”

*Twenty-two-month-old Phoebe loved her mom’s fancy high-heel shoes. Several times a day she begged to put them on. But her mom, Charlene, was afraid they’d be ruined.*

*After learning about *The Happiest Toddler*, Charlene tried the new approach. She narrated her daughter’s desire four to five times (reflecting enough of her emotion to hit the “sweet spot”). Then she offered a solution: Phoebe’s choice of three other pairs of shoes. But Phoebe’s eyes were locked on to her favorite ones as she wailed pitifully, “Choos! Choos!” over and over ... and over!*

*After 20 seconds of connecting with respect, Charlene changed her tactic to kind ignoring. Energetically pointing to the shoes, she exclaimed, “Shoes! Shoes! You want shoes. You want shoes now! But Mommy says, ‘No! No shoes!’ So you go ahead and cry—I love you so much—and I’ll be back in just a minute.”*

*Phoebe got so mad she gave a glass-shattering shriek and started to knock things off the table. At that point, Charlene decided that Phoebe was breaking an important family rule and needed to be stopped immediately before she broke something. So she*

*clapped her hands hard a few times to get Phoebe's attention, and said, "No throwing! No throwing!" And she carried Phoebe to her room and set the timer for an immediate time-out.*

## Time-Out: The Basic Rules

Does the idea of giving a time-out make you nervous? Most of us feel awkward when we do something new (like the first time we fed or bathed our baby). Here are some tips to help it go well:

**Start with *Mini Time-Outs*.** The first few times you use this approach just move your child to the next room.

Imagine your child is hitting the window with a toy. Say, "No! No! Windows are not for hitting. Give me the toy." If he refuses, count: "One ... two ... three ..." If he still refuses, quietly take his hand and lead him to another room. Then say, "No hitting windows!" and walk away—with the door wide open.

Don't worry about making him stay put. You just want him to see that ignoring you will lead to a moment of isolation for him.

However, if he goes right back to banging the window, calmly count to three and do a regular time-out.

**Pick Your Time-Out Place Ahead of Time.** A chair or bottom step may work with some tots. But young ones, and feisty toddlers of all ages, usually need to be confined—in a playpen if they are under age two, or gated into their bedroom if they are over age two (see [Time-Outs Don't Work Without \*Time-Ins\*](#)).

Of course, you must make sure there are no breakables, hard surfaces, or sharp corners in the time-out place.

(Some parents choose to sit their toddlers on their laps and hold them firmly as a type of restrictive punishment. That's fine *if* it works for you. But I find that for most toddlers, especially spirited ones, this can turn the time-out into a power struggle.)

**Buy a Timer with a Loud Ring.** Timers are great to let both you and your child know when the time-out is over. Keep it where you can get to it quickly. Introduce the timer to your tot as Mr. Dinger and let him hear what it sounds like. Explain that Mommy will let him out of his room when Mr. Dinger goes “ring-ring.”

**Make the Time-Out Last One Minute per Year of Age.** A time-out for your one-year-old would be one minute, two minutes for your two-year-old, etc. I recommend that you always use the timer. It allows your child to hear when the time-out is over and it also gives you a good answer when he begs to come out. (“It’s not up to me, it’s up to Mr. Dinger.”)

**When Time-Out Is Over *It’s Over!*** When the time’s up, let your child go free. I like to ask, “Are you ready to come out now?” Even if he says “No!” I open the door, as long as he is not still tantrumming. (“Okay, you can stay if you want, but the time-out is over.”) If he is still carrying on, acknowledge that he is very angry and that it sounds like he needs some extra time-out to find his calm.

Once the fit is over and your child is free to go, don’t talk about the time-out for thirty minutes or so. Just join him in some play or give a bit of attention. It’s time to

let go of your anger and allow your heart to forgive. If *he's* still mad, connect with respect, but then let him be on his own. Many kids need to sulk a little after being punished.

*“You hate time-out ... you say no time-out, Mommy. I know you hate it, but Sammy needed a little help to find his calm again. Do you want a hug? No? Okay, you’re still mad, mad, mad! I love you, sweetheart, and I’ll check on you in a couple of minutes.”*

Awhile after a time-out, express your regret for having had to do it. “Mommy knows you don’t like time-out. You were *mad*. I’m sorry. Next time, I hope we can *play* instead of you needing a time-out.” Later in the day, talk to him about what happened and gossip to his toys about the incident (and the lesson you want him to learn). At bedtime, reinforce the lesson by telling a fairy tale about a little bunny who misbehaved and what happened to him.

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## **Time-Outs Don’t Work Without *Time-Ins***

If time-out doesn’t seem to be working, maybe it’s because you haven’t been giving him enough time-ins. Toddlers hate unfairness even more than they hate punishment. Ignore your child too much and he’ll feel justified in defying you. On the other hand, “feed his meter” with plenty of little time-ins and playing the boob and he’ll naturally be more cooperative. So if your child is getting too many time-outs, he probably needs more time-ins! ( Just five minutes of time-in each hour can prevent many problems.)

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## What If My Child Won't Stay in His Room When I Do Time-Out?

Standing guard over the “naughty” chair or playing tug-of-war over the doorknob to keep your child in his room defeats the whole purpose of time-out—which is to ignore the child, isolating him and depriving him of your attention for a couple of minutes.

That’s why, for tots under two, I recommend playpens for time-outs. And, over two, I recommend using their bedroom and blocking the door with a baby gate. However, if your child can climb over the gate, you’ll need to close the door and either use a childproof doorknob cover to prevent those little hands from opening the door, or you have to lock it, using a simple hook-and-eye-type latch affixed to the outside of the door.

## What? Did He Say to Lock My Child in His Room? Isn't That Cruel?

The reason for locking the time-out place is to enable you to maintain control, which is hard to do if your child can escape. However, before using a locked room for a time-out, twice a day for the next few days you should let your child see that you can lock the door so that he can no longer open it with a simple turn of the knob. Let him try to open the door from the outside and point out the locked latch. (“See, honey, the door stays closed.”) Explain that it’s to help him stay inside for time-outs. (“Remember when Mommy held the door closed and you were really mad? You said, ‘No, no, *no!*’ Now Mr. Lock will keep the door closed even when you try to open it. Mommy will open it when Mr. Dinger rings.”)

Isolating your little one in his room for two minutes is neither mean nor unfair. All the love you give him the

other 23 hours and 58 minutes of the day more than makes up for this short penalty! Trust me, your child can handle two minutes alone in his bedroom—his favorite room of the house. (Of course, *never* use a closet, bathroom, basement, or nonchildproofed space for time-out.)

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## Time-Out: Advanced Rules

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Now that you know the basics, here are a few extra tips:

**Don't Say Much.** This is superimportant! Once you start counting, stay calm and neutral. The less you say, the more your child's stressed-out brain will be able to hear. The time for your explanations and being friends again will come later ... after time-out is over.

**Don't Be Emotional.** Adults who get upset when they do time-outs may make kids protest and fight even more. *Our* emotional reaction can accidentally backfire and make our uncivilized little friends feel “challenged to fight,” causing them to respond with the primitive fury of tiny Neanderthals.

**Do Time-Out the Same Way Every Time.** Consistency helps kids learn. Use the same tone of voice, stern face, and counting speed each time. Pretty soon, your tot will recognize exactly when you're serious and *give in* before you get to three.

*Molly found that after doing time-outs about ten times, her 15-month-old Albert stopped pushing the limits so much. She*

*found that just raising her warning finger and sternly saying, “One!” usually made him stop, so that he rarely needed time-outs anymore.*

**Don’t Wait Too Long.** The best time to teach discipline is right when the misbehavior is happening. Don’t wait for the end of your TV show. Delaying the time-out even five minutes only weakens your message and encourages your tot to push the limits even harder.

**Use a Mirror.** Put a mirror on the wall near your time-out area. That allows you to walk away, yet still observe your child (without him noticing you). Remember, during time-out you want your child to think you’re totally ignoring him.

**Don’t Gloat or Shame Your Child.** Saying, “You’re bad! You need a time-out!” makes some tots feel worthless and others burn with resentment. It can spur your child to resist your limits even more the next time.

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## Time-Out: Real-Life Questions



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**Q:** Will my child get confused if I count “one, two, three” at other times, like play?

**A:** Nope. Remember, your message is carried in your tone of voice and gestures. Kids can easily tell the difference between playful counting and your serious face and voice, along with your finger raised in warning, signaling a time-out.

**Q:** Is time-out damaging? Can it hurt my child's psyche or break his spirit?

**A:** No. Respectfully putting a child into a short isolation is not traumatizing.

You've heard the expression "survival of the fittest"? Challenges make your toddler more resilient and emotionally fit. Your toddler is not a snowflake needing protection from all problems. He's a resilient and tenacious human being, and with your love and support he'll learn to bounce back from all of life's hardships.

But be careful of the words you use when you discipline your toddler. Young children *are* deeply hurt when we shame, embarrass, or demean them (see [this page](#)).

**Q:** What should I do when my little boy fights being put into time-out?

**A:** Try to sidestep power struggles. Avoid comments like "You're so bad! Get in your room, immediately! Do you hear me?"

If your child resists time-out ... calmly offer a choice. "I know you hate it, but you have to go. Do you want to walk or be carried?" If he won't, or can't, answer, carry your kicking, screaming cave-kid to the time-out place in as unemotional a manner as you can muster. You can be silent or repeat in Toddler-ese, "You *hate* it, you *hate* it!" as you carry him there.

**Q:** What should I do if my child has a tantrum while he is in time-out?

**A:** Spirited kids have spirited reactions ... including *during* time-out. However, as long as the room is well childproofed, don't try to stop his yelling and throwing of things. If he sees that his actions *bug* you, it may actually make him get *wilder*.

Older tots who mess up the room during time-out need a warning that they'll have to stay in longer: "Phil, I know you're mad, but stop throwing or Mr. Dinger will give you a bigger time-out." When the time-out ends, he can come out, but after a few minutes, calmly require him to help you pick up his things before you resume playing with him.

**Q:** Can you do a time-out when you are not at home?

**A:** To prevent toddler misbehavior in public, plan short trips, describe what fun things you'll do while you're out, and feed the meter a lot during your errands. (It also helps to talk about the fun you will have once you return home.)

Sometimes, however, despite your best attempts, your child may need a time-out during your errands. If you're not far from the car, it's a handy time-out place. Here's what to do:

As always, start out by connecting with respect and offering a win-win compromise or distraction. If these fail, try a clap-growl, or proceed directly to counting to three, and if that doesn't stop the behavior go immediately to the car for the time-out.

Deposit him in the childproofed car (windows open a tiny bit, doors locked). Then stand right outside the car with your back turned to him. (Never walk away even for a second!)

After his time-out is up, take him out and use Toddlerese to show you know how upset he was. Once he has calmed down, *do not* immediately return to your errands. First, give a small time-in to *grease the wheels* of cooperation. Then quickly finish your shopping or just go home.

**Warning:** Don't strap your child in the car seat during the time-out. You don't want him to associate this safety

device with punishment. Also, never give your child a time-out in a hot car.

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## Should I Expect My Toddler to Say “I’m Sorry”?

All kids need to be taught manners. But apologizing after a misdeed may take a few years to learn. In general, quiet, shy kids learn to apologize faster than stubborn, challenging kids.

**Try this:** After your child misbehaves, ask for an apology, *but don’t insist on one*. Making a huge issue about saying “sorry” only invites a power struggle. (Mom: “Say you’re sorry!” Child: “No, you can’t make me!” Mom: “I’m warning you!”) You want to avoid battles you can’t win ... and *forcing* your tot to apologize is impossible if he really digs in his heels.

If your child shows no regret it’s time for a little kind ignoring. Say, “You’re still mad! You say, ‘No way, I don’t *want* to say I’m sorry!’ Okay, sweetheart, I’ll check on you in a minute and see how you’re feeling.”

Also, plant seeds of kindness by pointing out when other people apologize, and include apologies in your fairy tales and role-playing.

If your child *does* apologize, don’t make a big deal out of it. Simply say “Thanks.” But, later on, gossip to his toys or Grandma about how good you feel when he says he’s sorry. And praise him during your bedtime sweet talk routine.

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**Q:** What if he just plays while he's in time-out?

**A:** It doesn't matter. The purpose of time-out is not to make your child miserable, but to temporarily separate him from whatever he was doing, and from you.



## **Giving a Fine: A Penalty for Big Toddlers**

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*Maura's twins, Jake and Pete, 36 months, were struggling over a red ball. Maura knew she needed to stop them before there was blood on the carpet! She tried a little impassioned FFR + Toddler-ese:*

*“Ball! Ball! Ball! You both want it! You want it now! You say mine!! My ball!” Then as they quieted for a second and looked at her, she said, “But noooo! No fighting, or Mommy takes ball away. Balls are for sharing.” Then she offered a fun distraction, “Hey! I’ve got an idea! Let’s all roll the ball together!”*

*Maura got them rolling it back and forth and then left them alone. Two minutes later, they were squabbling again. And again, she echoed their frustration. “Ball! Ball! You both want ball. But Mommy says, ‘No fight ... no fight!’ So the ball has to go night-night. Say, ‘Bye-bye, ball. See you later.’ ”*

*Despite their protests, Maura put the ball out of reach and said, “Come on, you rugrats! Let’s have a race to the kitchen*

*and we'll have a little snack. Do you want cheese or maybe some yummy mud?"*

**What It Is:** If time-out is like going to jail, giving a fine is like, well, being fined. It's a "take-charge" consequence that targets your toddler's growing love of freedom and ownership.

Giving a fine penalizes your tot by removing a valued privilege or toy. Make the punishment related to the misconduct. In other words, if he defies you by playing basketball in the house, remove the ball for a while. (Penalties that connect the punishment to the misbehavior are also called *logical* consequences.)

**Best Used For:** Toddlers two and up (especially three and up).

**How It Works:** Simple! If your child ignores your warning or repeatedly breaks an important rule, remove a privilege or possession that's directly linked to the misbehavior.

If your toddler conks a friend with his toy bat, take the bat away and end the playdate. Say, "No hit! No hit ... no bat when you hit. Now we go home."

When you take away a privilege, tell your child you know how much she wants it, but what she's doing is not okay. For example, if your three-year-old refuses to stop tossing crackers to the dog, remove the crackers and say, "You like to see Rusty eat crackers, but crackers are for people ... *not* dogs. Mommy said, 'Stop, no, no, no!' but Eleanor didn't listen to Mommy's words, so ... bye-bye crackers. *No* crackers for dogs. Now you can get down and play."

In another example, if your two-year-old keeps dumping buckets of sand out of the sandbox after being



warned to stop, remove him from the sandbox and say, “Mommy said, ‘No dump sand! No dump sand!’ It’s a mess! So say, ‘Bye-bye sand!’ No more sandbox. Let’s wash hands.... Do you want to dry your hands on one piece of paper or two?”

Sometimes the “prized possession” you remove is ... you. This is using kind ignoring as a fine: “Mommy doesn’t like it when you say those words. They don’t make me laugh. They hurt my ears. I’m going to the kitchen and I’ll be back in a little bit when you remember your nice words.”

Once your toddler stops the negative behavior, do a little something that is fun to feed his meter and show him that good things happen when he follows the rules. Later, you might gossip to Daddy on the phone about when he did good listening and stopped when Mommy said stop.

If your child misbehaves in the same way every day, take a calm moment to discuss the fine you will be forced to give if he ignores your warning: “Honey, remember when you were playing with your ball in the house and Mommy said ‘No!’? Well, the next time you bounce the ball in the house, Mommy has to take the ball away for a whole day.”

Give your child extra chances to learn this lesson by role-playing with his dolls. (Have the Mommy doll tell the little boy doggie what you want him to do.)

## Spanking: How *Not* to Punish a Toddler

When you’re angry, clap ... don’t slap.

Violence is a huge problem in our country. And it has its roots in the home. After all, our toddlers imitate most things we do. If we eat with our fingers, they’ll imitate. If we whistle while we work, they’ll try to do that. So if we hit them when we don’t like their actions, what do you think they learn from that?

Hitting children teaches them that it's okay for big people to hit little people and that it's okay to vent anger through violence. Is that really what you want your child to learn? And what sense does it make to spank kids to punish them for hitting? We don't teach children not to spit by spitting at them, do we?

Toddlers get spanked and slapped more than any other age group. Now, I know there will be times when your toddler will make you really mad. But when that happens, please *clap ... don't slap*. Vent your anger by clapping and growling, not by shaking and slapping.

We expect our little toddler cave-kids to act primitive, but we can do better.

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## Spanking: Real-Life Questions



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**Q:** If my son defies me when I say “No!,” I give his hand a little swat. Is that okay?

**A:** Here's the problem with swatting—it's a dead-end street! What I mean is, as your child grows older, that “little swat” will no longer intimidate him. When he rebels, you'll be forced to hit him harder ... and harder. Some parents eventually find themselves using belts, coat hangers, or sticks. And later, children get so big that even those things don't work.

**Q:** My father was spanked, and it made him behave, and he spanked me, and I behaved too. So what's the problem with me spanking my son?

**A:** I often hear parents say, “I was spanked, and I turned out okay.” I'm a big supporter of family traditions. Many

of them have great value, but spanking is not one we should be proud of. (God knows you would *never* allow anyone else to spank your child, would you?) Slapping can trigger feelings of resentment and humiliation that can fester for an entire lifetime (especially if we were unfairly punished, or hit out of anger, or in the face, or with an object).

I think the only reason spanking has been passed on—generation after generation—from the Dark Ages to today is because parents never knew there was a better alternative. In fact, I have *never* met a parent who said she would keep hitting her kids if she had another way to get them to behave that was easy, effective, and respectful.

Well, that's exactly what *The Happiest Toddler* approach offers. Simple methods help parents raise children who *want* to obey (out of love and respect), not children who are *forced* to obey (through threats and fear).

Your ancestors had many traditions that you have happily stopped. They washed clothes in streams, slept on hay mattresses, and used outhouses. In those “good ol’ days,” children were paddled, whipped with switches and belts, had their ears pulled ... their faces slapped ... their mouths washed out with soap ... their tongues “hot-sauced” ... and their knuckles rapped with rulers.

It's time to stop using intimidation and pain to make kids cooperate.

No offense, Grandpa, but there *is* a better way!

## PART FOUR



How Do I Handle This One?



**Now that you know the basics, let's put them to work in some all-too-typical toddler situations.**

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- ◆ **Chapter 8** zeroes in on the number one frustrating behavior that our toddlers level at us: temper tantrums. I give tantrums their own chapter because almost every toddler has them (and almost every parent asks me about them). Yet with these tips, you can actually shorten more than 50 percent of outbursts to just seconds, and prevent nine out of ten tantrums from occurring in the first place.
- ◆ **Chapter 9** reviews most of the rest of the challenging toddler behaviors that parents have to deal with at one time or another:
  - worries and fears
  - annoying attitudes and actions
  - defiance
  - aggressive and/or dangerous behavior

For all these tough situations, I'll discuss how you can use *The Happiest Toddler* tools to solve the problem and, in the process, raise a child who is confident, obedient, loving, and happy!

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***“What makes me mad? Days when buttons won’t go straight and I want to stay up late and I hate what’s on my plate.”***

—Catherine and Laurence Anholt, *What Makes Me Happy*

### **Main Points:**

- Tantrums are normal but avoidable.
- Tantrums peak between 18 and 24 months and again at around three and a half years of age.
- Tantrums “push our buttons” and make many of us overreact.
- To *stop* half of your toddler’s tantrums in seconds: Connect with respect, and if that fails, add kind ignoring.
- To *prevent* 50 to 90 percent of outbursts from even happening: 1) avoid problem situations, 2)

connect with respect ... all day, 3) feed the meter, and 4) teach patience-stretching.

***“Tess is bilingual—she talks and screams.”***

—Ted, dad of 20-month-old Tess

All toddlers have tantrums.... It’s normal!

These little explosions can make us feel frustrated and attacked, but please don’t take the wailing and flailing personally. Tantrums are not a sign that you’re a bad parent or that you have a bad child. Even adults drop down an emotional elevator and act uncivilized when we’re upset. But remember, our toddlers are pretty uncivilized to begin with, so when they get upset they often scratch, spit, shriek, and act *totally prehistoric!*

The good news is that the techniques in this chapter will help you to defuse most “screaming meanie” attacks as fast as a bomb squad.

But before looking at how to stop and prevent your toddler’s meltdowns, I want to make sure you understand why almost all toddlers tantrum from time to time.



## **Why Do Toddlers Have Tantrums?**

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Tantrums usually peak at 18 to 24 months, subside a little, and then peak again around three and a half years. At these ages your child’s brain is virtually *bubbling over* with an intense and explosive mix of primitive impulses: greed, stubbornness, aggression, and impatience. And when you combine the “nitro” of your tot’s passionate “Mine!” with the “glycerine” of your

adamant “No way!” ... you’ve got some really, really powerful TNT. *Kapow!*

Other factors that push our sweet little toddlers into maniac mode include:

**They Don’t Speak Well.** Wouldn’t you get frustrated if you lived somewhere you couldn’t speak the language? Well, your toddler also gets irritated when she can’t communicate. No wonder little kids with limited language skills often resort to nontalking forms of communication like foot stomping, arm waving, eye bulging, and screaming!

**We Set a Bad Example.** Venting your anger in front of your child may train her to scream more. She’ll learn that unleashing her rage is totally fine. *After all ... Mommy does it.*

**They Get Stuck in an Emotional Corner.** For many little Tarzans, forcing them to give in can make them feel *humiliated*. When their primitive sense of pride gets bruised, they go bonkers. The harder these kids struggle against us, the more they get painted into an emotional “corner,” unable to gracefully back down and recover from their upset.

*Jeev, 18 months, was a gentle boy, but he could still act pretty uncivilized. He loved eating whole pears ... but one day his mom, Suparna, cut his pear in pieces because it was extra juicy. His response? He grabbed the plate and hurled it at his mom’s head! Suparna realized her “mistake” and immediately offered Jeev a whole pear. And what did this little cave-kid do? He scowled, shook his head No! and refused to even look at it.*



Like Jeev, your toddler may get so upset she paints herself into a corner, unable to give in, even when you offer *exactly what she's asking for*. That's why respectful, diplomatic skills are so great. They help our tots escape from this predicament with their pride intact.

**They Have “Temper” Temperaments.** Intense and spirited toddlers have bigger meltdowns because, well, they do *everything* bigger. You can't change your child's temperament, but the tips in this book will help you keep him from exploding into anger with every frustration and disappointment.

**Our World Is Simultaneously Too Exciting ... and Too Boring.** Your toddler's immature brain may get overloaded by noisy DVDs and fast-paced TV. Yet at the same time, she may get bored spending a lot of time at home. Remember, up until 200 years ago, toddlers usually spent many, many hours a day playing outdoors.

**Tantrums Work!** When we give in to outbursts (or pay too much attention to them), our kids learn that screaming gets them what they want. Younger toddlers recognize this sub-consciously, but older ones often learn to intentionally use fits to get their way.

Today's parents face many tough challenges. On top of working full-time jobs outside the home (which over half of all moms with kids under the age of three do), they cook and clean and do housekeeping chores, and they may be responsible for the care and feeding of their parents and/or grandparents, too. These days, most parents shoulder these responsibilities without much assistance from neighbors, kin, babysitters, or other hired help.

Whew! No wonder it feels like you're giving 120 percent ... you are.

You try so hard. You do so much. That's why it can really push your buttons when your toddler turns into a screaming red-eyed bully. It can feel so unfair—even humiliating—especially if she pelts you with mean words, like “I hate you!” or “You're stupid!”

Our toddler's rage can suddenly push us over the edge into our own impulsive, irrational rage.

We've all been there, but when it happens we must try to remember to breathe and say to ourselves: *My child is the caveman.... I'm a civilized adult.*

And as a civilized adult, you must try to stay calm and not return your child's outbursts with sarcasm, humiliation, or removal of your love ... and certainly not with violence. (Review [Chapter 2](#) for more ideas on how to handle your strong feelings.)

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## Why Does My *Three-Year-Old* Still Have Tantrums?

As kids get older and more verbal, their tantrums occur less and less. Yet many three-to-four-year-olds (and teens) have occasional meltdowns. That's because:

**1. They *still* struggle with impulse control.**

*Older toddlers are increasingly well behaved. But after a long day, your child may lose control and scream with the force of Old Faithful (especially if he has a spirited temperament).*

**2. They are emotional yo-yos.** *Three-year-olds are no longer babies, but they're not quite big kids.*

*They sometimes yo-yo back and forth between these two developmental stages so much that they totally*

*fall apart: “I’m a baby!... I’m a big kid!” Yikes! Think of it as emotional whiplash (for him and you).*

**3. They see outbursts at home.** *If there is lots of quarreling in your family (or violence displayed on TV), your child may defy you more because he’s learned that arguing is a normal way to express frustration.*

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## **Stop Tantrums ... in Seconds: *The Happiest Toddler Way***

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Here is an effective way to lovingly halt most toddler tantrums ... in under a minute. By now, these tantrum-calming skills should sound quite familiar. They’re as close to a magic wand as you’ll ever get.

### **Stop a Tantrum by Connecting with Respect**

When your toddler starts to *lose it*, the first thing you should do is connect with respect. Squat down to his level and echo back a bit of his feelings by using the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-ese. (Remember to use your tone of voice and gestures to reach your child’s sweet spot.) Practice this several times on small eruptions before trying it out on a major outburst. Amazingly, at least 50 percent of the time this simple step alone will quell tantrums in seconds.

***“Mad ... mad ... mad! Sara mad! Sara wants cookie ... now! Cookie!!”***

Parents who respond by immediately voicing their adult views or distraction are like impatient fast-food order-takers who jump right to *their* message (“You owe five dollars”) without repeating the order. That’s why answering your two-year-old’s whines for a premeal cookie by narrating her feelings (“Cookie! *Cookie!* You want cookie! You want cookie, *now!*”) provokes *less* crying than jumping right to your message, “No, honey. No cookies before dinner!”

Once your child begins to quiet, it becomes *your* turn to give a message (“But nooo, sweetheart. You know the rule: Cookies are *after* dinner.”).

***Linda used this approach to neatly sidestep a potentially unsafe struggle when her toddler loudly protested getting out of the bathtub:***

***“Our three-year-old, Jasmine, hates getting out of the tub. She would stay in there all day if she could. One day, when it was time for her to get out I gave her the two-minute warning and the one-minute warning. Then I turned the water off and she freaked and started yelling, ‘No! No! I don’t want to get out; I don’t want to get out.’***

***“I remembered the Toddler-ese and I energetically waved my finger, frowned a bit, and echoed her words, ‘No, no, no! I don’t want to get out! I want to stay in the bathtub! I don’t want to get out!’***

***“I was stunned! Within seconds, she just looked at me and stopped crying.***

***“Then, in a calmer voice I said, ‘Jasmine, I know you don’t want to get out, but it’s time to go; we have to get***

*ready to see Daddy.’ And she stood up and got out. Then I dried her fast and played dolls with her for a few minutes to thank her for her cooperation. It was great.”*

After you give your message, you can encourage your child to be even more cooperative in the future if you take a moment to feed her meter with a little distraction or a win-win compromise:



- **Distraction:** Once your child starts to calm, offer a bit of fun (like attention, a hug, a snack, or playing the boob). Playing the boob, for example, shows your tot that even though she had to give in to you *this time*, there are plenty of other times when she gets to be faster/smarter/stronger than you.

*Point at her shoe and beg her, in a pitiful voice, to give it to you. When she hesitates, throw your hands down like you “give up” and say, “Okay, you win, you always win me.” A few seconds later, beg for her shoe again and let her reject you*

*again. Kids love when we're boobs and they get to reject our silly requests.*

- **Offer a win-win compromise:** Right after you squelch a tantrum, help your child save face by offering her some type of compromise. This little deal shows your toddler that even though she lost the argument you have respect for her and she can still hold her head up high.

*“Cracker ... cracker ... You want cracker! You want cracker ... right now! No crackers now, honey, but after your carrots you can have more crackers. Should you get two or three?”*

*But ... what if all your good communication is met with even louder bawling? Then it's time to offer a hug, solve the problem, or do a little kind ignoring:*

- **Offer a hug.** Your toddler may just be having a bad day ... we've all been there. Try offering your upset child a hug, but be prepared to duck (just in case your irate little Tarzan takes a swing at your nose). Some parents soothe their flailing furious toddlers by giving a bear hug from behind—restraining the arms—while they repeatedly whisper in the ear things like “You're really, really mad.” “You say, ‘No, no, *no!*’ ”
- **Solve the problem.** Occasionally, if you're really in a time crunch, it's okay to give in. For example, you might say to your upset three-year-old, “You're so sad! You really want a cookie ... now! The rule is no cookies before dinner ... but you were so helpful picking up your toys this morning, Mommy will bend the rule—a tiny bit—and give you one cookie. Do you want it in a napkin or on a plate?”
- **Kind ignore.** If your uncivilized little friend is still flailing on the floor, most of the time your

best tactic will be to lovingly give her the *cold shoulder*—kind ignoring (Kind Ignoring: Give Your Tot a Little Cold Shoulder). Here's how:

- **Use Toddler-ese** one last time ... then lovingly say you're leaving for a little while.

Be caring, but matter-of-fact. Avoid threats, sarcasm, or shaming. Kind ignoring makes it clear that you understand, but you're not giving in.

- Pretend to be busy doing something for twenty seconds.
- If your child starts to calm, quickly turn to your tot and offer some Toddler-ese, a hug, and a nice time-in (“You were really sad.... You wanted the ball and Mommy said ‘No!’ But come on ... let's play with your trains. Do you want to be Thomas or Henry?”).
- If your child is still crying after twenty seconds of being ignored, return and echo again how she's feeling. Many kids get so upset that they need us to do kind ignoring two to three times before they start to settle.

A few spirited kids just won't stop crying even after you come and go a few times. They have trouble giving in because it hurts their pride. If your child is one of these stubborn kids, you may need to ignore him for two to five minutes until he starts to calm. Keep a watch on him out of the corner of your eye or in a mirror. Once he stops crying and starts to play with something, just sit on the ground near him (to show respect). Don't be in a rush to talk or make eye contact; remember, he's probably still mad. Then, start to reconnect by slowly joining in his activity. Don't talk about the tantrum yet. Just reward the now-good behavior with a bit of your attention. That will help him get over his pouting and open his heart again.



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## Public Meltdowns: How Not to Panic in the Streets



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Public tantrums are especially tough because, well, they're so *public*. They make us feel like we're under a magnifying glass and everyone is *staring at our flaws*. What's more, many toddlers turn up the shrieking if we seem embarrassed or unsure how to respond.

Avoiding *aisle-three meltdowns* is a lot easier if you plan ahead. Keep your trips short, organized, and timed to when your child will not be tired or hungry. (Meandering aimlessly through a mall is sensory overload for a little Stone Age brain.) Also, make waits easier by bringing along little snacks or treats (like stickers, drawing materials, or "tagalong" toys that your child gets only when you are out on errands). If, however, these best of intentions don't work out as planned, you can stop tantrums fast ... the *Happiest Toddler* way. Here's a great example of how one mother used connecting with respect to short-circuit her child's tantrum.



*Sandy brought Corey, 22 months, to the toy store while his sister, Chrissy, shopped for a present. It was their third stop that morning. Sandy sat Corey before a display of toy trains, keeping a close watch while she helped Chrissy.*

*When it was time to go, Corey refused. Sandy made a weak stab at using the FFR. "I know you don't want to go, sugar, but we're late and I don't have time for this right now."*

*Then Sandy went to pick Corey up and he erupted in tears. The clerk frowned, Chrissy moaned, and Sandy checked her watch. Corey should have had lunch and a nap an hour earlier.*

*Ignoring the stares of the other shoppers, Sandy realized she needed to do a better job of connecting with respect. Kneeling next to him, she exclaimed, "You say, 'No! No, no, nooooo!' You say, 'No go home! No! Corey likes trains!' Corey says, 'No go home!' "*

*Corey's crying weakened a bit and he stopped flailing, so Sandy continued. She stomped her foot, shook her head, and waved her arms to echo some of her son's intensity. "You say, 'No! No, no, no! Nooooo!' You say, 'NO go home! Corey not ready!' " Magically, Corey stopped crying.*

*Then Sandy dropped her voice to a whisper. "Hey! Psssst! Hey! Let's play train. We'll be the train.... Choo-choo! Choo-choo! Let's choo-choo all the way to the car."*

*Chrissy was so embarrassed that she pretended she didn't know her chug-a-chugging mother and brother, but Corey was thrilled to make train noises and held on to his mom's hips all the way out the door.*

See the section on tantrum triggers ([Step 1: Avoid Problem Situations](#)) for more tips on tantrum prevention.

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## **A Scary Tantrum Side Effect: Breath-Holding**

**Q:** My toddler screamed so hard he passed out! I was terrified. How can I keep that from ever happening again?

**A:** Breath-holding during a tantrum looks really scary, but fortunately it's usually not a big deal. Typically what happens is that young toddlers (15- to 30-month-olds) suddenly get upset (mad, scared, or startled) and try to cry, but although their mouths open, no sound comes out. For thirty to forty seconds, they keep getting bluer (or paler) until they pass out. (Sometimes the body may twitch a little too.)

In essence, these kids “forget” to breathe! But the instant they pass out, their breathing starts again automatically, and they revive in seconds.

If you can reach your child *before* he passes out, wet your hand and sprinkle a little cool water right in his face or puff hard a few inches from his face for several seconds (like you're blowing out birthday candles). This can often prevent a spell and make the child gasp, sputter, and start breathing.

Simple breath-holding spells are not dangerous. There is no risk of injury (as long as they don't fall and hit their heads). Nevertheless, you should immediately call your doctor to make sure it wasn't due to a seizure or other medical condition (like anemia). Ask if your child needs an iron supplement to keep the spells from happening again.

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## How to Eliminate Most Tantrums ... Before They Even Start!

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Being able to calm tantrums in seconds will make you feel great, but you'll feel like the best, smartest, and happiest parent ever when you can stop the tantrums *before* they happen!

Now you're ready to join the thousands of parents who have eliminated 50 to 90 percent of their young child's tantrums *in less than a week*. The four key steps are:

1. Avoid problem situations.
2. Connect with respect ... all day long.
3. Feed the meter.
4. Teach patience-stretching and magic breathing.

### Step 1: Avoid Problem Situations

Nobody knows your toddler better than you. So I bet you already have a pretty good idea of which situations

knock him off balance. The trick is to think ahead and be prepared.

The most common avoidable tantrum triggers are:

- **Fatigue.** Many kids get ornery if they miss their nap or sleep poorly at night.
- **Hunger.** Some kids get fussy if their meal is even thirty minutes late (low blood sugar). The moms of these sensitive tykes need to carry emergency snacks, like crackers and cheese, in the diaper bag.
- **Caffeine and stimulants.** Many kids bounce off the walls after having caffeinated drinks (cola, iced tea, chocolate milk). In addition, too much sugar or decongestants in cold medicines can also be *monster-makers*.
- **Being cooped up.** Toddlers thrive on outdoor play. Little cave-kids who don't get to *roam the jungle* (your backyard or the park) two or three times a day often get unbearably grumpy.
- **Being ignored.** Toddlers often act up when we ignore them for too long. That is why feeding the meter by playing the boob and giving time-ins—several times an hour—can miraculously reduce your child's need for time-outs.
- **Being overtempted.** If you live in a house with lots of attractive breakables, your little one may just not have enough self-control to keep his hands off things.
- **Unexpected changes.** Shy or sensitive kids may go bonkers when they have to deal with unexpected changes. You can sidestep problems with these little “princess and the pea” people by reviewing your next day's plan, mentioning any changes in routine that might occur.

- **Tension and violence.** Keep the peace in your house. Many toddlers model the violence they see on TV or when their parents fight at home.

## Step 2: Connect with Respect ... All Day Long

Don't just use your good communication skills to handle emotional explosions. Try to use the FFR and Toddlerese dozens of times a day. Use them even when you're just dealing with a minor upset or a small request. For example, when your 18-month-old asks for juice, smile and narrate back his desire in a cheery voice, "You say, juicy! You love your juicy, mmm! Okay, sweetheart, *here's* your juice."

Help your child learn by your example as you use the FFR with others (other children, your partner ... even your child's stuffed animals!). And comment to him about the feelings of people you see in magazines or in public. ("Honey, look how that man is whistling and happy! What do you think he is so happy about?")

Sure, all this takes a few extra seconds, but it pays off in ways big and small. Besides, your good communication will help your toddler learn how to talk and teach that loving people speak to each other with respect.

## Step 3: Feed the Meter

Little 18-month-olds take—and take—and then they pressure us for more! They have short memories and forget the caring attention and fun play you just shared two hours before. (Remember, two hours feels like six to an impatient toddler.) But they need frequent bits of our loving attention as much as flowers need water and sunshine. That's why feeding the meter with green-light techniques—several times an hour—is such a powerful tool for preventing tantrums.

Parents who feed the meter many times a day make their kids feel smart, strong, respected, and loved. And, when kids feel like winners, they instantly become more cooperative.



Use: time-ins (like attention, play, praise, gossip, hand checks, stickers, hand stamps), confidence builders (like respectful listening, offering options, playing the boob), fun routines (like special time and bedtime sweet talk), and planting seeds of kindness (like fairy tales, catching others being good, and role-play).

Can small steps like playing catch, being a boob, and little nightly massages really head off conflicts? *Yes!* Your toddler understands that the more play and attention you give him—and the more you build his confidence—the more co-operation he owes *you*.

But remember this key point: Your child's idea of what's *fair* is when he wins 90 percent of the time (see [The 90-10 Compromise: Your Toddler's Idea of What's Fair](#)). So if you let him feel smart and cared about

oodles of times a day and let him get his way on many little “conflicts” you don’t really care about (like what socks to wear or what book to read first), he’ll give in much more (like eating a bite of vegetables or holding hands when you cross the street).

## Step 4: Teach Patience

This fourth step, teaching patience, is critically important to preventing tantrums. Patience-stretching and magic breathing help our little cave-kids strengthen their brains’ ability to control their primitive impulses. Children who learn to be patient just a little bit longer automatically become calmer and more reasonable. And that extra minute or two of your tot’s patient waiting is often just enough for you to finish the chore you’re working on (get off the phone, finish tossing the salad, etc.).

Please review the instructions for teaching patience-stretching and magic breathing ([Teaching Patience: Patience-Stretching](#) and [Teaching Patience: Magic Breathing](#)). Practice patience-stretching *several times a day* (with older tots also do magic breathing once or twice a day). Within a week, you’ll be thrilled with your child’s growing ability to handle frustrations and delay his need for instant gratification.

Each time your little friend patiently waits for something, reward his cooperation with a tiny time-in or some playing the boob so he knows his efforts are appreciated.

***Aneta and Tony were struggling on a daily basis with their three young boys. Oliver, the oldest, was a great guy, but he had always been a strong-willed handful. So when the twins, Lucas and Mattheo, entered toddlerhood, Aneta started to feel “triple-teamed.”***

*Aneta came to my office asking for help with discipline, especially to get control of two-year-old Lucas, who was driving them crazy with his screams, demands, and defiance. I taught her the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-ese and the Happiest Toddler tricks for stopping tantrums, and we put together a plan to start feeding the twins little one-minute bits of fun (attention, play, gossip, playing the boob, etc.) a couple of times an hour and one five-minute special time a day for each of the boys. And as she left, I asked Aneta to keep track of the number and intensity of the outbursts for the next week.*

*Aneta immediately started feeding the meter by paying attention to the boys when they were good and using kind ignoring and time-outs to handle the meltdowns. She and Tony particularly liked gossip, patience-stretching, and special time, and after a couple of days they started to feel more comfortable with Toddler-ese and playing the boob.*

*I was supposed to call Aneta at the end of the week to check on her progress, but she beat me to the punch and called me one day early ... almost giggling with a feeling of success! She said that initially Lucas's tantrums escalated for two days, but then the kind ignoring worked like a charm to reduce his eruptions from several minutes to just seconds. But even better, all the kids were being more patient and about 75 percent of all the tantrums had just disappeared! She*



*proudly exclaimed, “They’re happier kids  
and we’re a happier family!”*

You can be sure that many people will give you many tips on handling temper tantrums. Of course, you’ll need to be strict with your children from time to time, but as you practice the advice in this chapter you’ll soon see that the best way to convert a wild child into a happy tot is not with threats and force, but with respect, encouragement, consistency, and play.

The time you spend with your children is the best, smartest investment you will ever make. All the generosity you give now will be repaid to you and your family and community one hundred times in the future. As your child grows up, you’ll avoid countless arguments, lies, struggles, and dangerous displays just because you made this investment of time and effort to learn how to give your child a loving, happy start to life.

Now that you’re getting tantrums under control, you’re ready to learn how to combine all the techniques you mastered in the previous chapters to help you expertly handle almost any other situation your toddler throws your way.

9



Real Answers to  
Common Problems

*“In the middle of every difficulty lies  
opportunity.”*

—Albert Einstein

## Main Points:

Troublesome toddler behaviors usually fall into one of four categories:

- worries and fears
- annoying attitudes and actions
- defiance
- aggressive and/or dangerous behavior



**Putting Your Happiest Toddler  
Skills Into Action**

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Tears, fears, and the occasional tug-of-war are all par for the course when living with toddlers. But that doesn't mean you're powerless to make things better. On the contrary, this last chapter will help you use the whole doctor's bag of *Happiest Toddler* tools and skills to solve almost any challenge your young child will throw at you. (Note: For a quick review, read a description of each *Happiest Toddler* skill in the "Key Terms and All-Star Tricks" section on [Appendix B](#).)

Most of the problem behaviors parents have to deal with during these years fall into one of four main groups:

- 1. Worries and fears.** *Examples:* separation worries, fears, abandonment issues when a new baby arrives.
- 2. Annoying attitudes and actions.** *Examples:* dawdling, interrupting, whining.
- 3. Defiance.** *Examples:* refusing medicine, fighting the car seat, picky eating.
- 4. Aggressive and/or dangerous behavior.** *Examples:* attacks on other children (hitting, pinching, biting), running away.



## Behavior Challenge #1: Worries and Fears

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Some tykes meet new people and situations with bouncy confidence. They jump right in and away they go. But for other little kids, worries lurk around every corner. These easily rattled children often:

- have a shy, slow-to-warm-up temperament
- are stressed (hungry, tired, bored, sick, facing big challenges, etc.)
- had a really scary experience in the past

What can you do to help these kids overcome their fears? In a word: lots! Let's look at a few examples....

## Worried-Behavior Example: Separation Worries

When your little one begs you not to *abandon* her at preschool (or at the babysitter's or at bedtime), it can be tough to handle. Sad eyes and clingy pleas really pull at the heart-strings!

Here's how Mari uses the Fast-Food Rule and Toddlerese to handle her son's separation worries:

***“When my two-year-old, Aidan, arrives at school he usually shrieks, ‘I want Mama!’ and he won’t exit the car. So I help him by narrating his feelings with a bit of intensity to hit his sweet spot: ‘No, Mama! No, no, no! No school! No teacher Chris! No teacher Cindy! No friends! I want Mama! No school!’***

***“By then, he usually starts calming, and I offer a compromise: ‘Okay, okay. No problem! But we have to tell teacher Chris that Aidan says, “No school today.” So let’s go. You carry teddy for me, okay?’***

***“At this point Aidan always leaves the car with me. Once inside school, we stop and play a little or chat with the teacher. Most days, he quickly gets involved in the buzz of activity and his friends and kisses me good-bye in just five or ten minutes!”***

Mari's words make Aidan feel accepted and safe. The little compromise she offers shows her respect and helps persuade him to exit the car and enter the school without a fight.

Luckily, Mari has the time to either wait with Aidan or take him home if he continues crying. But many other parents don't have that luxury; they *must* leave their child in order to go to work. If that's your situation, use a combination of some of the tools that have been described in earlier chapters and practice them first at home, so they'll work better in a stressful situation.

## Tools to Handle Separation Worries

**Patience-Stretching.** Practice the following three techniques for several days to help prepare your child for easier separations. Start with a few seconds and gradually increase to a minute. She'll quickly learn that waiting is cool because when she's patient she usually gets what she wants (see [Teaching Patience: Patience-Stretching](#)).

**Fairy Tales.** Prepare your child for what is to come by telling little stories in which Mommy goes away ... but always comes back.

*“Once upon a time there was a little birdie named Fluffy who worried when her mommy flew away to find breakfast. She said, ‘Don’t go, Mommy!’ But her mommy had to leave ... for just a super-duper fast minute. So Fluffy waited and sang songs with her teddy bear until Mommy came back. Mommy always came back, and then Fluffy felt happy and safe. ‘Yea! Mommy’s home!’ the little birdie cheered, and her mom gave her lots of*

*kisses ... and some big juicy worms to eat."*

**Loveys.** Loveys are terrific for kids with separation issues. Encourage your tot to *make friends* with a lovey. If your older toddler hasn't yet taken to one, offer a special *charm* (like a bracelet, magic coin, photo) that she can touch and look at whenever she misses you.

Now, after practicing these at home for several days, here's how to use them to respond to your child's protests at preschool. I call this combination of tools "Mommy Interruptus."

**Start by Connecting with Respect.** Give hugs and echo your child's concerns in a sincere voice with lots of repetition: "You say, 'No! No, *No!!!* No school! No go, Mommy!' "

Once your tot calms a bit, give her a little time-in (play, read, or sit together as you describe what other kids are wearing and doing).

**Next, Use Patience-Stretching and Loveys.** After a few minutes, act like you suddenly remembered you have to do something: "Oh! Oh! Wait! *Wait!* Mommy has to see teacher. Wait! Wait!" Then say, "You hold teddy (or your magic bracelet) really hard, and Mommy will be right back!" Then walk quickly across the room and return in just two or three seconds, saying, "I know, sweetheart. You say, 'Mommy, don't go!' But, good waiting! *Good waiting!* Come on, let's play!"

If she's protests, reflect her feelings by hitting her sweet spot with your face, tone, and gestures. Play a little more, until she is happy for a few minutes; then repeat the patience-stretching. For example, you might suddenly say, "Uh-oh! Pee-pee! Pee-pee! Mommy has to

go pee-pee. Here, hug teddy, I'll be right back." Then leave the room for a quick three seconds.



Over the next fifteen minutes, repeat this process many times. ("Uh-oh! Mommy has to pee-pee again! Here, let me draw a funny face on your hand you can look at, and I'll be right back.") Gradually leave for longer periods (ten seconds, twenty seconds, thirty seconds, one minute).

Once your child can calmly handle several minutes without you, you can leave for good. But never sneak away! Give a big wave and cheerfully announce, "Bye-bye! I love you. I'll see you after your nap. If you want me, just touch your *magic* bracelet (or look at the funny face I drew on your hand) and think of me giving you a big hug." You might also mention something fun you'll do together after school.

**Finally, the *Icing on the Cake: Praise + Gossip.*** When you pick her up at the end of the day,

praise your tot's success (give her a star or hand check). At home, gossip to Grandma or Daddy about her courage: "Darcy told me, 'No, no. Don't go ...,' but then she saw fun toys and some fun big girls and she was brave. She had a silly time and ate snack ... a big cracker with juice! Then Mommy came back, and gave Darcy a *big* hug and we were happy!"

Note: Some strong-willed kids cry when you leave, despite all your preparation. If that happens with your tot, call the school twenty minutes after you leave her, and ask the teacher if she is still crying. If she reports, "She started playing happily two minutes after you left," take a deep breath and congratulate yourself. (Fortunately, this is what happens nine times out of ten.)

However, if your child won't stop crying after you leave, something else may be fueling her anxiety. If there are stresses at home (like a new baby, divorce, etc.), plan to stay at school all day, for a few days, to monitor the situation. If you can't stay, try to pay some surprise visits to make sure the kids and teachers are treating her well. Keep using playing the boob, fairy tales, role-playing, patience-stretching, magic breathing, etc., to boost her self-confidence at home.

If the fussing continues, consider changing schools or sitters.

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## Worries at Different Ages and Stages

**Young toddlers:** Worries often increase around 18 months. A simple experience that was never a problem before, like meeting a new person, can suddenly snowball into panic: *Who's that man?!*



Young toddlers focus on one thing at a time. So if your child is engrossed in play, she might not hear you leave the room and then get terrified when she looks around for you and you're gone—*Oh, no! Where's Mommy!*—even if you're just in the bathroom.

**Middle toddlers:** Sameness and predictability help two-year-olds feel safe. For middle toddlers, unexpected disruptions in routine can trigger anxiety. For example, a child who's fine every day when Daddy drops her off may cry and cling the day Dad is unavailable and Mom has to take her to day care.

**Older toddlers:** Your three-year-old's growing skill with words will tend to lessen her anxiety. But you're not out of the woods yet! A scary cartoon or experience can suddenly shift her imagination into high alert and push her over the line into panic.

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## Worried-Behavior Example: Sudden New Fears

Fear is a common problem for toddlers and often comes on without warning. Typical fears include monsters, snakes, spiders, attackers, the dark, and being abandoned, but your tot could develop a fear of almost anything—including clowns! (As a young child I was afraid of a closet in our laundry room where my parents kept a recording of *Sleeping Beauty*.... It had a scary witch's voice on it.)

*Stella, three, was smart and confident. So the day she spied an ant crawling up her leg, her hysterical crying came from out of the blue. Her mom, Fran, removed the tiny bug, reassured her daughter, and then*

*they both promptly forgot the whole incident ... or so it seemed.*

*The next day, however, Stella complained that she was afraid to sit in the grass because of the “buggies.” Fran persuaded her to play outside by tucking her pants into her socks to “protect her.” But that night things got worse. Once in bed, Stella cried out: “Go! Go! Mommy! M-O-M-M-Y!!!” Fran arrived seconds later and little Stella clung to her for dear life, sobbing, “Buggies, Mommy! BUGGIES!”*

*Fran turned on the lights to show Stella her bed was bug-free. “See, honey? No bugs! Everything’s okay. See? No buggies!” Stella slowly calmed and Fran left. But a minute later Stella burst into a panicked cry about “buggies” yet again. That night Stella slept in her parents’ bed, where she was calm and quiet the whole night.*

Fears may pop up when a child is under stress, suffers a scary experience (an injury, earthquake, car accident), sees a scary cartoon, or hears something ordinary but misinterprets it as something frightening. (“At the picnic, the ants carried away *everything!*”)

Young toddlers (especially shy, cautious kids) often fear loud sounds like thunder, firecrackers, or barking dogs. Around age three, fear of “bad men,” monsters, and witches often develop.

One reason fears pop up at this age is because of a three-year-old’s new ability: *comparing*. Three-year-olds constantly compare themselves to the rest of the world. And, as you might imagine, the world can look pretty big and scary to them. Toddlers love puffing out their

chests and announcing their supremacy over babies, but they often feel weak and vulnerable compared to big kids, big dogs, and big strangers.

Older toddlers also have fears because of something called *projection*. Many bigger tots still have the urge to bite and hit, but they know that their parents expect them to control these primitive impulses. So they transfer the urge from themselves and *project* it onto scary shadows, strangers, and assorted imaginary “meanies.” (“The monster took my toys ... and tried to pinch me!”)

Note: Your reaction to your toddler’s fears may be deeply rooted in your past. If *your* childhood fears were pooh-poohed, you may tend to overprotect your frightened child and accidentally undermine her confidence. On the other hand, if your family made a big deal out of praising you for courage, you may see your tot’s fearfulness as a weakness that must be nipped in the bud.

I invite you to try to find a middle ground. Listen to your child’s fear without minimizing it or overreacting. During three decades of pediatrics, I’ve noticed that frightened kids calm fastest when their worries are respectfully acknowledged and when they’re encouraged to take baby steps to confront their fears.

## Tools to Relieve Fears

First, show your child that you take her feelings seriously.

**Connect with Respect.** Toddler fears may start out small, but ignoring her fears will only make them grow. *We* know that ants aren’t a danger, but if you’re too fast to pooh-pooh your child’s fear it may make her feel more alone ... and *more* scared, just when she needs your help. So before you try to dispel her worries, invest

a minute of your time in using the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-ese to show your little friend that you “get it” and you really care.

***“Bugs! Bugs! Stella hates buggies! Stella hates buggies! She says, ‘Go away now, you buggies!’ ”***

**Routines.** Bedtime fears are made better by some loveys (cuddly protectors that “stand in” for you when you’re in the next room) and special bedtime routines. Put on soothing music and dim the lights in your house an hour before bedtime to help keep your child in a calm state of mind. (Avoid roughhousing and TV during that *golden hour*.)

***Fran gave Stella a bedtime massage (right after she did her magic breathing). Then Fran tucked her into bed and did a little bedtime sweet talk (listing great things she did that day and her fun plans for tomorrow). Then Fran kissed all Stella’s dollies good-night and ended the routine with a few squirts of “secret superspray” (water with a tiny bit of lavender oil in a small spray bottle with a smiley-face sticker) and a special song (“Mommy loves you, Daddy loves you, Stella. Stella is safe, safe, safe!”).***

***The first night, Stella was fine for five minutes, but then she came crying to her parents’ door. They listened and echoed her concerns (making sure they aimed for her sweet spot). Then Fran hugged her, walked her back to her room, and tucked her back into bed. Fran kissed the dollies good-night, sprayed the “secret superspray,” sang the special song again ... and went out. And that was it for***

*the night. The next night Stella slept beautifully.*

*Within five nights, Fran was able to start cutting back to her old, briefer bedtime routine. And you know what? A few weeks later, for Halloween, Stella begged Fran to go trick-or-treating dressed up as an ant!*

**Gossip.** Let your child overhear you talking to her dollies about her fear. And use gossip to reward your tyke's little acts of bravery; for example, petting a neighbor's puppy or climbing up the slide. Each time she takes another baby step forward, gossip to her toys about her courage.

**Win-Win Compromise.** For toddlers, every day is filled with amazing, incredible sights! That's why they strongly believe that almost *anything's* possible. (Ghosts? Sure. Monsters? Of course! Your boss "exploded" at you today? Okay, but it sounds messy!) Using logic to deny a panicked child's fears ("There *are* no monsters!") is as doomed to failure as telling someone who fears flying that planes are safer than cars. The fear is very real in the imagination.

Here's a better approach: Wait for the panic to subside a bit, then offer a win-win compromise that allows your tot to feel safe and enables you to calm her hysteria. For example, you might suggest: temporarily letting her sleep with you; allowing your dog to keep her company; getting a Mickey Mouse night-light, etc.

**Fairy Tales and Role-Play.** Use the "side door" of your child's mind to help lessen her fears. Have her dollies "talk to each other" about the things that scare

them ... and how they calm themselves. Tell stories about nice doggies that lick your fingers and never bite and about mean doggies who have to go to time-out when they do something bad; role-play about dogs and encourage her to remind the puppy to be nice and not to bite.

*To help her three-year-old, Myles, get over his fear of dogs, Maria would play “Puppy Pretend” with her little guy: “Honey, do you want to be the big dog with sharp teeth and scare me? Or do you want me to be the dog and you can be brave?” And at night she would put his cuddly dog doll right next to him in bed to keep the bad dogs away.*

**Magic Breathing.** Calm breathing helps children learn how to keep panic under control. If you have an older toddler, I recommend you practice it every day ... *especially* if she is anxious or fearful.

For example, if your child is upset about a dog, first connect with respect (“You say, ‘No, *no*, doggie ... no!’ Say, ‘You go *away*, doggie! Go *away*!’ Wow, that doggie was a little scary, huh?”). Then, once she calms, do some magic breathing. This will help her complete her calming and feel some mastery over the fear.

**Confidence Builders.** Making your child feel big and strong can also help her overcome fears. Practice boosting her overall confidence (listen with respect, ask her opinion, play the boob) once or twice an hour. And take some specific steps to build her confidence about the thing she fears. For example, if she’s petrified by bugs, read books about bugs, cut bug pictures out of magazines to make a scrapbook, etc.

*Fran found a library book to read to Stella showing that bugs lived in the dirt*

*(not in kids' beds) and that they ate leaves ("They think kids taste yucky! Phooey!"). The pictures showed how tiny a bug is and how big a kid is. And Stella loved for her mom to draw a picture of a bug on a piece of paper and then she would crumple it up and throw it in the trash as she demanded, "Bad bug! Go away! Don't scare Stella!"*

Using a bit of magic is another fun, confidence-building approach that really makes sense to a toddler's immature brain. Here's how some skillful parents magically soothed their toddlers' fears:

*"Molly says, 'Go away, monsters! I don't like you!' But, honey, did you know that mommy monsters don't let their little boy and girl monsters go out at night? Yup. They have to eat their dinners and go right to bed! But to be 'double-triple' sure, let's do some secret magic to make 100 percent sure those monsters stay far, far away. 'Abracadabra, alakazaam, monsters, go home.... Don't come where I am!' "* [Remember, "secret" and "magic" are two little words that make toddlers feel powerful.]

*"Charlie, do you know what I just remembered? Dinosaurs hate the smell of garlic. They say, 'Yucky ... poop!' Oh! And you know what? We are so lucky, because I saved the very best piece of superstrong garlic in the refrigerator. Yea! Let's rub a tiny bit on a piece of paper and put it by the window. That will keep them away for sure!"*

*Tess, three, became terrified when the smoke alarm accidentally went off. To help her start regaining her confidence, her parents named it Fred and they taped a smiley face to it that Tess had drawn. Twice a day they all went to the alarm to say, “Good morning, Fred!” and “Good night, Fred!” and when Tess was eating her snack they said to Fred, “No way, Fred! No cookies for you. Cookies are for kids!” Within a few days, Tess’s worry had become just a distant memory.*

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## More Magic Fear-Fighters

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Older toddlers love magic and pretend too. Try the following and see how fast the bad things go away:

- Offer a protective charm: a special “magic bracelet,” a dreamcatcher (for bad dreams), a bedside photo of his protectors (like Mom and Dad or Superman), or, like Fran, a spray bottle of superspecial “magic water.”
- Pretend to put an invisible “magic space suit” on your little one each night. Patiently massage it on from head to toe so it will keep him safe once he’s in bed. Draw a picture of what he would look like in it ... if he could see it.

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## Worried-Behavior Example: Struggles When a New Baby Arrives

Big changes are tough even on adults, so it’s to be expected that they give toddlers extra stress.



*Stephen and Nicole's three-year-old, Sam, always had trouble going to bed on his own. But after the birth of his sister, the nighttime stalling escalated dramatically! Nicole explained: "Now when I say 'night-night' he pleads for 'one more book' ... 'a glass of water' ... 'a backrub.' Last night he sobbed that he couldn't stay alone because he could hear bad guys trying to get in the house!"*

## Tools to Handle Sibling Issues

Here are some easy ways to deal with the problem of sibling competition.

**Connect with Respect.** Worried kids dig in their heels, especially when they feel rushed. So, when your child is in the throes of anxiety, take a minute to appreciate his feelings with your best Fast-Food Rule + Toddler-ese.

**Time-In.** A new baby can make an older child feel "kicked off the throne." They often feel like something important has been taken away from them ... and it has. You can help your child deal with this loss by feeding his meter with many mini time-ins.

Now, more than ever, your older child will love **praise**. Catch him being good throughout the day and be generous with your praise ... but not *over the top* (don't overdo the jumping up and down and applauding). Use gossip, hand checks, and star charts to encourage the behaviors you like.

**Play the Boob.** This fun confidence builder helps little kids feel powerful. That's helpful because having a new baby in the house makes toddlers feel that there's a

lot over which they have no control. Also, remind your child that the play you enjoy together is “big kid” play and little babies are too tiny and weak to do it.

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## Before the Baby Arrives

There’s a lot you can do to help your older child greet the new baby with love, not jealousy. For example:

- Don’t talk too much about the “baby in Mommy’s tummy” until two to three months before your due date.
- Give your tot a small doll so he can practice feeding, changing, and good hand washing.
- Let your older child overhear you gossiping to the baby *inside* you (and later, to the baby after birth) about his big sibling’s skills and brilliance: “Psst, little baby. I can’t wait until David teaches you how to pick up your toys. He can do it superspeedy!”
- Teach your tot patience-stretching and magic breathing so he can practice self-calming before the baby comes and your life gets crazy.
- Be very thoughtful about timing the start of other big changes. Toddlers who are moved from their cribs, made to give up their pacifiers, or put in new schools often feel a little stressed and vulnerable. And if it is done around the time of the new baby, they may even feel betrayed and angry at you and the baby.  
If possible, avoid big changes starting three months before your due date and continuing until six months after the baby’s birth (unless your toddler is a *very* secure little guy).

- Buy a great toy that the new baby will “give” to his big brother and have some little toys that you can secretly hand to visitors to your home for them to give your older child for being such a great big brother.

Please set aside any guilty worries about your baby not receiving the same undivided attention from you that your first baby received. What your new baby doesn't get from you, he'll get *five times over* from his big brother or sister.

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**Routines.** Special time and bedtime sweet talk are terrific ways to make your tot feel less jealous. (They're only for “big kids” ... no babies allowed!) I promise that if you do special time twice a day, this daily investment of ten to twenty minutes will eventually save you hours of nagging and complaints. (Toddlers love getting an occasional *bonus* special time for good cooperation, like going for ice cream!)

**Magic Breathing.** If your toddler can do it, practice magic breathing every day to help him practice keeping his primitive impulses under control.

**Plant Seeds of Kindness.** After 18 months, toddlers increasingly want to be good. That's why the arrival of a new child is the perfect time to give lessons in kindness. Let the big sister (or brother) bring you a new diaper when you need one or unpack the grocery bags.

Replace negative comments (“Don't be so rough!”) with positive ones. (“Baby loves being touched softly,

like this. Hey, you're *good* at that!" Later, gossip to Daddy about the good touching.)

Role-play to let your toddler vent any anger he might feel toward you or the new baby in an acceptable way or to give him a chance to regress a little. ("Do you want to be my baby for a bit? Come sit on my lap, you big strong baby, and you can hug me for a long, long while.")



## Behavior Challenge #2: Annoying Attitudes and Actions

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As discussed, it's your toddler's job to test the limits, but some just don't know when to quit.

When your toddler dawdles, interrupts, or whines, it can be like fingernails on a chalkboard; you just want it to stop. Many of us are tempted to try to *force* our toddlers to obey with shouts and threats. But often that backfires and makes things worse.

Fortunately, there are several effective ways to reduce annoying behaviors.

[Chapter 6](#) covers the general approach for reducing yellow-light behaviors, but in this next section I'd like to focus on *dawdling* as an example to show how to curb any annoyance (including rudeness, interrupting, whining, back talk, potty mouth, and whatever else drives you bananas!).

### Annoying-Behavior Example: Dawdling

Some tots are zippy, but others are slow as snails. Kids who dawdle (delay getting dressed, coming to the table, responding when called) fall into one of two groups:

1. Dreamers—absentminded kids who just get easily distracted.
2. Avoiders—kids who drag things out to avoid doing what's being asked of them.

## Tools to Deal with Dawdling

**Connect with Respect.** Toss out a few phrases of FFR and Toddler-ese to let your child know you can see his point of view (even if you disagree). Then, use a “you-I” sentence (see [Give a “you-I” message.](#)) to let him know how *you* feel. (“When you don’t come I get sad, sad, *sad* ... because your breakfast gets cold.”)

**Win-Win Compromise.** Next, offer a little fun or a win-win compromise. For example, you might suggest a race: “I’ll count to ten and let’s see how fast you get your shoes on.” Or use a bit of reverse psychology.

*When Jessica delayed and delayed putting her shoes on to prepare for day care, her mom turned toward her daughter’s imaginary friend “Nana Mouse” and cupped her hand next to her mouth and gossiped in a loud whisper: “Psst, hey ... Nana Mouse. Mommy said to put on shoes ... but Jessie is too little. Jessie cried, ‘Waaah, waah! I can’t do it!’ I guess she is too little to put on shoes all by herself.”*

*In seconds, a grinning Jessica would bounce up and slide into her shoes to prove Mom wrong!*

Look for win-win compromises that allow you *both* to “save face.”

*Samantha told her three-year-old, Billy, that it was time to leave the park, but her son said he had to fill one more bucket with sand. He then proceeded to put sand in it ... one grain at a time! Growing impatient, Samantha offered a compromise and then something fun for Billy to look forward to. “You say, ‘No, no, no!’ You love the park and don’t want to leave. But Daddy is waiting. So let’s do this. You can put a little more sand in your pail before we leave. Should you take one more minute to put sand in, or two?” Billy quickly said, “Two!” To make it even more fun, Samantha played the boob a little to let Billy feel like an even bigger winner. She said “What!? Two minutes! No way! One is plenty. Okay, you win. You always win me. You can have two more minutes. Then as soon as we get home, we can play ball.... I bet I can throw the ball so fast you’ll never catch it! Is that a deal?”*

Remember, when your child keeps his part of the compromise, always reward him with a tiny time-in (like a hug, some praise, gossip, a bit of play) or playing the boob.

However, if your child doesn’t cooperate (or if you have no time for respectful listening and little compromises), then it’s time for a mild consequence like clap-growl or kind ignoring.

**Kind Ignoring.** Since annoying acts are yellow-light behaviors (“I don’t like that.”) not red-light ones (“Stop

now!”), they can usually be handled with just a little “cold shoulder.”

Here’s how you might put all these steps together for an annoying behavior, like whining:

***“You really, really, really want a cookie. But that whiny voice hurts my ears. So Mommy has to go away for a second. But as soon as you use your ‘happy’ voice, I’ll come right back and you can tell me what you want.”***

Then turn your back and pretend to be busy doing something on the other side of the room (don’t look back). Ignore any increase in whining, but as soon as your little friend uses his nice voice, reward him by immediately returning and offering a cheerful comment: “That’s the voice my ears like!” Then you can choose what to offer: 1) a cookie, 2) a cookie, only *after* he picks up his toys, 3) respectful sympathy but no more cookies for now.

If, however, the kind ignoring doesn’t work and the annoying behaviors cross the line into unbearable, that’s when you need to count to three and use a “take-control” consequence like time-out or giving a fine.

***Bernadette was having a pokey morning and wouldn’t get dressed for the park ... even though she loved playing outside. So her dad, Alvin, said, “Get dressed before the dinger rings or we won’t have time to play in the park.” Then he turned his back for a few seconds to see what she would do next.***

***Had she started getting dressed, he would have praised her and helped her along. But instead she continued to dawdle. So Alvin decided to play the boob. He pretended to “help” her get***

*dressed, but kept making silly mistakes like trying to put her pants on over her head and saying in a boastful, boobish way, “Yes! Yes! That’s how they go! I’m sure of it ... right?”*

*Unfortunately, she dug in her heels and just refused to put on her clothes. So Alvin decided to give Bernadette a fine for dawdling too long. “You really, really don’t want to get dressed. Okay. No problem,” he stated matter-of-factly, “but then, no park today ... maybe tomorrow.” And with that he turned his back and left.*

*Five minutes later Bernadette announced she was ready to go, and Alvin calmly replied, “I know you love the park, but you waited sooo long today, there is no time.” Bernadette had a meltdown and cried, and Alvin lovingly acknowledged her disappointment and offered her some juice. When she pouted and refused, he did a minute of kind ignoring and she stopped her complaints.*

*The next day, when her dad offered to take her to the park, he suggested a little “getting dressed” race: “I bet you can’t get dressed by the time I count to ten!” And she got dressed superfast. “Wow!” he exclaimed. “You got dressed as fast as a jet plane ... zooooom!”*

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**Put Annoying Behaviors “On Hold”**



A great way to stop your child from becoming a “professional whiner” is to put his behavior “on hold.” Just to remind you, this is when you *almost* give your child what he’s begging for; then at the last moment you turn and pretend you suddenly have to do something else for a minute. Please reread [Put Annoying Behavior “On Hold” ... with Patience-Stretching....](#) This one is worth its weight in gold!

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## Simple Steps to *Prevent* Annoying Behavior

Even better than *stopping* nagging and whining is *preventing* them. You can do this by using the same approach recommended for preventing tantrums (see [How to Eliminate Most Tantrums ... Before They Even Start!](#)):

- 1) Avoid problem situations.
  - 2) Connect with respect ... all day long.
  - 3) Feed the meter.
  - 4) Teach patience-stretching and magic breathing.
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## **The Old Switcheroo: Getting Tots to Take Their Medicine**

Lots of children resist taking their medicine. And trying to force them to swallow it down can lead to power struggles, wasted medicine, and a stressed-out family.

But here’s one little technique that really gets the job done for older toddlers ... even though it’s a tiny bit sneaky and involves giving a smidge of soda. Here’s what you do:

Before giving your toddler his medicine, pour about an ounce of decaffeinated, dark-colored soda (like root beer) into each of two small glasses. Next, mix a dose of medicine into one of the glasses. (You can also try dark grape juice, but a strong-flavored, fizzy soda works best to hide bitterness.)

Now call your toddler, and while he watches put his medicine in a spoon and say, “Take this, sweetie, then you can have a little soda. Some soda for you and some for me.” If he willingly takes his medicine give him the *plain* soda ... and a pat on the back. (A little later, gossip to his teddy about how he swallowed down all of his medicine and made you happy.)

If your child refuses the medicine, repeat your offer: “Take this really fast, sweetheart, then you can have your yummy soda.” Play the boob by begging a little (ham it up): “Please take it. *P-l-e-a-s-e!!!*” If he refuses again, pout and say, “Okay, you win! You *always* win! I *never* get to win! Here’s your soda,” *but* hand him the glass that’s *mixed with the medicine*. Your toddler will guzzle the soda—and medicine—fast. He’ll be in such a hurry to drink it down before you change your mind, he’ll never realize he’s been hoodwinked!

Don’t gloat or say, “Gotcha!” when it’s over. That may make your little one feel tricked and cause him to refuse the soda when the next dose is due. After the soda/medicine combo is taken, show your child that you’re pouring the spoon of medicine back into the bottle and set him free again.

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## Behavior Challenge #3: Defiance

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All little kids defy their parents from time to time. Sometimes it's because the thrill of doing something "forbidden" is *irresistible*, or it's *payback* for being stopped from doing something he wanted to do earlier in the day, or perhaps he has just forgotten the rule. But regardless of the reason, defiance can push our buttons like nothing else. We get mad, then *our* emotional elevator drops down, down, down to a primitive state of anger. Too often, we get sucked in so fast we just react ... and then overreact.

Note: To help put a stop to this process before you react explosively, it's a good idea for *you* to practice magic breathing! When you have a calm moment, sit comfortably, relax your face, and take a few deep breaths—slow in and slow out—to help you practice staying in control of your emotions.

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### The Silver Lining of Your Little Tot's Defiance

Think of defiance as a sign of *courage* ... the ability to stand up for oneself. It was gutsy of our ancient ancestors to fight off wild animals with just rocks and sticks, and it's gutsy for toddlers to resist parents who are five times their size!

Of course, I'm not saying we should encourage defiance. But I do believe the goal is to get our headstrong toddlers to *join the team* ... not to break their spirits.

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A little defiance is normal, but repeated disrespect must be stopped. Now here's the tricky part: Trying to squash your child's defiance with a display of anger often boomerangs. (Think of it as trying to intimidate a member of a motorcycle gang!) Rather than meekly giving in, your macho (or macha) little friend may actually yell right in your face and refuse to back down.

## Tools to *Prevent* Defiance

In a moment, I'll talk about *stopping* defiance. But first, here are some simple steps to *prevent* it before it happens.

**Feed the Meter.** Throughout a normal, happy day, offer your child *dozens* of little time-ins (like attention, praise, gossip, and hand checks), fun routines (like special time), and confidence builders (like offering options and playing the boob) to make him feel like a winner. These steps build the loving bond and magically help our kids become more cooperative and less defiant.

**Practice Patience-Stretching and Magic Breathing.** When you teach your child self-control you'll make it easier for him to avoid conflict—with you or anyone else.

**Plant Seeds of Kindness.** Practice by role-playing, by telling homespun fairy tales with messages about life lessons regarding right and wrong, and by catching others being good.

## Tools to *Stop* Defiance

You will be most successful teaching your children respect, fairness, and calmness when you model them yourself, during times of conflict.

So when you're caught in a toddler rebellion, use your *ambassadorial* skills to help you turn conflict into cooperation. Here's how:

**Connect with Respect.** Use a few phrases to show you understand and care.

**Let Your Child "Save Face."** To help both you and your toddler save face, try offering options, inventing little competitions (making a game out of what you are requesting, like having a race), or suggesting a win-win compromise:

#### *Offer Options*

*Three-year-old Selma hates getting dressed in the morning, so her mother has learned how to offer her options that yield the desired result: "Selma, you really, really don't want to get dressed. You love just playing with your toys. I'm so, so sorry, but Mommy has to leave very soon, so here's your choice: You can dress yourself or I can take you to the store in your pajamas (even though you might get cold). Which one sounds best, get dressed or be in your cold pajamas?"*

#### *Play (Make it a game)*

*Sofia wasn't a big eater, so her mother, Agapi, wanted her daughter to at least drink some milk to take in a little protein and calcium. This was usually a big struggle. One day Agapi's sister suggested*

*she sidestep the conflict by making it into a little race. Agapi decided to give it a try.*

*The next day, when Agapi put the milk in front of her strong-willed two-year-old, she said, "I'll count to five and see if you can finish your milk." Sofia smiled and drank half and Agapi encouraged her to drink down a little more. "Wow! You drank that superfast! I'll count to five again and see if you can finish it all ... but please save one little drop for me. Please! Okay? On your mark ... get set ... go!" Sophia drank it all, not even leaving a drop. To keep up the fun, Agapi added a bit of playing the boob and in a pretend whine said, "No fair! You drank MY milk too!" Sofia flashed her a grin a mile wide.*

### **Win-Win Compromise**

*Four-year-old Ben loved the park and ignored his mom's calls to stop playing. So she knelt down next to him and acknowledged his feelings:*

*"You are having so much fun! You love, love the park! You don't even want to come when I call. You just want to play, play, play!"*

*Then, when Ben looked up, his mom saw it was now her turn to give a message and she offered a win-win compromise: "But we have to go make some yummy dinner, sweetheart. So here's your choice: We can leave now and play football at home, or you can play here for two more*

*minutes. Your choice, sweetheart, fun football at home or two minutes here?”*

If defiance continues, it's time for a consequence:

**Mild Consequence.** For mild defiance, do a clap-growl or connect with respect plus kind ignoring.

*Arianna found herself constantly having to nag three-year-old Morgan to get ready for school. When she learned The Happiest Toddler approach, she decided to give it a try. The next time her daughter refused to put on her shoes, Arianna responded by connecting with respect and then adding a little kind ignoring: “You say, ‘No, no, no! No shoes!’ I know you don’t want to put them on, honey, but you know what no shoes means: no play outside. So Mommy will be right back to see if you’re ready for your shoes. And then we can also eat your crunchy cereal.”*

*Arianna turned her back for twenty seconds and pretended to be straightening up some papers at the other end of the room. She then returned and repeated, “Come on, sweetheart. Let’s put on shoes so you can eat your crunchies and play!” Morgan protested, “No, I want my crunchies now!”*

*Then her mom did a very smart thing. Rather than getting into a fight, she tried the technique of putting her “on hold” (see [Put Annoying Behavior “On Hold” ... with Patience-Stretching](#)). Arianna said, “Okay, honey, you win. Here are your crunchies.” But just as she*

*was putting the cereal on the table she abruptly stopped and said, “Wait! Wait! I almost forgot. Where are your shoes, you silly goose? Superquick, get your shoes ... then let’s have some yummy crunchies!” And she turned and again pretended to be busy for twenty seconds.*

*Arianna ignored Morgan as she protested, “I want my crunchies.” And then, with a big pout on her face, she suddenly got up and brought her shoes to her mom to be put on. Arianna immediately rewarded her daughter’s cooperation with an enthusiastic cheer and by offering her an option of cereal bowls: “Yea! Good job! Now, would you like your crunchies in the dinosaur bowl or in the blue cup?”*

**“Take-Charge” Consequence.** For serious disrespect, do a clap-growl (to show your displeasure) and then use a time-out or give a fine.

Remember, your child is leaving you no choice but to give a consequence. “You are forcing me to give you a time-out.” After the time-out, *don’t* immediately talk about her defiance. Wait until later that day to gossip about how her actions made you unhappy or role-play about it with her dolls.

## Defiant-Behavior Example: Resisting the Car Seat

*At 15 months, Henry began to squirm and fuss when Patrice went to buckle him into the car seat. “You have to have the harness on; it’s important to keep you safe,” his mom would explain. But Henry just fought and wriggled. Patrice said,*



*“Some days, belting him in is like wrestling a greased pig!”*

Young toddlers hate being confined. They often resist getting in car seats, sitting still on the bus, putting on party clothes, etc. You can try to reason them out of their resistance, but what if your loving logic just doesn't work?

## Tools to Prevent Car-Seat Fights

Here are a few ways to prevent car-seat conflicts before they happen:

**Practice.** Put the car seat in the living room and have him sit in it while you give him a minute of time-in (snack, read, etc.). Once he accepts the car seat at home, start going for very short rides (just around the block). Reward his cooperation with a time-in. Soon your tyke will learn that car seats are no big deal. Don't forget to gossip about his cooperation (to his stuffed animals, Grandma, or anybody). Paste photos of your child happily sitting in his car seat into a little book (“My Car Seat” scrapbook) and view it with him at bedtime to remind him of the fun things he does when he's in his car seat.

**Catch Others Being Good.** Point out when you see other kids in their car seats. Cut pictures of happy kids sitting in their car seats from magazines and add them to the scrapbook. Let your child overhear you gossip about the car-seat cooperation of kids he knows.

**Fairy Tales.** For older car-seat resisters, making up stories about giving in will plant the seed of cooperation and may help you prevent the conflict from ever occurring:

*Charlie the Crab hated to be in the car seat ... but he loved swimming with the other crabs at the clear, blue lake. He was sooo crabby. "No seat! No seat!" he'd cry over and over! But one day his friend Finny the Fish told him, "Hey, Charlie, when I was little I didn't like car seats, but now my mom sings songs with me and we sing the whole way to the lake. It's fun! What's your favorite song? Let's sing it now!"*

**Role-Play.** Play with his dolls and his car seat. Have one doll be the child who resists the seat and another doll be the mommy who says, "I know you hate it, little dolly. You say, 'No, no, no!' ' But let's have some fun and make it your *fun seat!* We can sing a silly song or read a book ... your choice."

## Tools to End a Car-Seat Fight

If the struggle has already begun, try this:

**Connect with Respect.** Even when you have to enforce a rule, remember to show your respect:

*At least twice a week, Christianne's 29-month-old firecracker, Aurora, would erupt into screaming in the middle of a car ride. Christianne couldn't stop, but she tried her best to let her little one know she really got her message. " 'No, no, no!' You say, 'No car, Mommy. No, no, no!!' " She would vigorously wave one arm, wag her finger and say, "You hate it, hate it! You say, 'No, no, no!' "*

When you find yourself in this situation, repeatedly echo your child's feelings and aim for his sweet spot. It may not stop his crying, but it will make him feel understood

and respected, and it will help him recover faster once you get home. (Wait until a quiet time, much later, to give your lecture about the dangers of cars and why car seats are smart to use.)

**Win-Win Compromise.** Offer a win-win compromise to show respect and gain cooperation.

*Three-year-old Baron often complained that his car seat was “too tight.” But his dad used his love of music to find a compromise. “I’m so sorry, Baron, but Daddy has to put you in the seat. I know you really, really hate it, very much! But wait, wait! I have a very important question. Do you want me to put on your Silly Songs music before you sit in the seat or after?”*

**Gossip.** After you get back home, let your child overhear you gossiping about his struggles and successes.

*“Psst! Hey, Elmo! Moses didn’t like his car seat at first and started to cry. But then we started to sing the Happy Birthday song and he got happy and became a super-duper car-seat sitter! I’m gonna tell Daddy what a good job he did!”*

## Defiant-Behavior Example: Picky Eating

*“Dr. Karp, I swear he lives on air. He eats one cracker and that’s it for the day!”*

—Shana, mom of two-year-old Danny

Feeding, feeding, feeding has been your big job for a long, long time. We all feel like good parents when our kids clean their plates.

Yet many toddlers tenaciously refuse any food other than crackers, macaroni and cheese, and buttered bread. Don't take this fussiness personally; it's just a normal part of the rigidity so common to the toddler years. Take some time to read a book or check with your doctor to learn the amount of nutrients your child really needs, and track his food intake over a week or two to see if he is getting enough. Most kids require less than we think.

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## Four Reasons Toddlers Become Food Refuseniks

- **They're not hungry.** Shortly after the first birthday a toddler's weight gain suddenly slows down. And by 18 to 24 months, many toddlers become "grazing animals," preferring many snacks a day to regular meals.
  - **Mealtime means more than food.** To your toddler, a meal is as much play, or a science experiment, as it is a time to eat.
  - **They hate green.** It's smart to like red and avoid green. Red signals what's ripe, sweet, and safe to eat. Green foods are often bitter or unripe. (Even with lollipops—toddlers pick red over green almost every time!)
  - **"Temperamental" taste buds.** Some kids are just born supersensitive. They hate rough clothes, loud noises, and strong flavors.
- 

## Tools to Handle Picky Eaters

Smart parents avoid battles they can't win. So rather than trying to force your child to eat something he doesn't want, sidestep the conflict by hiding it in the

food he likes or finding a win-win compromise.

**Connect with Respect.** Narrate your child's strong desire not to eat so she knows you understand.

**Catch Others Being Good.** Point out what kids have on their plates when you visit restaurants. Invite older kids to your house to eat a meal. Toddlers love imitating others, especially slightly older kids.

**Win-Win Compromise.** Compete to see who can chomp down the "little trees" (broccoli) the fastest. Offer choices ("Should I give you three peas or two?") and suggest a win-win compromise ("Eat a green bean and you can have another French fry. Eat two more green beans and you can have all five of these French fries!"). If your toddler drives a hard bargain and eats only one tiny nibble of the bean, you should still give her a piece of the French fry because that's definitely a baby step in the right direction.

**Reverse Psychology.** When your toddler reaches for a piece of broccoli, at first let her have only a tiny piece. Say, "No way! Mommy wants them ALL.... They're Mommy's trees." When your tot gobbles up her piece, make a silly pout and say, "Hey, you ate my broccoli!!"

*When two-year-old Celia refused to eat, Mark and Karen pretended to try to sneak bits of food off her plate as though they were greedy and wanted all her food for themselves.*

*"We appeal to her basic sense of 'It's mine!' " says Mark. "It works about half*

*the time, but a 50-50 success rate ain't so bad."*

**Putting Bad Behavior "On Hold."** Lips still zipped? If your child still won't eat, let her leave the table. However, if she returns for a little milk or sweets, you might put her "on hold" by doing something like this:

Begin to hand her the milk, then suddenly stop and offer her a *smidge* of dinner first. "You want milky? Okay, sweet-heart, here's your milk. Oops, silly Mommy! Mommy forgot, big girls have to eat one green bean before milky! Do you want to eat this big one or this little teeny, tiny, baby bean?"

If she refuses, say, "No problem, my love. But no beans ... no milky." Then say, "I'll check on you in just a sec to see if you're ready for your bean." Now turn and busy yourself with something for thirty seconds. Then turn back and whisper, "I know you don't like beans soooooo much. So should we find a teeny, tiny one or would you rather just eat a half of one?"

As soon as she eats her bean, reward her with a smile, milk, and a little time-in. This will encourage faster cooperation in the future.

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## **Be a Master of Disguise**

Okay, the following may sound like you are being a spy more than an ambassador, but here are my favorite tricks for getting nutrients and veggies past your toddler's lips:

- Appeal to her "sour tooth." Cut vegetables into French fry-size strips, cook them, then marinate them overnight in pickle juice or Italian dressing.

- Blend veggies into a soup.
- Blend and bake veggies into batter bread. Use a recipe for zucchini bread, but use pureed broccoli in place of zucchini and double the amount the recipe calls for.
- Make yam chips by baking or broiling them in an oven with a little salt and butter.
- Dip lightly steamed veggies into ranch or creamy Italian dressing.
- Grind zucchini or carrots and put them into pancakes and serve them with syrup.
- Serve fresh carrot or carrot/apple juice.
- Iron is important for blood, muscle, and brain growth. You can add a lot of iron to your child's diet just by cooking in a cast-iron pot or skillet. Add lemon juice or vinegar and the acid will really help bring the iron out of the metal and into the food.
- Your toddler needs 12 mg. of iron a day. Iron-rich foods include black beans (1 cup has 8 mg.), liver (4 oz. has 7.9 mg.), lentils (1 cup has 6.6 mg.), beef (4 oz. has 3.6 mg.), blackstrap molasses (1 tablespoon has 3.5 mg.), raisins (8 oz. has 3.2 mg.), prune juice (8 oz. has 3 mg.), or cooked greens (1/2 cup of mustard greens, dandelion greens, or collards has 2.6 mg.). Squeeze a little lemon juice over iron-rich foods—you'll increase iron absorption severalfold. (But dark grape juice cuts iron absorption by over 50 percent.)
- Your toddler needs 700 to 1,000 mg. of calcium each day. Some powerhouse sources of calcium that are easy to sneak into your toddler's diet include skim milk powder, which is easy to mix into foods (2 oz. contains 400 mg.); blackstrap

molasses (1 tablespoon has 290 mg.); sesame seed butter (tahini), sold in health-food stores (2 oz. has 270 mg.); yogurt (8 oz. has 270 mg.); grated Parmesan (2 oz. has 260 mg.); and broccoli (1 stalk has 160 mg.). And you can give your child a further calcium boost simply by letting her play outside! Just fifteen to thirty minutes of sunlight a day will help her body make vitamin D, which is essential for her to fully benefit from the calcium in her diet. (Don't forget to put on the sunscreen if your toddler is going to be out in the sun for more than thirty minutes.)

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## **Behavior Challenge #4: Aggressive and/or Dangerous Behavior**



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Up until now in this chapter we've been talking about dealing with yellow-light behaviors. But, this last group of parental challenges is made up of red-light behaviors. *You* get to go first ("Stop now!") when your tot's acts are violent or dangerous. These acts demand immediate action. Once the behavior has stopped, *then* you can spend a minute reflecting his feelings.

The kids who are most aggressive are those who:

- have spirited, high-energy temperaments
- are extra impulsive and distractible
- are under extra stress
- don't speak well



- are bored, cooped up, lonely, or stressed

If your tot is a wild child, there's a lot you can do to prevent his repeated acts of aggression. As mentioned earlier, you'll be able to dramatically reduce the fighting and cut the number of time-outs simply by boosting your child's time-ins!

However, when it's too late to *prevent* a problem, then it's time for you to jump in with some clear and consistent consequences.

## Dangerous-Behavior Example: Sibling Aggression

*Twins Caleb and Elijah, 24 months old, were playing nicely at the sandbox in the park two blocks from their apartment. Suddenly, Caleb decided he wanted the sand-sifter Elijah was using. He reached for it, but Elijah quickly yanked it away. In retaliation, Caleb whacked his brother's head with his shovel ... and Elijah promptly whacked him right back!*

*In a flash, their father, Alan, clapped and growled, scooped them up, and carried them out of the park. Once home, he immediately put them both in time-out.*

Your toddler's veneer of civilization is so thin it doesn't take much to propel him back to his primitive nature: hitting, poking, pinching, whacking, biting. (More about biting in the next section.) And, having *two* little cave-kids to supervise can make you feel more like a boxing referee than a parent.

## Tools to Handle Sibling Fights

Here are two straightforward ways to get control:

**Connect with Respect.** Upset toddlers are usually the most emotional people in the room and that's why we generally acknowledge *their* feelings before we give *our* message. But in red-light situations, *we* get to go first. "Stop! No hit! No hit! We *don't* hit people." Only *after* the danger or aggression stops do we use the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-ese to narrate our toddler's anger or frustration.

**"Take-Charge" Consequence.** When your kids are fighting, it may be obvious to you which one deserves a time-out. But if you're not sure who the chief culprit is, it's often best to discipline *both* kids. I know that may seem a little unfair, but here's why it can be the right thing to do: First, it's often hard to know who the victim really is (sometimes, the munchkin you thought was innocent actually provoked the fight by teasing or taunting), and second, it teaches that regardless of who started the fight, they both have responsibility for having continued it.

Later in the day, use your other tools (like gossip, role-play, fairy tales, catching others being good, etc.) to encourage anything positive about the fight (like stopping when you said "Stop!") and to discourage what you disliked (like biting or using hurtful words).

Kids who get into lots of fights may need more time to run around outside. They often benefit from attending nursery school to keep them busy and out of mischief.

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## When to Step Back ... and Let Your Kids Solve It

You don't necessarily have to intervene in every *slugfest* your kids have. Small struggles help kids learn to stand up for themselves and be courageous.

Besides, sooner or later, you will want your kids to learn to settle their differences on their own.

So as long as the fight is a yellow-light situation, not a red-light one (that is, it involves bickering and bellowing, but not bleeding), let the kids struggle a bit before you intervene. When you enter the room, use the Fast-Food Rule and Toddler-ese to show you understand that they're *both* upset and that you really care. Then excuse yourself and give them another minute to work it out. (Of course, if the fighting spins out of control—physically or verbally—it's time to step in and hand out some consequences.)

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## Dangerous-Behavior Example: Biting

Biting is a common behavior for primitive cave-kids. They typically chomp during teething or when frustrated. But if this behavior is not discouraged, promptly and powerfully, it can turn into a dangerous habit (like biting other kids' faces or biting babies).

*Just as Monica finished tying her 16-month-old's shoe, he bit her shoulder—hard! “Owww!” Monica yelled. Then, struggling to compose herself, she scolded him lovingly, mildly, “Please, Lukie! That's not nice. Mommy doesn't like biting.”*

*Do you think Lucas stopped? Nope! In fact, he soon began biting whenever he got mad.*

## Tools to Deal with Biting

Here's how to stop this dangerous behavior fast:

**Consequences.** If the chomper bites before you can stop him, he needs a consequence. With a young toddler, start with a mild consequence.

**Clap-Growl.** In the example above, Monica’s message, “Mommy doesn’t like biting,” failed to work because it was way too sweet. Remember, in emotional situations, what you say is much less important than the way you say it. Be firm and wear a serious expression to match.

If you happen to see your tot open his mouth right as he’s about to nip, give some fast, hard claps, make a deep, menacing growl, do a double take (see [this page](#)), and with a warning finger held up, bark, “Hey ... *hey!*! No bite. *No* bite!!”

Don’t stare at your child after the warning. Staring may make a defiant kid disobey even more!



**Kind Ignoring.** Immediately remove your little biter from the situation. Give him a “cold shoulder” for twenty to thirty seconds and lavish some sympathy on the child who was nipped. (Let the biter overhear you gossip to his victim, “I say, ‘No, no, *no!*’ I don’t like it when Lukie bites. Kids have to use their words when they’re mad. I like it when kids who are really angry say, ‘No, no! I don’t like it!’ ”) After a minute or two of kind ignoring, reengage your child with a little friendly talking or play.

Later in the day, gossip to his teddy bear about how you don't like biting. Role-play the incident and ask your child what the "biter" could do to make the bitten doll feel better. You might also tell a fairy tale. Perhaps a little story about the girl bunny who was sad because she would bite so much that the other bunnies didn't want to play with her. So her mommy taught her a special trick: Every time she wanted to bite, she should show her teeth and click them together three times ... but never bite. The other little bunnies thought this was funny and then they all wanted to play with her! This made her smile and she lived happily ever after. The end!

**"Take-Charge" Consequence.** Children who bite hard or are "repeat offenders" get an immediate consequence, like a mini time-out (see [this page](#)), time-out, or a fine.

## Dangerous-Behavior Example: Running Away from You

One last dangerous behavior you may have to deal with is when your child darts away from you in a crowded mall or parking lot. Obviously, running away in public is totally unacceptable and must be stopped immediately.

### Tools to Stop Children Who Run Away

In red-light situations, there is just no time to respectfully acknowledge your child's feelings. When there's a danger or your child is breaking an important family rule ... *you* get to go first!

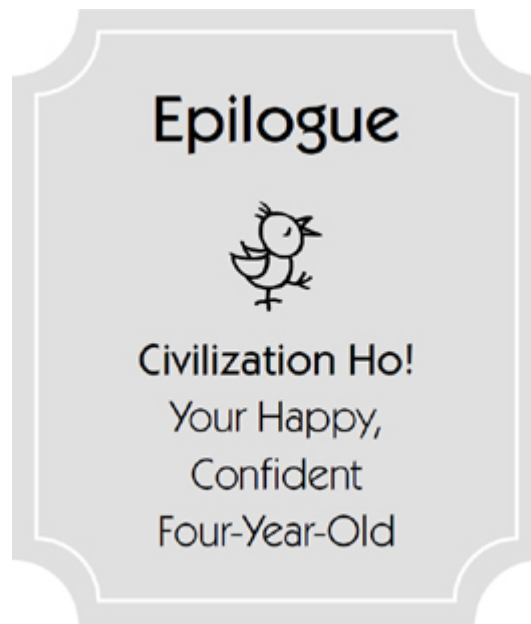
**Clap-Growl.** Give a loud clap and growl then demand, "No! *Stop!* Now! " You may have to raise your voice, or you may be able to get his attention with a stern voice and frown. (If your child doesn't stop

immediately and you have to run after him, keep a serious face so he doesn't confuse this with a game of chase.)

**Connect with Respect.** Once your child is safe, *then* it's his turn to have his feelings validated:

“You wanted the ball. You said, ‘Kick ball!’ You ran, ran, ran ... but nooo! No street, *no!* Cars! Cars hurt kids! *Ouch!*”

If your child tries to run away again, it's time for an immediate consequence. (See [Time-Out: Real-Life Questions](#) for a way to give a time-out when you are away from home.)



***“The journey is the reward.”***

—Taoist saying

Congratulations! You’ve just guided your toddler through some of the most amazing, fast-paced, challenging developments she’ll experience in her entire life!

She has been miraculously transformed from a one-year-old (gleefully practicing her first steps and words), to an 18-month-old (swaggering with the new thrill of freedom and falling prey to wild emotional swings), to a two-year-old (learning the simple rules of language and social cooperation), to a three-year-old (fascinated by people, play, art, humor, and friendship), to a four-year-old (a budding expert in art, humor, and making friends).

Whew! No wonder this has been such an exhausting period for all of you! And now here you are on the brink of your child’s fifth birthday. Soon you’ll be leaving toddlerhood behind as your child knocks at the gates of

childhood to begin her long life as a citizen of the civilized world.



Of course, there is still a lot of work ahead, but your beautiful child is no longer a little primitive. Five-year-olds are ready for all sorts of exciting new cultural experiences, like writing, reading, Little League, and lemonade stands.

And if you thought toddlerhood was amazing, just wait. Over the next couple of years, your child's sense of humor will blossom (Uh-oh ... barf and poop jokes are coming!), her curiosity about the world will explode ("Why? Why? Why?"), and she'll fall madly in love with her friends ("But Mommy, I have to go to Mary's party! Please!?!").

Your child's development and maturation don't mean she'll totally outgrow *The Happiest Toddler* parenting lessons. Of course, you'll use growling a lot less (although you may be tempted to bring it back during the teen years), but the basic tools, like the Fast-Food Rule, feeding the meter, and win-win compromises, will serve you well through *all* the years of your little one's childhood. Truthfully, none of us ever outgrows the need to hear our feelings heard, understood, and respected.

And don't expect to throw Toddler-ese away in a dumpster the minute your little friend blows out her four birthday candles. As the years pass, you'll no longer



be jabbing your finger in the air exclaiming, “*You want! You want!*” But you will still be using shorter phrases and repetition, and mirroring a bit of your child’s feelings to help soothe her emotional upsets, for many more years. (Remember, even adults slide down an emotional elevator when we’re distraught, and we feel most heard if our friends and loved ones manage to hit our sweet spot when they acknowledge our feelings.)

I hope you’ll look back fondly on these happy toddler days. Once you’re past this period, you’ll have a bit of a breather. The next ten years will also have unique challenges, but you will have mastered the most important skills you’ll ever need to be a great parent.

Congratulations, have fun, and hold on! As fast as toddlerhood passes, the years of childhood will rocket by even faster!

# Appendix A



## The Ten Basics for Raising a Happy Toddler

### **1. It helps to think of your toddler as a little caveman.**

With all their grunting and grabbing, toddlers can act uncivilized. In fact, their brains are actually pretty primitive and out of balance. The part that's good at language and logic is immature, and the part that's emotional and impulsive is in the driver's seat. Even our brains lose much of their language and logic ability when we're upset (we get so mad we "go ape!"). But since toddlers are primitive to start with, when they're upset their brains get so stressed-out they seem to go ... *prehistoric!*

### **2. Know your toddler's temperament.**

Is your child laid-back? Cautious? Spirited? Knowing your toddler's temperament will help you be better at anticipating his needs and reactions so you can be a better parent.

### **3. Give yourself a pat on the back.**

Parenting is hard. Parenting is a challenging job. Besides having to handle your primitive little pal's

ups and downs, you'll regularly have to struggle with these common parenting problems:

- *You don't have enough help:* If you're like most parents today, you don't have the rich network of family and friends that parents throughout history have relied on to help them at home. And at the same time, you may be struggling with a modern challenge that past generations rarely encountered: Dads *and* Moms having to leave the home to hold down full-time jobs.
- *You feel like a flop:* Most new parents have no training and little experience. No wonder we feel demoralized when our little Bamm-Bamms do the normal things that all toddlers do: have meltdowns, act unreasonably, and challenge the rules.
- *Your buttons get pushed:* Don't be surprised if your toddler's spitting and shrieks unexpectedly awaken within you painful memories or upsetting feelings from deep in your past.
- *You have a personality mismatch:* Does your personality clash with your little one's? If so, take a breath, count your blessings, and focus on what you love about your child.

#### **4. Be an *ambassador* to your uncivilized little tot.**

Once you realize your toddler is uncivilized (especially when she's mad), it becomes clear why parenting is so tricky. Most successful moms and dads handle their toddler's upsets with a mix of respect, kindness, and diplomatic limit setting. In other words, you'll be the most successful if you think of yourself *not* as your child's "boss" or "buddy," but as a skillful *ambassador* from the 21st century to your primitive little friend.

#### **5. Practice the *Fast-Food Rule* every day.**

Upset toddlers often get so frantic they seem deaf to

our calm words of explanation and reason. That's why, when your tot is tantrumming, it's *imperative* that you spend a minute echoing what you think she wants and feels—to help her settle down a bit—before taking a turn to tell her *your* important message.

**6. Speak in your upset toddler's native lingo—*Toddler-ese*.**

Toddlers aren't that good with language to begin with, and when they're upset, their stressed-out brains struggle with our words even more. That's why when your child is emotional—mad, sad, scared, etc.—she'll understand you the best if you translate your statements into a simpler style of language, *Toddler-ese*. It's as easy as one-two-three:

- 1) Use short phrases.
  - 2) Repeat the phrases several times.
  - 3) Use animated gestures and an expressive tone of voice to mirror a bit of your child's feeling.
- That allows you to connect with her emotional *sweet spot*.

**7. Encourage your child's good (*green-light*) behavior with lots of fun interactions like:**

- **Time-ins:** Lavish your child with tiny bits of *attention, play, praise, gossip, hand checks*, et cetera, at least twenty times a day.
- **Confidence builders:** Make your child feel like a winner by offering choices and *playing the boob* whenever you can.
- **Teaching patience:** Increase your child's control over her outbursts by practicing *patience-stretching* and *magic breathing*.
- **Routines:** Create fun routines like *bedtime sweet talk* and *special time* to help your tot feel smart, happy, and loved.

- **Planting seeds of kindness:** Teach your child how to be kind and considerate by means of:
  - 1) *fairy tales*, 2) *catching others being good*, 3) *role-playing*.

## **8. Curb your child's annoying (*yellow-light*) behaviors.**

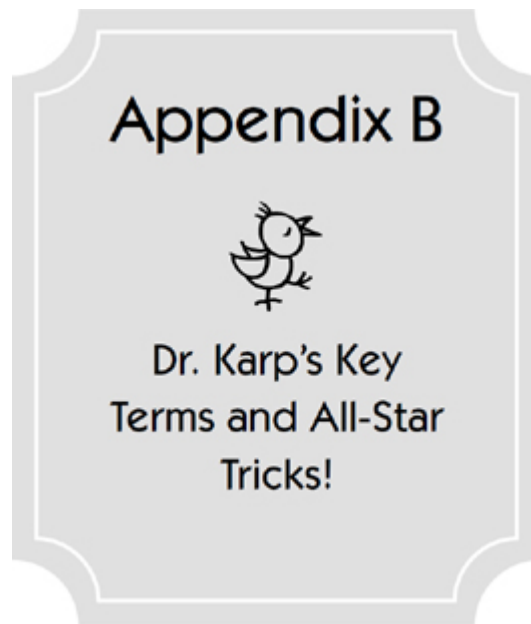
All toddlers dawdle, whine, and defy, but you can curb these annoyances by *connecting with respect* (a combination of the *Fast-Food Rule* + *Toddler-ese*), by offering *win-win compromises* to encourage better behavior, and by giving *mild consequences* (like *clap-growl* or *kind ignoring*) when the nuisance continues.

## **9. Put a quick halt to your child's unacceptable (*red-light*) behaviors.**

When your child is aggressive, doing something dangerous, or breaking a key family rule, it's time for you to stop the situation fast with a "*take-charge*" consequence (*time-out* or *giving a fine*).

## **10. Prevent most tantrums or lovingly stop them in their tracks.**

You can stop half of your toddler's tantrums in seconds just by using the *Fast-Food Rule* + *Toddler-ese*. And, even more amazingly, you can prevent 50 to 90 percent of toddler outbursts from ever happening by: avoiding problem situations, *connecting with respect* all day long, *feeding the meter* (with frequent *time-ins*, *playing the boob*, *routines*, etc.), and teaching *patience-stretching*.



There are so many *Happiest Toddler* parenting tips and skills, I've included this short glossary to help you remember the ones you'll be using the most:

***Avoid problem situations***

Prevent tantrums by avoiding common tantrum triggers, such as fatigue, hunger, caffeine, boredom, aggressive or violent videos, TV, etc.

([Avoid problem situations](#)).

***Bedtime sweet talk***

A nightly routine that reminds your child of the many good things she did that day and previews some of the fun things she can look forward to the next day

([Bedtime sweet talk](#)).

***Catch others being good***

Point out to your child other children and adults who are demonstrating the actions and attitudes you want to encourage in her.

[Catch others being good](#)

### ***Clap-growl***

Several loud claps followed by a low growl is both a warning signal and a mild consequence that all cave-kids understand.

[Clap-growl](#)

### ***Confidence builders***

Little self-esteem boosters that make your toddler feel like a winner (such as asking your child's opinion and playing the boob).

[Confidence builders](#)

### ***Connect with respect***

This is talking to your upset child using the Fast-Food Rule spoken in your very best Toddler-ese.

[Connect with respect](#)

### ***Double take***

After you get your toddler's attention with a clap-growl, put up a finger and turn your face away for a moment. This shows that you're the boss and helps avoid getting into staring matches.

[Double take](#)

### ***Fairy tales***

Like the age-old tradition of teaching values through story-telling, these are little stories that you make up to illustrate a specific lesson you want your child to learn.

## Fairy tales

### ***Fast-Food Rule***

Before telling an upset person *your* point of view, first repeat back how he's feeling ... in a way that touches the sweet spot of his emotions.

### [Fast-Food Rule](#)

### ***Feed the meter***

Giving your tot many bits of fun and attention all day long is an almost instantaneous way to boost her good behavior.

### [Feed the meter](#)

### ***Give a fine***

Removing a valued privilege or possession is a way to punish unacceptable behaviors.

### [Give a fine](#)

### ***Give in fantasy***

When you can't or won't give your child something she wants, tell her how you *wish* you could give it to her ... and much, much more.

### [Give in fantasy](#)

### ***Gossip***

Supersize the impact of your praise (or criticism) by letting your child overhear you whispering it to someone else, like Daddy, a bird on the lawn, or his favorite teddy bear.

### [Gossip](#)

### ***Green-light behavior***



Good things your child says and does that you want to praise and encourage.

[Green-light behavior](#)

### ***Hand check***

Little pen marks you put on the back of your child's hand when she does good deeds. They're a terrific way to make her feel good about herself all day long.

[Hand check](#)

### ***Kind ignoring***

Discourage annoying yellow-light behaviors (like whining and dawdling) by briefly turning your back to deprive your tot of your attention.

[Kind ignoring](#)

### ***Lovey***

A cuddly "companion"—like a silky blanket or stuffed animal—that your toddler can snuggle with for comfort and reassurance.

[Lovey](#)

### ***Magic breathing***

Deep breathing helps toddlers to develop self-control and reduce stress.

[Magic breathing](#)

### ***Mild consequences***

Small consequences (clap-growl, kind ignoring) used to curb annoying yellow-light behaviors.

[Mild consequences](#)

### ***Patience-stretching***

An instantly effective way to help even young toddlers learn how to control their impulses and wait patiently.

[Patience-stretching](#)

### ***Plant seeds of kindness***

Encourage the development of your tot's character through the "side door" of his mind by mentioning the values you want to see rather than telling your child what to do.

[Plant seeds of kindness](#)

### ***Play the boob***

A confidence builder. This all-time favorite parenting trick makes your tot feel strong and smart by making you seem a little silly, slow, and klutzy.

[Play the boob](#)

### ***Praise***

Let your child know you like what she's doing by giving her a balanced diet of praise. Throughout the day, mix a bit of "applause" with a bunch of compliments and a whole lot of gentle, smiling approval.

[Praise](#)

### ***Put bad behavior "on hold"***

A way to use patience-stretching to sidestep your child's whining and demands and teach him to be more reasonable.

[Put bad behavior "on hold"](#)

### ***Red-light behavior***

Things your child says or does that are dangerous or aggressive or that violate important family rules and that you need to stop ... immediately.

## Red-light behavior

### ***Reverse psychology***

A clever way to get your child to do something by ordering him *not* to do it.

[Reverse psychology](#)

### ***Role-playing***

A playful way to give your child the opportunity to practice behaviors you want to encourage.

[Role-playing](#)

### ***Saving face***

Shaming or embarrassing your toddler may lead to resentment and actually *decrease* cooperation. Saving face means allowing him to keep his dignity, even when he doesn't get his way.

[Saving face](#)

### ***Show your tot you believe in him***

This is a confidence builder in which you ask for your child's help, offer him options, or give him a minute to figure things out for himself.

[Show your tot you believe in him](#)

### ***Side door of your child's mind***

Toddlers learn more from indirect messages—fairy tales, role-playing, and catching others being good—than from lectures and long explanations. Their natural tendency is to imitate what they see and overhear (through the “side door” of the mind) rather than what they're told to do.

[Side door of your child's mind](#)

### ***Special time***

A daily routine of one to two short (five- to ten-minute) sessions of uninterrupted fun and attention. It's a *gift* that many kids fondly remember for the rest of their lives.

[Special time](#)

### ***Spokesperson***

A method of acknowledging your child's feelings by saying what you think she would if she could.

[Spokesperson](#)

### ***Sportscaster***

A method of acknowledging your child's feelings by narrating your child's actions and feelings like an announcer describing a sports match.

[Sportscaster](#)

### ***Star charts***

A tool for improving your older toddler's cooperation by making a daily recording on a little chart of a few specific behaviors you want to encourage.

[Star charts](#)

### ***Sweet spot***

When talking to anyone who is upset, you'll be most successful having her feel respected and cared about if your tone of voice and facial gestures reflect about a third of the person's emotional intensity.

[Sweet spot](#)

### ***"Take-charge" consequences***

Stronger penalties like time-out and giving a fine are the best way to quickly stop red-light behaviors.

## “Take-charge” consequences

### ***Time-in***

Feeding your child’s meter with a little gift of your time and attention.

### [Time-in](#)

### ***Time-out***

A short period of isolation to put a halt to unacceptable behaviors.

### [Time-out](#)

### ***Toddler-ese***

A special language that’s supereffective with upset toddlers, made up of three simple steps: short phrases, lots of repetition, and mirroring a bit of the child’s feelings to connect with her emotional sweet spot.

### [Toddler-ese](#)

### ***Win-win compromise***

Too many of us try to end conflicts with “I win ... you lose” solutions. A better way to resolve disagreements (with your child or anyone else) is to find compromises where you *both* get some of what you want.

### [Win-win compromise](#)

### ***Yellow-light behavior***

Annoying things your child says and does that you want to discourage.

### [Yellow-light behavior](#)

### ***“You-I” message***

A valuable way of helping your child see *your* point of view by saying, “When *you* do ... *I* feel....”.

“You-I” message

To all my little toddler patients, who invite me into their  
prehistoric world every day!



## Acknowledgments

*“The more things change, the more they remain the same.”*

—Alphonse Karr, 19th-century French journalist

Ever since I was little, I have been fascinated by trying to understand how everything in our world ... makes sense! How all of nature dances and spins, pulls and pushes, and yet, in extraordinary and unexpected ways, always finds its way back to a perfect harmony.

In the work I did with families for nearly thirty years, I came to understand that toddlers also always “make sense”! They dance and spin, pull and push, but they can quickly be led back to harmony—if you know the path. For decades, I traveled that path every day with the toddlers who visited me for their health care. And now, like an adventurer just back from an unexplored land, I am very excited to share the secrets I have discovered about toddlers with parents, grandparents, health professionals, educators, and all others who love young children.

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## About the Author

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**Also by Harvey Karp**

**THE HAPPIEST BABY ON THE BLOCK:  
The New Way to Calm Crying and Help  
Your Newborn Baby Sleep Longer**