

## PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

# *for the adventure of family life*



### 09\_When babies are inconsolable

Finally the baby is born - and it screams and screams. The parents are overtired, desperate, and feel helpless because whatever they offer the baby for reassurance and support is unsuccessful. Many don't know what to do, they put the child to the breast again, maybe it is still hungry after all? Others bounce it up and down, often with the help of a gymnastics ball, or take the baby in the arm, swing and carry it up and down. The baby often falls asleep for a short time from exhaustion, but as soon as you put it in the crib, it starts crying again.

#### **Crying is babies' body language.**

They let you know when they are tired, hungry, too cold/too warm, experiencing pain or having to process a lot of impressions from the day. "Babies want to be heard with these messages," says Thomas Harms, Bremen body therapist and developer of Emotional First Aid - EFA. In 90 percent of cases, parents, grandparents or people around them suspect digestive problems if a baby cries an above-average amount. However, this assumption is not correct, because only 10 percent of babies actually have gastrointestinal complaints. When a baby cries, the whole body tenses up and the abdominal wall becomes hard. This results in the above-mentioned assumption.

#### **Parents want the baby to stop crying as soon as possible.**

Everything possible is done because everyone wants quiet, happy children. Admittedly, it is extremely difficult to endure when a baby screams for a long time. This creates enormous stress for parents. But "babies express themselves through crying", according to Harms. With EFA, experienced midwives and lactation consultants show how parents can calmly react to crying. Parents learn simple techniques to better regulate their high level of inner stress during the child's crying phases. These include, for example, simple breathing techniques. The goal is not to calm the baby down quickly, but to connect with the child, listen to it, and just be there. The first step is for the father and mother to be in touch with themselves, to feel themselves again instead of reacting quickly and hastily.

### **Relaxing body and mind is the basic prerequisite for bonding.**

Interestingly enough, good will is not enough to build up an intimate bond with the child, but the key lies in this: first feel, perceive and relax. Experts call this 'self-connection.' The babies feel that mum or dad is there now and not 'exasperated.' Thoughts are not on externalities, e.g. "What else should I do?", but completely centred. It can often be observed that babies who are allowed to cry in peace on their mother's stomach calm down through the calm breathing and openness to what is happening at the moment. Experts can use helpful body-oriented interventions to bring parents back into their own bodies. "Only when I'm relaxed can I engage with someone else", Harms is convinced.

### **Babies share their experiences and birth traumas when they cry.**

A child who feels safe and relaxed with its parents sometimes simply starts to cry and "tells" about its difficult experiences. It's important for parents to start acknowledging feelings that are simply there. Midwives can help parents and infants overcome emotional crises after birth through the body-oriented therapy and counselling approach.

### **How can Emotional First Aid - EFA help these parents and children?**

Parents learn to recognise the baby's body signals as warning signs at an early stage. Instead of rushing around trying different things, parents first slow down their body with specific physical exercises and thus find their way back to their centre. Even if slightly older infants and toddlers do not sleep peacefully at night and the caregivers are at their wits end, help can be provided. This preventive trauma processing is very important for a loving relationship with the newborn, but also for the family if further pregnancies are planned.

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