

PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

for the adventure of family life



08_Don't leave your child alone when it is crying

When a baby cries, there is always a good reason for it.

It may be afraid, thirsty, hungry, in pain, exhausted, may feel alone, overstimulated, bored, too hot, too cold, or feels the parents' worries and tensions. Sometimes it's hard to figure out why the child is crying. But babies never cry to tease parents, to gain power over them, for fun or for spite. And yet babies often cry in the stroller or in their own room at night without anyone coming to take them out and soothe them.

Crying is their only guarantee of survival.

Crying is the only way babies can show they are uncomfortable. When babies cry, they feel helpless and alone. Specialist in child and adolescent psychiatry Karl Heinz Brisch writes in his book *SAFE - sichere Ausbildung für Eltern (SAFE - Safe Training for Parents)*: "It is extremely important for parents to know that infants are not yet able to adequately regulate major stress, i.e. cannot calm themselves down. Right from the start, they need at least one attachment figure who works with them to regulate and reduce their stress through sensitive physical contact, such as tender touch, eye contact and understanding words. In this way, the attachment figure conveys a sense of emotional security. Only through many such helpful experiences does the infant learn how to regulate stress."

What is the best way to calm children's stress?

The most effective means is physical contact: rocking, holding, stroking, massaging, singing and responding to the child's discomfort in a calm voice.

When the baby is left alone in its crying, it learns that in situations of fear and pain it cannot rely on anyone for protection and security. It experiences powerlessness, abandonment, panic and fear of death. Imagine it's night and you're in the hospital. You are in pain and afraid. You ring for the nurse and she doesn't come. How much more lost must a baby feel crying at night? These experiences leave a deep impression on the child.

What to do when parents get stressed by the baby's crying?

Sometimes the child can't be calmed down and you can't find out what's wrong. This also means stress for the parents. But just holding the child in your arms conveys to the baby: I am not alone in my distress. Any form of loving physical contact helps the child reduce some of the stress and tension. Physical contact is calming because the brain releases neurotransmitters that relieve pain and stress, as well as building trust and attachment, and thus a sense of security and protection.

If one parent is too exhausted or under stress, it is advisable to put the child in the other parent's arms and regain strength yourself. Or accept help from grandparents, friends or neighbours for a few hours. Soothing another works best when you are in balance yourself. Experienced midwives and infant nurses can use *Emotional First Aid* (EEH) to help mothers relax, develop more self-confidence in being a mother and resolve birth trauma.

Do we spoil babies by hugging them while they cry?

Unfortunately, there is still a misconception in many places that letting babies cry won't harm them. This belief is a holdover from the Nazi era, when it was a recommendation in educational guides. It was assumed you could spoil children too much by picking them up. Today's attachment and brain research, however, proves the opposite. Anyone who, as a baby or child, has experienced that someone helps them in stressful and fearful situations develops the ability to calm down over time and can better regulate states of excitement.

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