

# Understanding Baby's Cues & Tired Signs

Baby tired signs, facial  
expressions and more





## How your baby communicates

Your baby can't communicate her needs to you with words until well into her second year and even then she will find this difficult. Fortunately your baby can communicate with you very efficiently non-verbally through:

- Facial expressions
- Head, legs, arms and hand movements

All the non-verbal cues are small moment-by-moment actions that are not always easy to identify and like all languages you have to watch closely and learn your baby's non-verbal language.

Each cue is like hearing a single word. You can't get meaning from one word - you have to hear a whole sentence. That's the same for your baby's cues.

You need to watch your baby to see what your baby is trying to tell you. Here are some examples:

## Cues your baby is ready to play

- Lifting their head and face to you
- Gazing straight into your eyes
- Reaching to you with their arms
- Smiling
- Eyes bright, shiny and alert

These are strong messages your baby is ready to socialise and enjoy time with you. Your baby is alert and wide awake. This is the best time for her to pay attention to games and conversation.

## Cues your baby may be overstimulated

- Frowning
- Looking away or looking down
- Yawning and or mouthing hands
- Pulling at ears or rubbing head
- Dull or glazed eyes

Your baby is saying "I've had enough playing and I'm ready to take a break or I'm finished socialising altogether". Your baby may be ready for a feed or sleep.



## Cues that your baby needs a break

Sometimes when you miss your baby's cues they become overstimulated and need a break or time out, leading to your baby becoming overwhelmed or distressed.

When that happens, your baby can give some strong messages to tell you they need some help to calm down and have a rest. These include:

- Turning their head away
- Starting to flap arms around
- Arching their back
- Showing you a very sad face
- Fussing
- Crying

When your baby shows these cues, it means your baby has become overloaded with stimulation and needs to take a break. Then your baby needs your help to soothe and calm down.

## Here's what you can do

- If your baby becomes overwhelmed or distressed and shows you "I need a break" cues, it's time to soothe and calm your baby.
- The most important thing that you can do is watch your baby carefully and follow your baby's lead.
- This can give you much more information about what her non-verbal messages actually mean.
- Playing and feeding becomes much more enjoyable because you go at your baby's pace and you enjoy watching what your baby enjoys.
- It's more relaxing for you as well.

## How your baby tells you they are ready for sleep

- Tired signs are another way of talking about non-verbal cues, but like all cues you have to watch them carefully so you don't misinterpret them.
- Usually before you go to sleep you are drowsy. Your baby will get drowsy too.
- This means you need to watch for more than just non-verbal tired signs.



As your baby grows they will need different amounts of sleep. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Is your baby:
  - Drowsy
  - Glazed eyes and heavy eyelids
  - Still, quiet or not very alert
- Have you seen these types of non-verbal cues?
  - Yawning
  - Dull eyes
  - Sucking or putting hands to mouth
  - Fussy or restless
  - Rubbing eyes, face, ears
- Take into account the age of your baby and how long ago your baby's last feed and sleep was.
- And finally get to know your baby. Each baby sleeps, feeds and socialises differently. Your baby may stay awake longer or sleep longer.

Watch your baby carefully and get to know what your baby needs to go to sleep.

### **Tresillian has a sleep formula for you to try:**

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Brain state} \\ \text{(State of consciousness)} \\ + \\ \text{Non-verbal cues} \\ + \\ \text{My Baby's age and stage of sleep} \\ \text{development} \\ + \\ \text{My baby's individuality} \\ = \\ \text{What my baby needs to go to sleep} \end{array}$$

Refer to [The Tresillian Sleep Book](#) for further information.



## Crying after 3 months

At about 3-4 months your baby undergoes major developmental changes and becomes more socially aware. After the peak crying period is over your baby will signal to you with more meaningful vocalizations as well as crying. At this time your baby's cry becomes more purposeful and social. It's usually directed at you when distressed and needs your help.

## Crying at 6 months

At 6 months your baby uses crying to protest about things she doesn't like such as having her nose wiped. This type of protest crying continues into the second year and is normal. Everybody protests about things they don't like. Your baby just needs support and reassurance.

When you continue to respond to your baby's communications like this, your baby learns that her communications mean something and her brain grows healthy and strong.

When you continue to respond to her communications, especially when your baby asks for help and you give it, your baby will learn that it's ok to ask for help. This helps later for learning at school.

At 6 months your baby will go through separation anxiety and so will cry and protest when you leave or when your baby can't see you. This is a normal developmental process and it happens to all babies between 6-8 months. She cries because she misses you and she loves you totally!

Eventually, with your gentle patience and help your baby will learn that each time you leave the room, or leave your baby to go to sleep or stay at day care, you'll come back again. After a while your baby will trust that you'll come back again and the separation crying will cease – but only with your calm reassurance and help.

## Crying at 9 months

At 9 months your baby uses crying to show physical, social and emotional discomfort.

Whatever the reason for your baby's crying, you will always need to provide a prompt, soothing, calm and loving response.



**Tresillian Day and Residential Services support families experiencing a range of early parenting challenges including:**

- Sleep and settling difficulties
- Adjustment to parenthood
  - Breastfeeding
  - Infant nutrition
- Toddler behaviour
  - Multiple babies
- Emotional and psychological health & wellbeing
  - Postnatal depression and anxiety

**For Parenting Support or to Self Refer to a Tresillian Service call:**

**Tresillian Parent's Help Line**  
**1300 272 736**

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**[tresillian.org.au](https://tresillian.org.au)**