

Infants & Toddlers

a letter to families

Your baby counts on you to understand how he feels and to know how to “fix it” when he is hungry, frightened suddenly by a barking dog, or anxious because he sees a strange person bending over his crib. What have you noticed about how your baby can best be comforted? Some babies will only become calm if you pick them up and hold them cheek-to-cheek and tummy-to-chest, soothing them with loving, reassuring words. Others will fuss less if you hold them in a “kangaroo pouch” slung from your shoulders. Whatever the case, you will want to share this insight with your baby’s teacher. Below are some other ways to keep your little one from getting too upset or prolonging an upset feeling.

Young children are very conservative! They like to be held the same way and have the same lullabies sung over and over. They love to hear the same voices and feel the security of the same arms holding them in a comforting way that they can count on. Keeping routines predictable and familiar, and loving gestures available, is very soothing and reassuring for your baby.

Some babies need to nurse quite frequently. If your baby cries a couple of hours after nursing, first see whether he is wet or needs to burp. But your baby may be communicating loudly that he needs to be held for breast or bottle. An empty tummy causes such a feeling of anguish, and Baby’s cries are the only way he can let you know!

Some babies have trouble settling to sleep. Croon some simple, repetitive lullabies over and over as you rhythmically pat Baby’s back.

Some babies have stiff limbs or lots of gas

pains. Use nonallergenic oils to massage your baby’s limbs. Try circular massage motions on his tummy to help him get rid of gas more easily.

You are probably really good at interpreting your baby’s signals of distress. These tell you when your little one is tired, thirsty, or needs a change of scenery. The more you hone your observation skills, the more you will see not only what seems to be the reason for your baby’s fussing, but also how to soothe his troubles.

You are the special detective who knows your child best. If your baby has some fears that are worrying him at this stage, such as a noisy vacuum cleaner, you will want to share your observations with his teacher. Together, you can provide the reassurance, the slow transitions, and the lap and cuddling time that may be needed as your little one gradually outgrows some of his early fears.

NOTE TO TEACHERS: COPY THIS PAGE AND SEND HOME TO PARENTS.

Alice Sterling Honig, Ph.D., a professor emerita of child development at Syracuse University, is the author of many books, including Secure Relationships: Nurturing Infant-Toddler Attachments in Early Care Settings (NAEYC, 2002; \$15) and, with H. Brophy, Talking With Your Baby: Family as the First School (Syracuse University Press, 1996; \$16.95).