

Inconsolable crying by babies is normal

Babies cry. Some babies cry a lot. Almost all babies go through a period of increased crying that can be difficult to soothe, called the Period of PURPLE Crying. This period of increased crying typically starts around two weeks of age and ends around four months. As you can imagine, or perhaps have experienced, this can be very overwhelming and frustrating for parents. Frustration during this period of increased crying is the top reason someone shakes or injures an infant.

The acronym PURPLE helps parents and caregivers understand normal baby crying. More strategies to make it through this challenging time are found at purplecrying.info.

P: Peak of crying typically occurs about two months of age and decreases after that.

U: Unexpected crying. The crying comes and goes unexpectedly, for no apparent reason.

R: Resists soothing. Despite all soothing efforts by caretakers, the baby continues crying.

P: Pain-like face. Babies look like they are in pain, even when they are not.

L: Long-lasting crying can continue nonstop for 30-40 minutes or even longer.

E: Evening crying. Crying occurs more often in the late afternoon and evening.

There are many ways to soothe a baby. However, it is important to understand that nothing works all of the time.

Inconsolable crying is part of normal baby behavior. It also is normal to be frustrated with a crying baby that you cannot comfort. Parents and caretakers need to know that it is OK to put the baby down in a safe place and walk away for a while if they are becoming exhausted, frustrated or angry.

Check on the baby often, at least every 10-15 minutes, or ask a trusted caretaker to look after the baby and take a longer break.

The following tips are common ways to soothe a crying baby:

Check on the basics first. Feed, burp and check to see if the baby needs a diaper change. Hunger is the main reason a baby will cry. Babies need to be burped because they do not have a natural ability to get rid of air built up in their stomach.

Rhythmic sounds, motions, or touches are often soothing. Rock the baby or walk with them. Perhaps take a ride in the car, with the baby secure in a rear-facing car seat in the back seat.

Lullabies are common in most cultures. The baby does not care how well you sing. Hum in a low tone against the baby's head. Dads and grandpas often do well with this strategy. Soft music, a ticking clock, or adding white noise such as running a vacuum cleaner or dishwasher can help.

Try a lukewarm bath or a gentle massage on a baby's back, arms or legs.

Parents and caretakers can try these and many other soothing strategies, but if the baby does not respond and continues to cry, that is OK. It is not a sign that the baby is a bad baby, or the parent or caretaker is inadequate.

Try not to get discouraged. Remember that inconsolable crying is normal, but that the Period of PURPLE Crying will pass. Dr. Diana T. Yu is the health officer for Thurston and Mason counties. Reach her at 360-867-2501 or yud@co.thurston.wa.us.