

# Info-sheet for Parents

## Understanding Baby Behaviour

Babies have a number of behavioural states or different levels of wakefulness ranging from deep sleep to crying. For babies in the neonatal unit it can be difficult to tell what state they are in due to medication, illness or premature birth.

Understanding your babies behaviour can help:

- You recognise when they are asleep to help ensure they get as much uninterrupted restful sleep as possible.
- Tell you when your baby is comfortable or not and helps you to know when they might need more comfort including what your baby likes to help calm them.
- Provide information on which positions are most comfortable for them and when support provided is helping.
- Let you know what type and how much stimulation they can enjoy.
- Support feeding, successful feeding is based on understanding signs that tell you when your baby is ready to feed, if they need a break and if they are satisfied.

### Traffic lights and baby behaviour

Baby behaviour also known as 'cues' have been described as being like traffic lights, your babies responses can tell you whether you may need to stop, pause or continue caregiving.

Red Light cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell you that you need to stop</li> <li>• Your baby needs comfort or help</li> </ul> <p><b>Examples:</b> Gagging, turning red or pale, hiccoughing, jerky movements, stiff or limp muscle tone</p>
Yellow Light Cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are signs that your baby is beginning to tire or get upset</li> <li>• You may need to pause, offer some comfort or a different form of support</li> </ul> <p><b>Examples:</b> Cry, yawn, frown, look away, sneezing, sighing</p>
Green Light Cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are signs that your baby is comfortable, content or alert</li> </ul> <p><b>Examples:</b> Your baby is looking at or around you, smiling, bright eyed, smooth movements</p>

Behavioural cues change as your baby grows and they may not always mean the same thing. It is important to look at your baby and consider the behavioural cues within the bigger picture. Several cues occurring together are more important than a single cue.

### Offering support

Understanding what your baby might be doing to try and calm or when they need some additional help can be useful for parents. Most term babies will try a number of ways to calm themselves, if caregivers are aware of these self-calming behaviors instead of immediately responding you are responding to their cues. It is important that babies are not left to cry, by looking at their cues you are working out can they start to calm themselves or do they need help.

<b>Ways babies try and calm themselves</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moving their hands to their mouth or face</li><li>• Sucking on fingers, fists or their lips/tongue</li><li>• Holding on to something</li><li>• Paying attention to what is happening around them</li><li>• Moving or changing their position</li></ul>
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When newborn babies are crying and they don't show any attempts to calm themselves they need attention from their parents or caregivers.

<b>Ways parents can help babies to calm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk to the baby in a soft steady voice</li><li>• Hold both of the infants arms close to the middle of the baby's body</li><li>• Place a hand at the baby's feet for them to push against</li><li>• Wrap the baby with their hands near their face</li><li>• Pick up the baby holding them close to your body</li><li>• Slowly and gently rock the baby</li><li>• Feed the baby</li><li>• Change the baby's nappy</li></ul>
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### Remember

- Your baby's needs and behaviour will change over time
- By responding to your baby's cues you are able to provide the care and support they need

Information in this information sheet has been modified from the following sources:

- Understanding the Behavior of Term Infants (2003) March of Dimes  
<https://www.marchofdimes.org/nursing/modnedia/othermedia/infantBehavior.pdf>
- Caring for your baby in the Neonatal Unit: A parents handbook (2014) Inga Warren and Cherry Bond