

Tips for Coping with a New Baby During COVID-19

All babies cry. Most babies cry a lot from two weeks to two months of age. Some cry more than others, and some cry longer than others. For many new parents, crying is one of the most stressful parts of coping with a newborn.

In some cases, extreme stress and a temporary lapse of emotional control in a caregiver can lead to actions that result in abusive head trauma. In fact, the most common trigger for abusive head trauma is simply a crying baby. The American Academy of Pediatrics released a policy statement on the medical aspects of abusive head trauma and points out that actions that lead to abusive head trauma are often the result of when caretakers experience stress and get to the end of their rope.

However, there is a bright side: The key to preventing actions that lead to abusive head trauma is to understand how common feelings of frustration, isolation, and exhaustion are during the first few months of an infant's life.

Helpful tips

Usually, new parents can seek out social supports and external help—but what happens now, when we are all restricted in our movements and our contacts? What happens when grandparents can't come over to help out, or when neighbors don't stop by for a cup of coffee? What happens when families are hit with sudden job loss, loss of childcare, and other restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic? Here are a few suggestions:

- **Try all the soothing tricks.** Crying babies want to be soothed. You may need to try a few things, over and over, before they calm. Try holding them, feeding them, swaddling them, gently rocking them, singing to them. If these don't work, put the baby down and take a break. Be sure your baby is in a safe sleep environment (on their back on a firm sleep surface with a tight-fitting sheet, away from soft blankets, toys, pillows, and other bedding materials). While some babies cry for a long time, many parents are surprised at how rapidly babies will cry themselves to sleep.
- **Pay attention to your own needs.** Particularly for breastfeeding mothers, babies' demands may feel relentless. Rest as much as you can—try sleeping when the baby does. Find time for yourself when your partner watches the baby. Put on your headphones, give a friend or relative a call, have a cup of tea, or just relax.
- **Connect with others.** Social distancing during the COVID-19 outbreak can be isolating. Try video chats or social media to stay in touch. If you're a friend or relative on the receiving end of these calls, listen first before offering suggestions. Imagine you are with the young parent, they are crying on your shoulder, and you are offering reassurance without any words. Keeping this image in mind can help you provide the social support that all new parents need.

- **Use your "helpers".** Engage older siblings as much as you can by encouraging them to be your special helpers, so they can help out in developmentally appropriate ways.
- **Seek help.** Depression is the most common mental illness in the United States. If you had a history of depression before your baby was born, you may be at higher risk for postpartum depression. Speak with your provider sooner rather than later to help foresee this potential condition. Many doctors, nurses, and mental health providers are now set up for telehealth visits and may be able to help you by video or phone.
- **Reach out.** If you are a friend, relative, or neighbor to a family with a newborn, this is the time to reach out. Think about ways you can help. In addition to social support, can you buy diapers or other baby supplies? Can you drop off food or treats for the siblings or adults? Can you safely supervise older children outdoors? Maybe they could come along with you when you walk your dog!
- **Help a co-worker out.** If you are a co-worker of a parent returning to work (especially during social distancing) after parental leave, be kind and supportive. If you see or hear the baby on the call, say Hi!
- **Find a forum.** New mothers may find it helpful to discuss their experiences with other new mothers. In addition to seeking help from friends, relatives, neighbors, and medical professionals, look for discussion forums and communities of moms dedicated to sharing problems, stories, and tips with each other online (see the list of resources below).
- **Your pediatrician is here to help.** Never hesitate to call for advice. Your pediatrician is an excellent resource for understanding your baby and your own needs, including those related to postpartum depression.
- **Resources.** Here are a few key resources that may be helpful to you at home:
 - All Babies Cry offers tips and suggestions for parents of newborns.
 - The University of Colorado has stress relief tips during this period of isolation.
 - Prevent Child Abuse America has tips and resources for parents, children, and others.
 - Postpartum Support International toll-free Help Line, in English and Spanish, refers callers to appropriate local resources: 800-944-4773 or text 503-894-9453 (English) or 971-420-0294 (Spanish)
 - Smart Patients Postpartum Community: online community of peer support and active discussion forums.

Stay informed

Families are encouraged to stay up to date about this situation as we learn more about how to prevent this virus from spreading in homes and in communities.

For more parenting information from the AAP, visit www.HealthyChildren.org.

For the latest developments from the CDC, including travel warnings, new cases, and prevention advice, visit www.cdc.gov.

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Source: HealthyChildren.org (Robert Sege, MD, PhD, FAAP)

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