

The Period of **PURPLE** Crying®

a program of the



National Center on
Shaken Baby Syndrome

FAQ for Parents

This document covers some of the questions, but not all, asked by parents when they receive the *Period of PURPLE Crying* program. The answers given are intended to serve as a guide for nurses and health educators but should be paraphrased as needed.

1. Does the *Period of PURPLE Crying* program provide more specific information about soothing a crying baby?

The National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome added a supplementary video to the *Period of PURPLE Crying* program titled, “*Crying, Soothing and Coping: Doing What Comes Naturally.*” Dr. Ronald Barr, the chief researcher on the *Period of PURPLE Crying* program, reviewed the literature on infant soothing and emotion regulation to develop a video that provides realistic soothing strategies.

The 17-minute video, which outlines soothing strategies that anyone can try to help calm a crying baby, differs from other available soothing materials in that:

1. It respects the current scientific evidence on the inconsolable crying that occurs in the first few months of life.
2. It includes real stories from real parents about their experiences, successes, and failures with infant soothing and their likelihood of success in calming infants.
3. It reminds parents that soothing will work some of the time, but when it doesn’t work and you begin to feel exhausted, frustrated, or angry it is okay to place the baby in a safe place, walk away, and take some responsible time apart from the crying baby. The video also provides advice on coping with crying when soothing techniques do not work.

2. The program said to walk away when I am frustrated and let the baby cry. I would just feel too guilty doing that. It is as if my baby is crying for my help.

Many parents have told us this, and it is a very understandable feeling. It may not be an easy thing to do. We do encourage you to hold, rock, walk, and try other soothing methods first. However, it is important to know that it can become very frustrating at times, and that you need some time away from the crying when you are too frustrated. Furthermore, it will be better for your baby if you are able to take a break and calm down. It will not hurt the baby to let them cry, even if they cry for a very long time. When you do take a break, take a break responsibly and check on your baby often, about every 10-15 minutes. You can also ask someone you trust if they can take care of the baby for a while. Remember, whether you are carrying them around or leaving them in their crib, they are probably going to keep crying. It is important to take care of yourself, because the calmer you are, the better equipped you will be to take care of your baby. At times like these, it is important to remind yourself that your baby is fine, you are doing a fine job and the crying will come to an end.

3. I have seen programs that say that doing things like swaddling or rocking will help the baby stop crying. Is this true?

There are many ideas or programs available that say they can help parents stop their babies from crying. The problem occurs when parents expect that the methods described will or should work every time, as is often promised by these programs. If, as a parent, you have these expectations it may become even more frustrating if you are unable to stop the crying. The reason soothing methods do not always work, as described in the *Period of PURPLE Crying* video and booklet, is that inconsolable crying is a normal part of

early infant behavior. Just remember that what works for some babies does not work for others, and what works on some days does not work on other days. Don't let yourself get discouraged by this. Keep trying and remember that they will get through this phase and so will you. And remember, when done incorrectly, swaddling can cause injury to your infant. For guidance on the correct way to swaddle your baby, ask your health care professional.

4. The program said that babies can cry five hours a day and still be healthy and normal. I just cannot believe that this could be true.

Many parents have a hard time understanding this. One of the reasons is the concern that their baby may be sick or in pain. These are very reasonable concerns. Therefore, the *PURPLE* program reminds you that if you are concerned about your baby's crying, **it is important to have your doctor examine your baby to be sure they are all right**. However, if the examination shows that they are growing, not sick, have no fever, or do not display other problematic symptoms, then they are very likely going through the *Period of PURPLE Crying*, which will come to an end by about four to five months, and often earlier. There are many scientific studies that show that babies can cry for five hours every day, for weeks and weeks, and still be healthy and normal. These studies show these babies, once they get past this phase, do not have other health or temperament problems at any higher rates than other babies. In fact, they become just like all the babies who did not cry as much once they are about five to six months of age.

5. Why do they cry like that? What would be the purpose?

This question could take some time, the quickest answer is that it is part of normal child development. Some babies and children have more tantrums, cuddle more, or sleep more. Like height and weight, there are many differences in the way children develop and grow. From an evolutionary point of view, crying has served babies well as an aid to survival. They are more likely to get fed, picked up, and carried. It is a hard question to know why they do this, but the important thing to remember is that this crying is normal, and they almost always grow out of it.

6. Is it just human babies that have this increased and inconsolable crying?

No, there have also been many studies on animals who breastfeed including monkeys, chimpanzees, guinea pigs, and baby rats. These studies have shown that these animals have similar increases in crying and inconsolable crying bouts.

7. If I could be a perfect parent and do everything right, would it make a difference?

Not in the instances of inconsolable crying. Additional studies conducted in Botswana, Denmark, and England showed that even when parents do everything the way we would all agree is just about perfect (carry the baby all the time, feed them whenever they cry or whimper, and keep them close to comfort them day and night), these babies still experience increased crying bouts and inconsolable crying. This increased crying is just part of normal child development.

8. My mother tells me that there is something wrong with my baby because they cry so much. What should I tell her?

One of the best things to do is have her and others read the booklet or watch the video to see what the *Period of PURPLE Crying* is about. The *Period of PURPLE Crying* app can be shared on up to five devices and each user can set up their own user profile. Important videos and written articles can also be shared via text or email. This can be a useful tool when discussing inconsolable crying with secondary caregivers.

9. What other resources does the *Period of PURPLE Crying* mobile app offer?

The *Period of PURPLE Crying* mobile app not only contains a PDF version of the *Period of PURPLE Crying* Booklet, and both films, it has additional articles addressing normal crying characteristics, soothing techniques, coping strategies, safe sleep practices, infant safety, and self-care for parents. The app also has an interactive tool that gives caregivers the ability to track a baby's developmental process including feeding, pumping, crying, growth, vaccination dates according to the CDC recommended schedule, sleeping, and diaper changes.