Crying
BABY BEHAVIOR SPOTLIGHT #5

“Babies cry for many reasons, not just because they are hungry.”

This is just one of many powerful messages that we can share with WIC participants about crying. Crying is stressful. Pregnant moms may either be thinking and worrying about whether they will know what to do with a crying baby, or alternately, may not have thought about a crying baby—after all, most of us picture babies as sweet, calm, and sleeping. And then reality hits.

Prenatal baby behavior education helps prepare parents for their baby’s arrival by:

- **Helping them know what to expect** with their baby’s behavior;
- **Building parents’ confidence** that they can recognize their baby’s cues;
- **Providing tools** so they know how to respond to their baby’s cues, including crying.

How do hunger cues and crying messages fit into this prenatal preparation?

**Knowing What to Expect.**

“Crying is normal.” “Babies cry for many reasons, not just because they are hungry.” “Crying can be very stressful for new parents, but it’s an important way that babies communicate their needs.” These are quick easy messages we can share with parents that will help them know what to expect.

**Building Confidence.**

Most new parents will recognize hunger cues. Reviewing these cues with a pregnant mom is important because we want to build her **confidence** that she will recognize when her baby is hungry. If possible, involve dad and grandma too. But just as important, we want to build their confidence in knowing that if their baby is crying, **but not showing hunger cues**, she/he is **NOT hungry**. They are trying to communicate that something else needs to be different. “Responding to hunger cues quickly, before your baby starts to fuss, may help your baby cry less.” is a great message to encourage moms to watch for those early hunger cues.

**Providing Tools.**

When parents recognize their baby is crying for reasons other than hunger, they need to know what to do next. Otherwise parents will resort to feeding to get a baby to stop crying, because it works. **Steps to Calm a Crying Baby** (on the BB brochure) can help parents know what to do and build their confidence in knowing that they can calm their baby and know what their baby needs. This is useful information for parents before the baby is born, but may also be helpful after the baby has arrived and they are in the thick of things.
If a mom is struggling with her newborn, and believes she has an especially sensitive or fussy baby, acknowledge that it is hard and stressful to hear a baby cry. You can give her a message of hope—“As your baby gets older, she will get better at letting you know what she needs and she will cry less.” Conversations about “I want to be near you” cues and “I need something to be different” cues are most effectively discussed after the baby has arrived. A mom who states that her baby cries a lot may want to explore cues further. (Stay tuned for the next Baby Behavior Spotlight on Cues!)

WIC Staff Quote:
Arlin Penner from Nicollet County had this comment about her experience with discussing baby behavior with moms:

“I find talking with moms about the difference between hunger cues and crying-without-hunger to be very powerful. Helping them understand that babies cry for lots of reasons, just makes sense, and is something that I don’t think a lot of new moms have even taken time to think about.”

Staff Activities for Reviewing Crying:
- View the Question/Answer Portion of the Crying Section of the “Getting to Know Your Baby” DVD. Listen to how Dr. Heinig answers common questions about crying.
  - Practice answering the same questions in your own words
  - Think about other questions/comments you hear from participants about crying. How might you answer these questions?
- View the baby vignette portion of the Crying Section of the “Getting to Know Your Baby” DVD. Listen for key messages about crying.
- Review the Hunger Cues and the Crying section of the Baby Behavior brochure
  - What sections might you use to build confidence in prenatal moms that they recognize hunger cues vs crying-without-hunger?
  - How might you utilize the section “Calming a Crying Baby”?
  - How might you tailor this information for a second time mom?
- Review the video clips “Hunger Cues”, “Crying Without Hunger”, “Overstimulated Baby”, and “Calming a Crying Baby”
  - Review the Hunger Cues and Calming a Crying baby portion of the prenatal scripted booklet (see page 3) for ideas on how a conversation about crying and calming a crying baby might sound.
  - Practice talking about crying with prenatal moms, tailoring the conversation to the knowledge and interest of the mom.
  - What information might you share with a mom who’s struggling with a fussy baby?
Note: The Hunger Cues and Calming a Crying Baby sections from the scripted prenatal staff tool used at the Baby Behavior workshop is provided below. This scripted example is for staff development and practice only. It was developed to demonstrate how one might incorporate the videos and brochure into a baby behavior conversation—It is not intended to be used directly with participants.

**Hunger Cues**

A concern that new parents sometimes have is whether they will know when their baby needs to be fed. Ask: What questions might you have about hunger cues? Would it be ok if we talk a little bit about hunger cues and crying?

- Newborns need to be fed often because their stomachs are very small. When your newborn is hungry he will show you hunger cues. *(show handout—go over hunger cues)*
- A hungry baby:
  - Keeps his hands near his mouth
  - Bends his arms and legs
  - Makes sucking noises
  - Puckers his lips
  - Searches for the nipple (root)

  *Ask: Which of these cues have you seen babies do before?*

- Babies will usually give you several of these cues at one time. *(demonstrate cluster cues)*
- Responding to hunger cues early can prevent your baby from becoming too upset, and it will be much easier to feed your baby when he is calm.

- Let’s take a look at a video of a newborn baby that is crying because of hunger.
  
  *Show video “Hunger Cues”*
  
  *Ask: What hunger cues did you see this baby giving?*

- Now let’s watch another video of a crying baby that is not hungry.
  
  *Show video “Crying Baby”*
  
  *Ask: What did you see this baby doing?*

  This baby is not showing any hunger cues. You may have noticed her jerky movements, tense muscles and stretched out arms and fingers. When a baby shows these cues, she’s telling you she needs something to be different. We’ll talk more about these cues after your baby has arrived.
Calming a Crying Baby

So what do you do when a baby is crying but isn’t showing any hunger cues, like the baby in the video we just watched? This sometimes worries expectant moms.

- Although it is stressful to hear a baby cry, crying is normal for all babies. It is one way they communicate with you. **Ask: Would you like to talk a little bit about steps to calm a crying baby?**

**Refer to Crying section of handout and go over steps**

- The first step to calming a crying baby is to try to figure out the reason she is crying. It may be as simple as a wet diaper or feeding her if she shows hunger cues.

- But there will be times when you have checked everything and your baby still cries. When this happens, move to:
  - Step 2: Hold your baby close to you, and
  - Step 3, Repeat the same action over and over.
  - Step 4, Be patient, calming a crying baby takes time

- In this next video, we will see a mom trying to calm her crying baby.
  
  *Play video “Overstimulated Baby”*  
  *Ask: Was this mom able to calm her baby? Why not?*

  *Affirm:* Trying too many different things all at once can overwhelm your baby and make him more upset.

- Now let’s take a look at how other babies were calmed by repeating the same action over and over.
  
  *Play video: “Calming Your Baby”*  
  Did you notice how these babies were held close and calmed by repeating the same action over and over? Sometimes babies calm down right away, others may take longer.

- **Ask: What other things might you try to calm a crying baby?** (see handout for other suggestions)

- Remember, be patient. Calming a baby takes time. Sticking with the same action for several minutes can be the secret to success.
Summary and Closing

Having a baby is a very exciting time. The first six weeks can be the hardest on parents. As you get to know your baby, you will recognize what he is trying to tell you and be able to respond to his needs. As he gets older things will get easier.

- We talked about (or similar summary based on conversation)
  (refer to index page in handout)
  - How babies sleep and why it’s important that they wake up
  - We reviewed hunger cues, and we’ll talk more about your Baby’s cues after your baby has arrived.
  - And we discussed steps to help calm a crying baby
- **Ask:** What is one thing that we talked about that you want to remember when your baby arrives?
- Offer handout and encourage them to share it with their support system.
- Provide post-it and encourage them to watch the BB You-tube video produced by CA WIC (or provide DVD) with those that will be helping them in the first few weeks.