



READING YOUR BABY'S CUES

Even though your baby is little, he or she can communicate likes and dislikes to you. Learning to read your baby's signals and messages means understanding what the cues from a recovering infant look like. The following is a list to guide you in interpreting your baby's messages. Baby cues are grouped into two categories: *stable cues*, which tell you that your baby likes what is happening or that your baby is comfortable and ready for interaction, and *stress cues*, which tell you that your baby does not like what is happening and is uncomfortable. Stress cues indicate the need for a change or for your baby to take a break.

However, each baby has his or her own style of communicating and set of behaviors. For example, not all babies twitch or hiccup when they are stressed. At first, it may seem like a guessing game while you are learning to read your baby's cues and you and your baby are getting to know each other better. Learning to read your baby's messages through these cues, though, is an important part of establishing your relationship and meeting your baby's needs.

STABLE OR READY CUES

These cues typically mean that your baby is relaxed and comfortable and likes what is happening:

- Regular breathing without variations
- Stable skin color without variations (no pale or blue color)
- No gagging, grunting, tremors, startles, or twitches
- No coughing or sneezing
- Smooth movements of head, arms, legs, and hands
- Able to maintain position without squirming
- Able to actively do things to keep self calm, such as bracing leg or foot against the bed
- Holds feet one on top or next to the other
- Holds fingers or holds his or her other hand
- Brings hand to mouth and keeps it there to feel or suck
- Sucks on fingers or fist
- Grasps the blankets or caregiver's fingers
- Curls up into a ball on his or her side
- Able to maintain calm sleep states
- Able to use help offered by caregivers, such as sucking on pacifier or holding on to caregiver's hands to stay calm or looking at face or an object and staying calmly alert
- Enjoys being held and can calm self when held
- Can focus with eyes, and watches faces or objects
- Can make the "ooh" face by pursing lips when looking at faces
- Tries to smile or coo
- Can sustain interest in looking, listening, and following for brief periods of time

Source: Als, Lester, Tronick, and Brazelton (1982).

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STRESS CUES OR CUES TO TAKE A BREAK

These cues typically mean that your baby is not comfortable and does not enjoy what is happening. Note the context in which these cues occur to understand what they mean.

- Experiences changes in breathing to faster breathing, pausing, or gasping
- Becomes pale, red, or blue
- Hiccups, gags, or grunts
- Spits up (unless caused by illness)
- Strains as if to have a bowel movement
- Startles, has tremors, or twitches several times in the body, limbs, or face
- Coughs, sneezes, yawns, or sighs
- Squirms
- Becomes limp in the limbs, neck, face, or trunk
- Becomes stiff in the legs, arms, or fingers
- Sticks tongue out
- Arches the back and neck
- Restless in sleep with jerky movements, sounds, whimpers, or fussing
- During awake times, looks tired and glassy-eyed, fusses, stares, looks away, looks panicked or worried, or has dull looks
- Cries weakly or becomes irritable
- Suddenly goes to sleep or fusses
- Frantic, ongoing, disorganized activity that your baby cannot control

Source: Als, Lester, Tronick, and Brazelton (1982).

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