

# Behaviour (0-3 years)

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## Baby and toddler behaviour

Because babies cannot talk to you, and toddlers are still learning how, babies and toddlers often communicate their needs through behaviours like crying, body language and tantrums.

## Why is understanding behaviour important?

Taking the time to understand your child's behaviour is the best way to tune into her feelings and help her find positive ways to tell you what she needs.

## Understanding your baby's behaviour

Crying is how your baby tells you what she needs. Your baby will cry to tell you she is hungry, uncomfortable, tired or unwell. As she gets older, your baby will still cry to communicate, but she will also learn to tell you what she needs using body language. Her behaviour will give you signs, or cues.

When your baby says 'I'm tired' she might:

- Cry.
- Rub her eyes or yawn.
- Make jerky movements with her arms and legs.
- Turn away from you or throw her toys.

When your baby says 'I'm hungry' she might:

- Cry.
- Make sucking noises.
- Turn with an open mouth towards your chest (if she's younger), or towards her spoon when you're feeding her solids. And she'll turn her head away or push away the spoon when she's full!

When your baby says 'I want to play' she might:

- Look at your face and make eye contact.
- Smile.
- Coo and babble.
- Reach towards you.

Responding to your baby's cues will help her feel secure and probably result in less crying overall. For example, if you give your baby some quiet time when you sense she has had enough play, she won't need to cry to get her message across!

## Understanding your toddler's behaviour

Your toddler is learning to use language to communicate. But at this age she will have big feelings and not enough words to express them. When your toddler's feelings get too big for her words, you might see a tantrum. Tantrums might involve crying, screaming, kicking, falling down, or running away. In some cases, children hold their breath, vomit and break things.

Tantrums are more likely when your child is tired, hungry or over-excited. Your child might also have her own triggers for tantrums, like putting on shoes or visiting relatives.

## Tips to help with your child's behaviour

When your **baby cries**, and you have ruled out hunger, discomfort, tiredness and illness, you can try these ideas:

- Reduce stimulation: try sitting with your baby in a quiet, dimmed room.
- Lie your baby on her side and rhythmically pat her back (turn her onto her back if she falls asleep).
- Put your baby in a pram or a baby sling and go for a walk. It is sometimes easier to cope when you're on the move.
- If you feel frustrated, angry, helpless or distressed, it is OK to leave your baby to cry for a short time. Lie her on her back in a safe place, like her cot, while you take a five-minute break.
- Seek help if you feel that you cannot cope and you might hurt your child. Talk to your doctor to start with.

A difficult behaviour you might experience with your toddler is a tantrum. If you are finding it difficult to manage **your toddler's tantrums** you can try these tips:

- Identify the tantrums triggers for your child. If you cannot avoid them, you can at least be prepared. For example, if shopping is a tantrum trigger, try to do your shopping without your child or after she has had a sleep and something to eat.
- Know the signs. If you see a tantrum brewing, step in and try to distract your child with another activity.
- Be calm and wait out the behaviour. There's usually not much point in getting angry or trying to reason with your child in the middle of a tantrum.
- Be consistent about not giving in. If you give in to a tantrum now and then, your child will try extra hard to push you to that point every time.
- Notice when your child is being good. Rather than giving tantrums lots of attention, reward good behaviour with praise, a cuddle or a small treat.
- Hang in there. Children tend to have fewer tantrums after they turn four.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

## Recommended Reads

- [Nurturing personal, social and emotional development in early education: a practical guide to understanding brain development and young children behaviour](#)
- [Eat, play, sleep: the essential guide to your baby's first three months](#)
- [Transforming Tears, Tantrums and Troubles While Staying Close to Your Children](#)