



Emotional Well-Being: Understanding Tears

Now I want to change gears and discuss the second way to ensure that your child's emotional needs are met, and that's to understand your child's tears. Listening to your child cry can be so difficult that the mere thought of their child crying can scare a lot of parents away from making any changes regarding sleep. Why? Because they perceive crying to be something bad. Many parents feel inadequate, like they're not doing their job if their baby is crying. Now I'm not taking away from how heart-wrenching it can be to hear your child in tears, but with a better understanding as to why babies and toddlers cry, hopefully that will remove some of the guilt you may feel and it can give you some greater perspective around the topic of tears.

So—why do babies cry? They cry for two main reasons: to communicate and **to heal**. The communication function is very well known. Babies cry when they're hungry, when they're hot or cold, when they're tired, when they're bored, when they're uncomfortable. The healing function of crying, on the other hand, is much less understood.

So let's address the million dollar question: what are our babies healing from? Well, they might need to heal from overstimulation, from the frustration they experience before and during developmental milestones, from any stress experienced at home, from a transition such as a new daycare, a move, or a new

sibling, or from any normal hurts, frights or frustrations, like falling and bumping a head.

Babies and toddlers have normal everyday stresses that they need to heal from, and allowing the baby to cry in a supportive and loving environment can allow him to heal. Because of this, **we actually do our babies a disservice when we suppress the crying by offering the breast, bottle, pacifier**, even with the best of intentions.

So what does this have to do with sleep? Sometimes night wakings can be caused by a child's need to cry and "catch up" on this stress release if they haven't had ample opportunity to have a good cry during the daytime. Maybe the baby has been using your breast as a pacifier all day long, or maybe you've been offering your baby the pacifier every time he makes a peep.

If what I'm describing is resonating with you, it's more than reasonable to explore the 'crying in arms' approach at bedtime. After doing your bedtime routine, hold your child in your arms until he falls asleep or stops crying and settles. He might be angry from the accumulated stress, so feel free to comfort and console him without attempting to stop the crying. This is very useful to implement during the daytime as well after he gets scared, bumps his head, gets his toy taken away, or anything of the sort, especially if you have a frustrated toddler. Give her a big hug, rub her back, and assure her that everything will be okay. Remember that this supported crying is healthy because he is being given the opportunity to release this stress in the comfort and security of your arms. So this approach likely won't teach your child to sleep through the night, but think of it as step one of your sleep plan.

I want to share a personal anecdote that showcases how crying in arms can be utilized during the daytime hours:

There was one time I was at a pizza shop with my husband and kids. My younger daughter, who was around 2 years old at the time, was eating her pizza when she lost her balance, fell off her

chair and hit her head. She was crying hysterically so my husband picked her up, took her outside, and tried to distract her. I'm watching this all unravel from the window while I'm inside. He's holding her going "Eliana, look at the flowers....oh wow, look at the birds....look at that big tree!" and she just wasn't having it. She was actually getting more frustrated and angry with him. I signalled to my husband to bring her back in because I could see his attempts to calm her down weren't going anywhere. I grabbed Eliana, put her on my lap, rubbed her back and told her that it's okay. She continued to cry, but after about 60-90 seconds, she immediately stopped crying and went back to eating her pizza. See, all she needed was to be acknowledged and heard. She hit her head, which frustrated her! Once I acknowledged her boo-boo and stopped trying to distract her, she was able to calm down and go back to her previous activity.

Now I want to make one last quick point about comforting your baby during the daytime. I always encourage parents to experiment with various soothing mechanisms to comfort your baby throughout the day. So try utilizing all sorts of strategies like rocking, holding, rubbing his back, talking and singing. What you DON'T want to be doing is nursing your baby or toddler to comfort her every time she fusses. Firstly, you don't want to suppress your child's need to let out his frustration if he bonked his head, as we just discussed. Second, having a baby with a full-blown boob addiction usually means that this habit of constantly needing the breast will continue into the night. It's impossible to expect a baby who constantly gets the breast in his mouth during the daytime to soothe himself back to sleep without the breast at night. So if the child is fussy or cranky, pick him up, give him a big cuddle, talk to him and assure him everything is okay, then **put him back down.**