



The Crying Question: Communication and Culture

Crying is actually magical. Have you ever felt that for yourself? Not long periods of crying, or crying all alone. But have you ever been witnessed in your crying by someone you loved and trusted? How did that feel?

Most parents' main concern with making sleep changes is "How long will my baby cry. How soon can I pick them up if they are crying?"

As a mom, and someone who absolutely adores babies, I used to hate all crying. But the main reason that crying made me uncomfortable is because my culture taught me very early that all crying is bad and means something is wrong. It isn't true.

Certainly crying can mean something is wrong, but it doesn't always.

As an adult who had studied psychology and child development, I now know that crying is absolutely essential for babies- because it is how they communicate without language; for toddlers because it helps them release frustration when they don't have emotional literacy yet; and for adults for all of the above reasons- catharsis and release when we are flooded, as well as a way to bond with other humans.

The science tells us that crying in appropriate doses actually flushes negative stress hormones out of our body and replaces them with endorphins and oxytocin. That's why crying can feel so good even if it started out with you feeling really bad. Children and adults who feel safe crying have better cardiovascular and overall health.

The communication part is fascinating. It turns out that crying **alone** isn't as healthy for young babies. The way we learn to truly self-soothe is by having the presence of another human or humans who are not trying to fix the problem and stop our crying, but are simply with us and witnessing our human experience. We learn to self-soothe by co-regulation and even just sitting with someone is co-regulation. (Refer back to the previous Attachment video.)

For this reason, in the Sleep Savvy Baby Philosophy, there is no leaving baby to cry and doing timed check-ins, though I do use timed check-ins when we are working with older toddlers on solo sleeping. . I believe in parental presence and compassionate witnessing while your baby is understanding your new boundaries and learning their own new skills and *adapting their sense of security around releasing sleep association desires*.

Babies also cry to communicate. Newborns cry to communicate basic needs. Older babies cry to communicate needs; but also to communicate *desires*.

However, if their caregiver is no longer willing to meet their desires in a certain way, they will adapt to that or find a way to fulfill their desires themselves.

They are also creatures of habit. When you begin to make changes with a sleep plan, your baby is going to cry to communicate that they would like you to continue with the old good-feeling habit, and *not* these new boundaries you are having on how you are willing to support them.

You are always going to meet your child's actual needs for food, shelter, cleanliness and even closeness. No sleep plan should deprive them of this. But constant closeness, constant bouncing or constantly replacing a pacifier or nipple all night long at the detriment of your health and happiness as your child's caregiver is your child's desire, not their actual need.

It is your job to make sure **you** are cared for first. Even if that means that your infant, or anybody else in your life will have big feelings about that boundary and frustration with figuring out what they will do now....

Extra Note: Crying will become inevitable once you have a toddler. Tantrums are an essential part of growth and development.

Once we have more experience with toddlers and children, we typically do not bat an eye at the crying we know is going to happen when we put new boundaries on what a child is asking us to give them or how we will support our child's sleep and how we will not.

Once we have lived with toddler tantrums and have seen how important clarity and consistency with boundaries is, and how much children need us to show them how to live amicably and peacefully in community with us, we get better at witnessing and loving them through all of their feelings about the joys and limitations of living in family and community.