

The Shift in the Way We Think About Babies

Old way of thinking about babies

- Passive passengers
- Not enough brain structure for memory
- Not really communicating in a meaningful way
- Their long-term health is not influenced by early experiences
- They arrive as “blank slates”

New way of thinking about babies

- Babies are conscious, sensitive and aware in the womb
- Babies are communicating
- Our earliest experiences with caregivers influence how our brains and nervous systems develop
- Babies are essentially whole and sentient from the beginning of life and development is a process of unfolding

Being With Babies Before, During and After Birth

Science is now showing that the way babies are cared for in the womb during birth and in the first few years afterwards creates the foundation of one's lifelong physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health.

A sense of safety is crucial to a new person's well being. Below are some suggested ways you can help your baby feel safe, respected and loved before, during and after birth.

- **Acknowledge** – Verbally and nonverbally welcome and honor this new person from the very beginning as an aware, sensitive and communicative being.
- **Trust** – Believe in the natural process of human development.
- **Slow down** – Recognize that prenatals and babies have a much slower internal rhythm than we do and make space and time to be with their rhythm.
- **Listen** – Be open to hearing all the ways prenatals and babies are communicating.
- **Communicate** – Tell your prenatal and baby what is happening externally and what you think may be happening internally. Keep him or her informed of the situation especially when you are transitioning and/or feeling stress.
- **Differentiate** – Name and claim your feelings.
- **Attune** – Recognize what is or may be happening for your child and align with the baby or prenatal in that experience.
- **Reflect** – Verbally or nonverbally articulate what we see or feel baby doing.
- **Empathize** - Express loving compassion for the child's experience.
- **Repair** – Apologize when things happen that are misattuned or unsafe for the prenatal or baby.
- **Self-reflect** – Examining our own feelings, thoughts, beliefs, actions, etc. regarding our experiences of parenting.

CALMS™
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Old way of helping a baby who is upset

Baby is crying



Parents and caregivers go straight to trying to get the baby to stop crying ("you're ok, sh, sh sh!")

CALMS way of helping a baby who is upset

Baby is crying



Check in with yourself

Pay attention to yourself first – see what alarms in your body are reacting to baby's upset



Allow a breath

Take a moment to try to calm yourself down first



Listen

Try to get a sense of what baby is trying to communicate (hunger, tired, discomfort, wet, needing a change or position or scenery, sad, angry, scared...)



Make Contact/Mirror the feelings

Let baby know that you are with him/her and that you see what he/she is experiencing



Soothe

Help baby calm down because he/she is not equipped to do it alone – Babies need to learn how to calm down in the midst of upset. They learn this through your care. If you are calm, patient, loving and compassionate they will eventually learn to do that for themselves.

Why do CALMS?

- Babies are people
- Babies are communicating all of the time and want to be seen and heard by their loved ones
- Babies cannot manage their emotional experiences without the help of caregivers
- Babies learn how to manage their emotions by feeling the feelings of the people caring for them
- Babies learn about themselves by having others reflect their feelings back to them
- When we are calm and able to listen and reflect what's happening for babies they calm down faster
- Over time (several year) with consistent help from caregivers children learn how to manage their own emotional ups and downs in healthy ways

The "How To" of CALMS™

How to Check In

Ask some basic questions and be honest with yourself. Are you feeling:
Scared, Angry, Frustrated, Helpless, Stuck, Stressed, Inadequate, Guilty, Hopeless???

Another way to learn how to get in touch with your feelings is to pay attention to your body sensations. Ask yourself "What do I feel in my body?" Your body carries information about your feelings that your mind does not normally recognize. Scan your body for tension and other sensations, especially in these areas:

Jaw, Shoulders, Hands, Stomach, Pelvis, Heart/chest

Most parents experience tense feelings and uncomfortable sensations in these places at some time or another. It's normal and natural to feel emotionally overwhelmed and physically uncomfortable when you are stressed.

Acknowledging these feelings and finding the areas of tension are two ways to begin letting go. Just take it one step at a time.

How to Allow A Breath

You can do this with your eyes open or closed, sitting or standing, and just about anywhere.

- *Deeply inhale for a 4 count and then exhale as long as you can
- *Imagine that a sense of calm is entering and flowing through your body with each intake of breath
- *Repeat this a few times

Here are a few more ways you can practice self-care:

- Slowly drink a glass of water
- Look out the window
- Go outside for some air
- Eat a healthy snack
- Feel your feet on the floor
- Tighten and relax your fists
- Make eye contact with another adult
- Get a hug or some physical contact from another adult
- Call a supportive, empathetic friend or family member
- Use positive self talk: "I can do this." "My baby wants me to help him." "I am doing my best."

How to Listen

- *Slow down
- *Get quiet inside
- *Use all of your senses to observe your baby
- *Pay attention to what your own inner voice is telling you
- *Trust your instinct

How to Make Contact and Mirror Feelings

- *Think about what you hear, see and feel as you observe and listen to your baby
- *Make comforting physical contact with your baby
- *Talk to your baby about what you think is going on
- *Leave your communication open ended, "It seems like you feel..." or "It looks like..." or "I wonder if..."
- *Keep the dialogue going by checking in again and noticing your baby's response to your words
- *Notice your own feelings and keep breathing
- *Continue cycling through the listening and mirroring steps for as long as it feels productive

Here are some examples of mirroring phrases that might be reflective. Keep in mind that your baby will respond best when you reflect the movements you see and the feelings you feel while listening. Your simple and genuine communication of the words you say and the way you say them, the expressions on your face and the way you move your body - conveys all of the information that your baby needs in order to understand your reflection.

- "Oh baby, you are having a tough time."
- "I really hear you."
- "Yes baby, you are really upset. I see how upset you are."
- "I see that your eyes are closed and your face is scrunched."
- "I see how you are kicking your legs and moving your arms by your head."
- "You seem really frustrated right now."
- "That was a loud noise and it startled you."
- "I can see and hear that you are really crying."
- "I see you looking at me."
- "Wow, that's a big smile."
- "Oh, looking away."
- "That was a deep breath."
- "Big stretch!"

How to Soothe

- Holding
- Breastfeeding or close body contact
- Sweet sounds such as poems or songs
- Being worn in a sling
- Bouncing
- Rocking
- Going outside, feeling fresh air and seeing plants and animals
- Hearing white noise such as running water or radio static

How to make your soothing efforts more effective:

*Let your baby know that you are going to try one of the things that usually helps to calm and soothe him

*Watch his response and notice if he starts the calming and settling

*Be sure that you are offering, not pushing, the soothing activity onto the baby

*Continue to listen and reflect as you enter into the soothing activity

*Give each activity some time for baby to adapt to it

Bibliography

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The Prenatal Prescription by Peter Nathanielsz

Parenting From the Inside Out by Daniel Siegel

The Science of Parenting by Margot Sunderland

Ideas For Self-Care

30-60 seconds fill ups

These are great to use preventatively and when you and/or your children are heading towards a meltdown

- **Pause** – Just stop what you are doing. Stop moving, stop talking, Stop. Just stop.
- **Check in** – Notice and name sensations you are feeling in your body, i.e. "My neck is tight, my shoulders are hunched, my stomach is in knots..."
- **Admit** – Say out loud how you are feeling "I'm scared and I'm about to lose it!" "I'm feeling angry and I'm about to blow my stack!"
- **Breathe** – Breathe in slowly for a count of four to eight and out for a count of four to eight. Do this at least four times.
- **Drink water** – Stand up and drink a full glass of water slowly.
- **Look around** – Say out loud ten objects you see around you, i.e. "Green plant, yellow bowl, red rug, colorful painting..."
- **Outside** – Walk outside for a minute and breathe in the fresh air.
- **Make contact** – If another adult is around make eye contact or ask for a hug. If you are only with your children look in the mirror and tell yourself that you are safe and loved.
- **Big Hug** – Eye to eye, skin to skin, heart to heart. Hang on until one of you breathes a big sigh of relief.
- **Pray/Meditate** – Get still, close your eyes and connect.
- **Add your own...**
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10-30 minutes fill ups

These are some suggestions for when you are feeling crispy or on the edge of flipping your lid

- **Get wet** - Take a hot shower or bath.
- **Call a friend** – Talk to an adult who can empathize and reflect with you and how you are feeling.
- **Make tea** – Make a cup of tea and sip it slowly.
- **Move** – Take a walk, do some yoga poses, do jumping jacks, run up and down the stairs...
- **Eat** – Make a healthy yummy snack and savor it.
- **Music** – Put on your favorite music. If you feel inspired, dance!

Add your own...

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60 minutes or more

These are some ideas for when you have time to maximize your fill up and/or you've been thought a very emotionally and physically draining time.

- **Date** – With your mate or with friends. Get out and have some adult time with people you love!
- **Exercise** – Walk around the lake, take a yoga class, play tennis with a friend. Whatever brings you joy and gets you moving for at least an hour.
- **Movie** – Go to a movie and get lost in a dark theatre and a great story.
- **Nap** – Sleep whenever you can.
- **Music** – Go to a concert.
- **Dance** – Go dancing.

Add your own...

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