

Clues to Baby Cues

Understanding Baby Behavior

- Who:** WIC Participants, mostly soon to be mothers and fathers.
- Why:** Understanding what babies are trying to tell us can seem like learning a whole new language. Helping parents understand what their baby is trying to communicate and encouraging them to look for behavior cues can help parents and babies be calm and happy.
- When:** Group sessions are held during scheduled WIC 2nd nutrition education visits. Estimated group time is 25-30 minutes.
- Where:** Group sessions are held in a room with chairs arranged in a circle or semi-circle.

Objectives: By the end of the session the participants will be able to:

- Share what excites them about being a parent
- Understand ways babies communicate
- Identify ways they can respond to their baby's cues

Materials:

- Flip Chart
- Markers
- Pens
- Pamphlets: Understanding your Baby's Cues, Why do Babies Cry?
- Posters: Hunger Signs, Babies Talking
- PowerPoint: Pictures of Infants

Discussion Guide

This Discussion Guide is intended to help facilitators keep the participants engaged and the conversation on track in order to meet desired objectives. It is not a script that must be read word for word. Words in quotation marks are examples of wording or questions that can be used to guide the conversation.

Opening the Session

“Welcome to Clues to Baby Cues – Understanding Baby Behavior. My name is _____ and I will be leading our discussion on how babies communicate. We will be talking about recognizing your baby’s cues to help you find out what your baby is trying to tell you. Noticing and understanding these baby cues will hopefully make life with your new baby be a bit smoother. I know you all will have lots of ideas on the topics we will be talking about. I want to be sure everyone has a chance to share their thoughts with the rest of the group and feels safe doing so. How does that sound?

Let’s begin....”

Warm Up: Pair Share

“To get us started, please turn to the person next to you and tell them your first name and what excites you about being a parent. Then after every one has gotten a chance to share, I’ll ask some of you to share your responses.”

Wait 1-2 minutes.

“What did you hear?” *or* “What excites you about being a parent?”

Write responses on flip chart.

🌀 Activity 1: Infant Cues Introduction – How Babies Communicate

“As you’ve just heard, there are many exciting things about being a parent. One of those things is getting to know your new baby and learning how to be a great parent. Let’s spend the next few minutes talking about how babies communicate with their

care givers. We know babies can't tell us in words what they need, but they do offer cues to let us know what they want. It is up to us to correctly interpret these clues. So we get to play the detective! What are some ways babies express their needs to let us know what they want?"

Allow time for responses.

Possible responses include:

- *With their bodies (gesture, movements)*
- *By making noises (grunts, coos crying)*

What Babies Want

"Babies are dependent on their parents to survive, aren't they? If they are hungry for example, they need to communicate that. What are other things babies need to communicate with us about?"

Allow time for responses.

Possible responses include:

- *tired*
- *dirty diaper*
- *hot/cold*
- *wants to be near you*
- *needs a break or something different.*

➔ *Pass out handout - UNDERSTANDING BABY CUES*

"Here is a handout with more information about understanding your baby's cues. There are two overall messages that babies want you to understand. They want to be near you -- to play, interact or feed. Or they may need a break from what ever is going on. They may be over stimulated, tired or just need a change. Many times babies show these cues **before** they start crying. By watching for these cues and responding to them, you can help your baby to be more comfortable. He or she will also feel more secure, because his or her needs are being met."

“What surprised you with some of this information?”

Allow time for responses.

✪ **Activity 2: Hunger Cues**

“At the beginning, it may be confusing to know what your baby is trying so say. If you look for the clues, though, you will soon become the expert at understanding your baby’s language. Let’s talk more about hunger cues.”

➔ *Show poster – Hunger Signs*

“Here is a poster about how babies show early signs of hunger. What are some of the similarities and differences between hunger cues and other cues?”

Allow time for responses.

“Research has shown that babies give clues before they start to cry. Crying is a late hunger cue and babies don’t eat well when they are upset. They can literally be too fussy to eat, even if they are famished! Once babies reach the stage where they are upset, they need to be soothed and calmed down before they can eat, so it makes a lot of sense to intervene when they first show signs that they are interested in eating.”

✪ **Activity 3:**

“Let’s take a look at some other pictures and see what these babies may be trying to communicate.”

➔ *Show pictures on PowerPoint. After each image ask:*

“What do you think this baby is trying to communicate?”

Pause for responses. End with crying photo!

“Let’s talk a little more about crying. It is upsetting to hear a baby cry, isn’t it? How do you feel when you hear a baby cry?”

Allow time for response.

“We know we get stressed when we hear a baby crying, yet crying is normal. Research has shown that babies often cry for a total of an hour or two every day, when you add up all the briefer episodes. That’s a lot. Watching for an infant’s cues and responding to their need before they start to cry will reduce some of the crying. There are times though when it seems like babies are crying and you don’t know why. What do you do then?”

Allow time for response.

➔ *Handout* - **WHY DO BABIES CRY?**

“We know all babies cry. Here is a handout about why babies cry. Babies cry for lots of reasons. Both breastfed and formula fed babies have periods of fussiness and it does not mean that they are hungry, or that they don’t like the breast milk, or that cereal needs to be added to the formula. Parents often incorrectly assume that changing the diet what the baby eats (supplementing with formula, changing formulas) will make their baby stop crying. Some crying is normal.”

“Take a look at the ‘Tips’ on the back page of the handout. Think about one or two people who can help you when your baby cries and how you can share this information with them. You can even write their names on the pamphlet if you’d like.”

Closing the Session

“Being a new parent is an exciting time. (*Refer to flip chart with responses from warm up activity*). We’ve talked about the different ways babies communicate and how they use their bodies and make noises to let us know what they want. We know there are some specifics cues babies use to let us know they are hungry.”

➔ Review poster

“We know all babies cry for various reasons, however crying is not an early sign of hunger. Recognizing and responding to your baby’s cues will hopefully make both of you happier!”

“What other questions do you have about baby cues?”

Allow time for questions and responses.

“Take a few moments and share with a partner how you might use some of the things we talked about today.”

“I appreciate all the ideas you have shared during our discussion today. You will be the one who knows your baby best and I am confident each of you will be great at cluing in to your baby’s behavior cues and knowing what your baby needs.”