



Baby cues and baby body language: a guide

Key points

- **Baby body language can tell you how babies are feeling and what they need.**
- **Look for baby cues for tiredness, alertness, hunger, discomfort and more.**
- **Watch the videos below to see baby cues in action.**

About baby cues and body language

Your baby's body language can tell you how your baby is feeling and what they need from you.

Your baby's body language gives you important cues about whether your baby is:

- tired
- hungry
- wide awake and ready to play
- needing a break
- unwell.

Why it's important to respond to baby cues

When you notice your baby's body language and respond to it, your baby feels safe and secure. This helps you to build a strong [relationship with your baby](https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/development/understanding-development/relationships-development). (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/development/understanding-development/relationships-development>). And a strong relationship with you and other main caregivers is vital to your baby's development.

Recognising baby cues

All babies give cues to how they're feeling and what they need from you. But **each baby develops their own mix of signs** to tell you how they're feeling and what they want.

And as you and your baby get to know each other, you'll begin to recognise their cues and figure out the best way to respond to your baby's individual cues. For example, your grizzling baby might look relaxed when you smile at them, or they might seem to like it better when you sing and talk to them. This helps you know how to respond the next time your baby grizzles.

Understanding your baby's cues can take practice, and there'll be times when you don't know what your baby wants. At those times, it's good to remember that warm and gentle responses from you help your baby feel safe. Your responses also build your relationship with your baby.

Watch the video to learn more about baby cues.



If your baby is unwell, they might cry (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/behaviour/crying-colic/crying-babies>), seem listless or pale, have a fever (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/health-daily-care/health-concerns/fever>), or show other signs like a rash.

Baby cues that say 'I'm tired'

Tired signs in babies include:

- staring into the distance
- jerky movements
- yawning
- fussing
- sucking fingers
- losing interest in people or toys.

Watch the video to see what these cues look like in real babies.



When you recognise tired signs in your baby, it's a good idea to start settling baby for sleep (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/sleep/settling-routines/patting-settling>).

Baby cues that say 'I'm hungry'

When your baby is hungry, they might:

- make sucking noises

- turn towards the breast.

Watch the video to see what hunger cues look like in real babies.

Baby cues that say 'I want to play'

Cues that your baby is ready to play with you include:

- eyes wide and bright
- eye contact with you
- smiles
- smooth movements
- hands reaching out to you.

Watch the video to see more signs that your baby is ready to play and to see these baby cues in action.



When you recognise 'ready to play' signs in your baby, it's a good time to smile (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/connecting-communicating/bonding/whats-in-a-smile>), and talk to your baby (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/connecting-communicating/communicating/talking-with-babies-toddlers>). Baby play (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/first-1000-days/play/playing-with-baby>) is simple: it's all about the interactions between you and your baby.

Baby cues that say 'I need a break'

Babies who are 4 months and older might not always be ready for a nap after their play time. Sometimes they might want a change of pace or activity instead. So what do these baby cues look like?

If your baby wants a break from what they're doing right now, they might:

- turn their head away from you
- squirm or kick.

Watch the video to see more signs that your baby wants to change activity and to see these baby cues in action.



When you recognise 'ready for a break' signs in your baby, it's a good idea to give your baby some quiet time or a different activity. For example, if your baby turns their head away from the rattle you're showing them, you could lie your baby on their back to look at a mobile for a while.

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References

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External links

- [Jean Hailes – What Were We Thinking!](https://www.jeanhailes.org.au/what-were-we-thinking) (<https://www.jeanhailes.org.au/what-were-we-thinking>)
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