

# Secrets of Baby Behavior

## *How to better understand your baby*

### WHO:

WIC participants, mostly mothers, some fathers or caretakers of infants birth to 6 months old. Many come to the group session with their children. Some may be new mothers; others may have years of experience with infants. The topic will be presented in English and Spanish to participants of various educational levels and ethnic backgrounds. Approximately 2-15 participants per session. Educator is WIC staff (WNA or RD). One facilitator per group session.

### WHY:

Despite extensive nutrition education provided to WIC participants, many do not comply with infant-feeding guidelines. It is common for participants to formula-feed, overfeed, introduce solid foods early, or give inappropriate foods and fluids to infants. Recent focus groups of WIC mothers concluded that 22% introduced solid foods prior to 4 months old. Some behavioral beliefs associated with the early introduction of solid foods were:

- Babies cry because of hunger (formula and cereal prevent hunger)
- “When I gave formula, the baby no longer cried and slept, and that is when I decided not to give him breast milk.”
- Feeding solid foods is “achieved” as a developmental milestone rather than as a means to provide nutrients

Future interventions (classes) must address issues that are important to mothers (e.g. full=quiet sleeping infants).<sup>1</sup>

### WHEN:

Group sessions are held during scheduled WIC visits. Estimated learning time is 30 minutes without starting solid foods section, 40-45 minutes with starting solids section.

### WHERE:

Sessions are conducted in the classrooms with chairs in a semi-circular arrangement.

### WHAT:

Infant cues-what is your baby trying to tell you and how should you respond?  
Infant sleep-what is normal?  
Starting solid foods-new guidelines

### WHAT FOR:

By the end of this session you (the participant) will have:

Shared what is great and what is stressful about being a new mom.

1. Recognized what normal infant sleep patterns look like.
2. Practiced reading and responding to a baby's cues.
3. Listened to and discussed the new infant-feeding guidelines

### MATERIALS

**Posters:** Baby's Sleeping (Poster 1)  
Sweet Dreams (Poster 2)  
Baby's Talking (Poster 3)  
Clues to Why Babies Cry (Poster 4)  
Baby's Cues (Poster 5)  
There is brand new information (Poster 6)  
Why wait? (Poster 7)  
We hope you have discovered... (Poster 8)

**Props:** Cards for Sweet Dreams poster  
Photocopies of handprints  
Pre-made hand with reasons babies cry

**Materials:** Flipchart or whiteboard & pens  
Sticky notes

**Handouts:** Understanding Your Baby's Cues  
Feed Me! Birth-6 mos.  
Healthy Sleep: For you and Your Baby  
Why do Babies Cry?

### KEY



Use flipchart



Pass out handout



Question for the group



Pairs activity



Hands on activity



Writing activity

**HOW:** (session directions follow)

## Introduction

1-2 minutes

**“Welcome to ‘Secrets of Baby Behavior’** my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I will be your group leader for this short interactive class. The **focus** of our session **is your baby from birth to 6 months old**. Let’s go around the room and have each of you introduce yourself and tell us how old your baby is.”

Let’s begin...

## 1. Warm Up

2 minutes

As you all know, there are a lot of great things about being a new mom, but being a new mom can also be very stressful at times.



- **First, tell me: “what is great about being a new mom?”** (*Wait for at least 3-4 responses. Probe if you need to. Write responses on flip chart or whiteboard. Affirm each response; for example: “That’s wonderful” or “Thank you for sharing.”*)
- **Now, tell me: “What is stressful about being a new mom?”** (*Wait for at least 3-4 responses. Probe for “crying” and “waking up a lot” if you need to. Write responses on flip chart or whiteboard. Affirm each response; for example: “I can see how that would be stressful” or “I hear that all the time from new moms.”*)

**Instructor:** “So it seems like being a mom is great AND stressful. From what you’ve mentioned, it sounds like babies waking up a lot at night, crying, and not knowing what your baby needs is stressful for new moms. Let’s spend a few minutes talking more about those things.”

## 2. Baby’s Sleep-What is Normal?

4-5 minutes

(SHOW POSTER-“Baby’s Sleeping”)

**Instructor:** “Babies and adults sleep very differently. Babies sleep 13-14 hours per day from 2 -12 months old, but not all at one time. Babies and adults both wake up at night, but sometimes it is harder for babies to get back to sleep. Waking is actually very healthy for babies. Understanding why and when babies wake-up can help tired parents.”

Let’s talk a little about **HOW** babies sleep:



**Have you noticed any signs that your baby is dreaming?** (Pause at least 5 seconds for responses. Possible responses: smiles or cries in sleep, eye movement, body twitches, makes noises in sleep, etc.)

Yes, those are all signs that your baby is dreaming. When babies sleep, part of the time they sleep deeply and part of the time, they sleep lightly. During deep sleep (which we call **quiet sleep**), **it is a lot harder to wake them up** and they **don't dream**. During light sleep (which we call **active sleep**), **babies dream** and they are **easy to wake-up**.

(SHOW POSTER-“Sweet Dreams.” *As you read through the script below, put up the cards listed in bold up on the poster.*)

For babies, dreaming is **very important** because while they dream, blood flows up to their brains bringing nutrients and other things that they need for their brains to grow and develop. **(Place up card that reads “I will be very smart”)** When they are dreaming, it is easier to wake babies up but babies have to wake-up sometimes to feed, to stay warm, and sometimes to breathe. **(Place up card that reads “I will wake-up if I need your help”)** So waking and dreaming are important to keep babies’ brains and bodies healthy. **(Place up card that reads “I will develop a healthy body”)** We know it is tough, but the good news is that it doesn’t last forever. As they get older, babies will wake-up less and less. **(Place up card that reads “I promise I will wake-up less and less as I get older”)**

It is also **very important** for babies to sleep on their backs. Babies will be able to wake-up more easily if they are having difficulty breathing when they sleep on their backs. This will help prevent your baby from developing a deadly condition called “SIDS” or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. **(Place up card that reads “I will have less of a chance of dying from SIDS”)** Many people think babies choke when put to sleep on their backs, but studies show this is not true. Babies also spend more time in active sleep and dreaming when they sleep on their backs. This means babies that sleep on their backs might become healthier and smarter.



What surprised you about **WHY** babies dream? (Pause for responses.)



What other questions do you have about your baby's sleep?

Here is a handout with the information we just talked about and more.



(Pass out Healthy Sleep handout)

Understanding **how** babies sleep is just one way to help you better understand your baby. Now let's talk about how you can learn to communicate better with your baby.

### 3. What Babies Want: -Part 1-

3 minutes

You and your baby have your own “language” that you use to talk to each other. Since babies can’t talk, they have to use their bodies and noises to tell us what they want.



- Without talking, show the person next to you one way your baby tells you she wants to be near you. (*Pair up the people sitting next to each other. If there are an odd number of people, the teacher should be someone’s partner. Allow about 30 seconds for them to share with each other.*)
- Who would like to share with the group how your baby tells you she wants to be near you? (*Wait 5 seconds for a response. If no one wants to share, go right into the script below using the poster.*)

(SHOW POSTER: “Baby’s Talking.”)

Babies tell us they want to be near us by keeping their eyes open and their faces relaxed, like the baby on this poster. They might try to reach toward us, like this baby. They will also lift their faces and smile if they are old enough.



- Without talking, show the person next to you one way your baby tells you he needs a break or something different. (*Pair up the people sitting next to each other. If there are an odd number of people, the teacher should be someone’s partner. Allow about 30 seconds for them to share with each other.*)
- Who would like to share with the group? (*Wait 5 seconds for a response. If no one wants to share, go right into the script below using the poster.*)

(REFERING BACK TO POSTER: “Baby’s Talking.”)

When babies need a break or a change they may just turn their heads or their whole bodies away for a moment (like the baby in this picture.) They can stiffen up their bodies and fuss a little, like this baby. Often giving them a little break or soothing them will stop them from getting more upset and crying. Many times crying can be prevented by recognizing and responding to your baby’s cues quickly.

Here is a handout with more information about understanding your baby’s cues.



(Pass out handout “Understanding Your Baby’s Cues”)

Many of you mentioned earlier in the class that your baby crying can be stressful. Let's talk a little bit about why babies cry and how crying can often be prevented...

#### 4. What Babies Want: -Part 2- Clues to Why Babies Cry

4-5 minutes

(SHOW POSTER: "Clues to Why Babies Cry.")



- ❖ Now I am going to give each of you a drawing of a baby's handprint and a pen.
- ❖ On each finger of the hand, write one thing that might cause YOUR baby to cry. (Give participants about 1 minute to finish their hand.)
- ❖ One example would be: baby needs a diaper change
- ❖ Who would like to share their hand with the group?
- ❖ (If no one shares, teacher reviews pre-made hand)

(Teacher should read through any of the following reasons NOT mentioned by participants when reading their hands):

- ✓ **Need a break or something different**-often babies are overwhelmed by too much noise, lights, people, or anything over stimulating. Sometimes they just need a break away from it all. If you watch for this cue, you can give baby a break before he starts crying. Often crying can be prevented.
- ✓ **Need to be near you or held**-babies can cry just because they want to be near you or miss you. You cannot spoil a baby with too much love. Your baby needs to be close to you to develop self confidence and be able to trust you and others.
- ✓ **Hungry**-it's true that some babies cry because of hunger, but there are lots of other reasons babies cry. Look for other hunger cues like bringing hands to mouth, sucking on things, tight fists over tummy, awake & alert.
- ✓ **Tired**-some babies are very sensitive to being tired. Right when you see tired signs, give baby a nap before she gets over tired and starts to cry.
- ✓ **Too hot or too cold**-baby may be bundled up too much with blankets and clothes or too hot out in the sun. He may also need an extra layer of clothing in the cold.

**Understanding your baby better will make you both happier!**



**What are your questions about why babies cry?**

Here is a handout with information about tips to prevent crying and ways to soothe your baby if they do get to the point of crying.



(Pass out handout "Why do Babies Cry?")

When your baby is trying to tell you something with his noises or body movements, it is important that you recognize what he is trying to tell you and to respond to him in the right way. Let's talk about some different ways to respond to your baby's cues.

## 5. Responding to Baby's Cues

6 minutes

(SHOW POSTER- "Baby's Cues")



### LET'S PLAY A GAME!

Let's play a game. I'm going to tell you what a mom might do and let's guess which one of these babies on the poster is hers. Ready? *(For each question you read below, allow 5 seconds for group to respond, then give the written answer below. If the wrong baby is chosen, say: "I can see how you would think that" or "a lot of people have said that in the past too, but actually..." then continue with the right answer.)*

1. Which of the babies on this poster would a mom pick up and rock back and forth speaking softly the same words over and over or singing softly? (Answer: Baby #8)

Yes, the baby is crying. We all want to hold and rock our crying babies. We somehow know that using the same words over and over can help calm our babies. Doing things over and over (like rocking, stroking or speaking) calms babies. Just remember, when babies are really upset, they need time to calm down. Keep doing the same thing over and over and eventually, they will calm down.

2. Which baby would the mom let take a break? (Answer: Baby #1, #4, #5, & #7)

Baby #5-Yes, that baby looks like he needs a short break. His brow is wrinkled and he has one finger up to his mouth like he is unsure about what's going on.

Baby #7- Yes, that baby looks like he is getting tired. His head is turned away. If the mom lets him look away and take a break he will stay calm, but if she continues to play with him he might quickly turn into baby #8! She'll wait until he turns his head back before she talks to him or tries to play with him.

Baby #4-Yes, that baby needs a break as well. Maybe there is too much noise in the room and the baby is over stimulated. Just turning off the TV or taking baby out of the room might stop him from becoming more upset and crying.

3. Which baby would the mom show a new baby book and tell her about it? (Answer: Baby #2 and Baby #9)

Yes, a relaxed and awake baby loves to play and learn. She looks like she wants to be with her mom and learn something. Her eyes are wide and she is happy and relaxed.

4. Which baby would the mom try to feed? (Answer: Baby #6)

Yes, that baby is showing hunger cues, she's trying to suck on her hands, she's active and awake. Hunger cues can help us know when our babies need food and we know now that crying doesn't always mean hunger. Follow the cues!!



**How does your baby tell you she is full?** (Wait 5 seconds for answers. Add the following answers if not mentioned by participants: falling asleep, pushing away, back arching, hands relaxed, decreased sucking, arms extended out.)



**What can happen if a mom always feeds her baby whenever her baby makes a noise or is a little fussy?** (Wait 5 seconds for answers. Answer: the baby will be overfed and could become overweight.)

Now that you have practiced **how** to respond to different cues that your baby gives you, we hope that you feel better about responding to your baby when he or she is trying to "tell" you something.

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**\*OPTIONAL: THE FOLLOWING SECTION ON STARTING SOLID FOODS IS OPTIONAL. IF YOU CHOOSE NOT TO TEACH THIS SECTION, CONTINUE TO SECTION 9, THE CLOSING ACTIVITY.\***

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## 6. Starting Solids-The NEW guidelines

5-10 minutes for tasks 5, 6 & 7

Now we would like to change topics and quickly share with you some brand new information about feeding your baby solid foods.

(SHOW POSTER "There is brand new information...")

There is brand NEW information about feeding your baby solid foods!  
First, let's talk about what solid foods are...

**"Health care professionals consider any food or liquid the baby gets that is not breast milk or formula to be 'solid food'."**

Now let's talk about the new guidelines, developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, for starting solid foods with your baby:

### *Guidelines*

**"Doctors, nutritionists and other health care professionals recommend that babies not be given anything other than breast milk or formula until the baby is close to 6 months old or until they are physically ready. The American Academy of Pediatrics says that infants may be physically ready to accept solid foods sometime between 4 and 6 months."**



**What do you think about the new guidelines?** *(Pause 5 seconds for responses. Thank all who share. For those who are negative about new guidelines, teacher can thank them for sharing their opinion, and add that next we will talk about why the AAP came up with these guidelines.)*

Now that we've read the new guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics, let's talk about WHY waiting to start solid foods is important.

## 7. Starting Solids-Why Wait?

(SHOW POSTER "Why Wait?")



❖ **What have you heard about why parents should wait to give babies solid foods until about 6 months old?** *(Pause 5 seconds for responses. Thank all who share. Affirm correct responses. Then read list below.)*

A baby's body **may not be ready** for solid foods earlier than 6 months old, and feeding solid foods **too early** may cause the baby **problems**, such as:

- ✓ Solid foods can hurt the baby's digestive tract.
- ✓ Solid foods can cause the baby to choke.
- ✓ Solid foods can cause the baby to eat too much.
- ✓ A baby given solids too early may be at higher risk for developing allergies.
- ✓ Babies given solid foods too early are at higher risk of developing diabetes.
- ✓ Research studies show that giving babies cereal before they are 6 months does not help them sleep through the night.

\*If you are already giving solids, **it's not too late** to stop giving it to them and start looking for cues that your baby is developmentally ready before giving solid foods to them again.



**What surprised you about the problems your baby could have if you start solid foods too early?** *(Pause 5 seconds for responses)*



We've talked about the new recommendations for waiting until about 6 months old to start solid foods, and we've discussed the problems baby could have when given solid foods too early. Since every baby is different, let's talk about what signs to look for to know your baby is developmentally ready to start solid foods.

## 8. Starting Solids: Am I Ready?



(Pass out handout Feed Me: Birth-6 months and point participants to the following information in the handout)

Watch for signs that your baby is physically ready to have solids foods. These signs will appear around 6 months old. Your baby needs to show you **ALL of these signs** to be ready to start solid foods!

- Sit up with support
- Hold head steady
- Put fingers or toys in my mouth
- Show he wants food by opening his mouth
- Close his lips over the spoon
- Show he doesn't want food by turning his head away
- Keep food in his mouth and swallow it

For more information on which solid foods to start when, please look at the rest of this handout (Feed Me: Birth to 6 months) or talk to a staff member here at WIC. They can help you develop a feeding plan for your baby.

## 9. Closing

2 minutes

(SHOW POSTER- “We hope you have discovered...”)

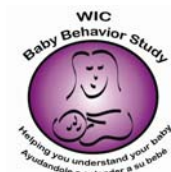
We hope that you have discovered a few secrets today to help you better understand your baby. In closing, we will pass out sticky notes to all of you.

- Please write down one thing you will do differently with your baby based on what you learned today.
- When you are done, place your note up on this poster on the star.
- We will then share some of your thoughts. (*Give participants about 1 minute to write. After all notes are posted, the teacher should read all (if short on time just read a 2-3) the notes aloud to the group.*)
- Would anyone like to share anything with the group that they plan to do differently with their baby?



Again, thank you for participating in our class today. We hope you have learned a few things to help you better understand your baby.

Have a great day!



**Created by the UC Davis Human Lactation Center as part of the FitWIC Baby Behavior Study.**

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.