

Infant Crying

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

I. Interactions and Relationships

A. The provider supports the development of positive self-esteem by helping children understand and appropriately express their feelings and needs.

8. The provider offers comfort and reassurance when children show distress, fear, or discomfort.



The Basics

Why must infants cry? Crying is a form of communication. This evolutionary response alerts caregivers that something is wrong, whether it be a need for food, comfort, sleep, or diapering. Infants' developing brains are incapable of understanding and handling big feelings on their own. As caregivers respond with support, infants begin to learn:

- 1) about their feelings, internal states, and bodies, and
- 2) that adults are sources of care, comfort, and safety.

Sensitive and responsive caregiving drives the formation of secure infant-caregiver bonds which is associated with higher subsequent self-esteem, emotion regulation, and executive function.

In contrast, lack of caregiver responsiveness to infant distress early in life is associated with higher levels of mood, behavioral, and health problems by age five. Without adult support, an infant's stress may become overwhelming and lead to maladaptive regulation strategies that ultimately affect all areas of development.

How can I be responsive as a child care provider? Emotional availability describes the healthy connection between caregiver and child. When fully able to focus on the infant, caregivers can support infants' positive sense of self by offering reassurance when children show distress, fear, or discomfort by holding, rocking, and providing gentle touch.

In practical terms, caring for many children at one time is challenging and there will be times you are not able to hold an infant to soothe them. There are many strategies you can employ that let an infant know you care:

- 1) *Sing*. Your voice can stand in when your hands are full. Sing their favorite lullaby. Make up a song. Your voice, no matter the quality, is more powerful than any recorded music.
- 2) *Be expressive*. Use infant-directed speech, or speech higher in pitch, more melodic, and more animated. Talk about the infant's emotions, letting them know that you see them and are holding their feelings in mind.
- 3) *Ask for help*. Young children want to be of service to the adults they love. Recruit the older children in your care to talk and sing to the infant. Sometimes even a silly dance will do if you are heating a bottle and in need of infant entertainment. Letting children help safely and appropriately reinforces prosocial behavior and contributes to a positive, supportive atmosphere.

I want to learn more!

- [Caregiver Practices to Support Infant-Toddler Social Emotional Development](#)
- [Understanding Temperament in Infants & Toddlers](#)
- [Excessive infant crying doubles the risk of mood and behavioral problems at age 5](#)
- [Emotional availability: theory, research, and intervention](#)

This resource is available to you through Satellite Family Child Care System, a YoungStar Connect Partner.

