

Maternity Services at Calvary

Understanding your baby's behavioural cues

Hospitality
Healing
Stewardship
Respect

Special Care Nursery Fact Sheet

All babies have their own ways to communicate. Babies can tell us how much help they need from us to be comforted, stay calm, settle and stay asleep, or stay awake and alert. They may need support to develop strategies to help comfort themselves when they cry, or help them to stay in a relaxed state. The strategies might include sucking their fingers or hand, changing position, looking at something. We may need to help them by calm holding, speaking softly to them or wrapping them lightly with their hands near their face.



Your baby's ability to cope with his/her environment or his/her need to withdraw from it will be reflected in signs that you can observe. The following examples aim to assist you in understanding these signs.

Defensive / Avoidance Behaviour

Babies have many behavioural cues which say they might need a break from stimulation or need calming. These cues let you know that your baby needs help or time out. Examples include:



- Fussing, agitation or crying
- Sneezing, and hiccupping
- Gagging, spitting up
- Changing colour and / or pauses in breathing
- Frowns and grimaces
- Holding their arms up, splaying fingers
- Shutting their eyes, or staring, glazed look, turning away
- Arching, grimacing, yawning
- Tongue thrust, twitching/jerky movements
- Limp or stiff posture, bracing legs
- "High guard" hands

Coping / Approach Behaviour

These behavioural cues let you know that your baby is ready to interact, play and feed.

- Pink colour with steady, relaxed breathing
- Hands/feet together, smooth movements
- Holding on – hand to mouth/face
- Rooting/sucking
- Soft flexed posture
- Responds to voice or sound
- Snuggles when held, restful sleep, easily consoled
- Opening his/her eyes
- Looking around and trying to focus



More Information

March of Dimes, 2003, Infant Behavior, Reflexes and Cues,

<http://www.marchofdimes.com/nursing/modnemedi/othermedia/infantBehavior.pdf>

L'il Aussie Prems, Nurturing Touch in the NICU and Beyond,

<http://www.lilaussieprems.com.au/blogs/2009/11/27/nurturing-touch-in-the-nicu-and-beyond-for-parents-and-caregivers/>

If you would like to talk to someone about your baby's cues when he/she is in the SCN, please ask a member of the nursery staff.