

# How to calm your baby



Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust  
London Neonatal Operational Delivery Network, South London



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This advice from the therapy team is for babies who have had a difficult time during pregnancy or after their birth who now might need some additional help to calm or comfort them.

## Creating a calm cossetting space for your baby

Try to create a calm protective space to provide what your baby needs to feel calm. Your baby already recognises your calming voice, your smell and touch. Babies need gentle lighting, movement and sound. Creating this calm protective space will help your baby get good quality sleep, to move gently from deep sleep to being drowsy and then to being alert so that your baby remains relaxed, comfortable and ready to interact with you.

## How your baby lets you know that the calm space is working

By spending time with each other you will learn how your baby shows you that they feel content, relaxed or ready to look and listen to you. Babies each have their own facial expressions and small movements to show you how they are feeling and you will learn to recognise if your baby is beginning to feel uncomfortable, tired or over stimulated. Research suggests that babies often use the following signs to communicate that they are feeling more stressed:

- Fluctuations in breathing and heart rate
- Gasping, yawning, sneezing, hiccupping and gagging
- Skin colour changes
- Disorganised body movements
- Splaying their fingers
- Turning or looking away
- Stopping sucking when feeding or spillage from their mouth indicating swallowing has stopped
- Suddenly falling asleep
- Startled appearance with wide eyes.

These signs may be telling you that your baby may need you to slow down, pause or change things.

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## Top tips for soothing your baby

These soothing methods help your baby to learn to be comforted by your presence:

- Your baby knows your voice so may find it calming to listen to you gently talking, reading or humming
- Avoid sudden big noises near your baby such as a loud voice, dragging a chair or closing the door to the incubator suddenly
- Your baby will know your particular smell, so use comforters which you have held and which smell of you. Sometimes a particular toy or cloth can stay with your baby
- Avoid strong smells including perfumes, aftershave or cigarette smoke when visiting your baby. After washing your hands or using hand sanitiser, pause to let them dry before approaching your baby
- If your baby has a cover on the incubator to shade them from the light, make sure this is effective. If you need to move the cover out of the way, do so gradually.



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## Creating a calm space if your baby needs to stay in the incubator

Your baby should have an incubator “nest” created for containing leg and arm movements to give the same reassuring confined space of the womb environment. This may include arranging rolled towels or blankets in a particular way, using special mattresses and pillows.

Here are some activities you can do when your baby has to stay in the incubator to help your baby know you are there. They act in the same way as a cuddle.

- Place your warm hand on your baby giving light but firm touch, keep it still and avoid stroking as some babies find this overstimulates them
- Place a warm cupped hand on your baby’s head and the other hand on their feet
- Offer your baby your little finger to hold
- Gather your baby’s arms and take their hands up towards their face, holding them so they can enjoy experiencing having their hands near their mouth.

Before you start moving your baby for any care or intervention, you can use the cuddle activities described above to help them feel prepared. Try to do care routines, interventions and position changes at the same time so that your baby is not disturbed too often.

Try to support times of designated quiet rest to make sure your baby experiences deep, peaceful sleep.



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## When a baby can move out safely from the incubator or is in a cot

When your baby can be safely removed from an incubator then skin-to-skin kangaroo care is best. Your nursing team will support you with this.

Once in a cot your baby may require different positioning support depending on their needs. You will need to follow current safe sleep advice. Your therapy team will advise you about this.

When you want to try and soothe your baby without picking them up, try some of the cuddle activities you used to keep your baby calm when they were in the incubator.



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## Notes

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## Notes

Other patient information leaflets are available for:

- How to help your baby get ready for breast or bottle feeding
- How to position, hold and interact with your baby

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## Disclaimer

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

If you would like this information in another language or another format such as braille, large print or an electronic or audio file, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on **020 8333 3355** for University Hospital Lewisham or **020 8836 4592** for Queen Elizabeth Hospital or email **LG.pals@nhs.net**

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