

Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Devon Clement**

[Parenthood Prep](#) with Devon Clement

## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

New parents have a lot of fears, but one of them is, “What if the baby just won't stop crying? What if I just cannot get them to calm down and I don't know what they want?” Today, we're going to talk about what to do if you end up in that situation. Stay tuned.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello, and welcome back to the *Parenthood Prep*, the podcast that prepares you for parenthood. I'm having so much fun saying that. You might hear some little kitten noises in the background today. That's because I'm recording with my kittens in the room with me. They are at a very playful, fun age; lots of cleanup, lots of mess, but also just a really good time. Much like a baby of a similar age.

I'm so excited about a lot of things going on here at the podcast. First of all, we sent the emails out to our gift card winners. So, thank you so much for your ratings and reviews. And please, keep them coming. And please, keep sharing it.

Also, the podcast is doing super well. I've gotten so much positive feedback. I just really love it. My mother learned how to listen to podcasts just so that she could listen, which is great. So, that's exciting.

And we are introducing a new feature, which is that on the website there is an option to submit a voicemail, which is a sound recording of either asking a question or roasting your baby. What does that mean? Well, it's exactly what it sounds like. Tell us something funny or annoying that your baby did, or your child, so that we can maybe roast them on the podcast. And by we, I mean me. But people are going to be helping me choose the roasts.

To submit your question, or your baby roast, go to our website [HappyFamilyAfter.com](http://HappyFamilyAfter.com), and on the right-hand side there's a little tab that says,

## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

“Leave a voicemail.” Click on that, and you can just go right ahead and record. I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

So, I'll start with a roast of myself as a baby, which my mother still talks about to this day. Hi, Mom. She got us both all dressed up... It was some holiday or something... in these gorgeous outfits, and then I spit up my entire bottle all over both of us, and she had to change. She had gotten these special outfits for whatever occasion it was. And she still talks about it 40-some years later. I'm sure you have a story that you want to share.

Today, we're going to talk about something that a lot of parents, new parents especially, I think, are really worried about, really afraid of. Which is, what to do when your baby just won't stop crying? I think it's sort of this looming fear in everybody's mind, that there's going to be a time where the baby is just going to be crying and miserable and you're not going to be able to fix it, and there's just nothing you're going to be able to do about it.

I think in these visions, also, we're usually somewhere out in public, where everyone is looking at you and thinking about what a bad parent you are, and how can you not just like handle this, and there's something wrong with you. So, if that's you, and I know it's a lot of people, I'm going to talk to you about what to do if this actually happens.

Which, first of all, it might not. It's not a guarantee that there's going to be some time where you're not going to be able to get your baby to calm down, especially in public. And if it does happen, it's also very normal. It happens to a lot of people. So, it is totally, totally fine if you end up in that situation. Yes, even in public.

I want to talk about some strategies for what to do when this happens. Let's start by talking about why it might be happening. A bunch of years ago, when I was first starting out doing newborn care, I came across an article from one of the big websites, like Baby Center or something like that. It was all the reasons your baby might be crying. And I was like, “Oh, great. This is good reading. Maybe I can send it to some of the moms I'm working with, some of my clients.”

## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

I read this article, and it was the most ridiculous paranoia inducing thing. There were about 20 things on the list, in addition to basics like “hungry” and “tired”. They also had things like, the tag in their clothes might be bothering them. Well, what better way to make people totally paranoid, and have them jumping through hoops, than to give them all these crazy reasons why their baby might be crying.

Maybe .01% of the time they're crying because their clothes are bothering them. It's honestly not even enough to consider it an option, unless you purposely put them in something cute that also happens to be itchy or scratchy or something like that.

There are three basic reasons why your baby might be crying. Number one: The most obvious, of course, is hungry. Number two: They might be experiencing some physical discomfort, not from the tag in their clothing, but from gas or reflux, or something like that. Number three: They're overstimulated, there's too much going on. And number four, which is really the biggest one: Is that they're tired.

I think that in the first three months of life, we give gas far too much credit for making babies upset. I don't think they're actually as gassy as we think they are. Or at the very least, it's not bothering them as much as we think it is. And beyond three months, it's always teething. If they're crying in the first three months, we say, “It's gas.” If they're crying beyond the first three months, we say, “it's teething.”

And yes, those things are true, and they do bother them, but tiredness bothers them so much more. I would even go so far as to say that overstimulation falls under the umbrella of “tiredness”, because usually when they're overstimulated, they need to go to sleep.

Generally, if your baby is crying, and they're fed and they have a clean diaper, they're probably tired and need to go to sleep. Which is sometimes a lot easier said than done, especially if they have hit that wall of overstimulation, over tiredness, and it's going to be tough to get them down.

## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

So, what do you do in that situation? Number one: The number one thing is you have to get through it to give them what they need. Which means that we're not going to try to comfort them while we are getting a bottle ready, getting set up to nurse, getting their diaper changed, getting them swaddled, getting them out of the place where we're into a place where they can feel more calm.

I have watched, so many times, parents trying so hard to keep their newborn calm while they're on the changing table when the baby is fussing and even crying because they don't like having their diaper changed. They don't like being cold. They don't like having their body manipulated. And the parent just keeps trying to soothe them, understandably, because you want them to be happy.

But actually, if you just got the diaper changed really quickly and got them dressed again, you could pick them up and they would be so calm and happy. You're just dragging out the process and making it take longer than it needs to, and making them be more upset, while you get flustered and upset. It's just not good for anybody.

Again, I've mentioned this before, and I'll mention it again, the number of times I've showed up to an overnight where the baby is in the witching hour, everyone's flustered, every light in the house is on and the TV's on, and the baby's in a diaper because they were getting changed, and then they got upset and the parent picked them up.

They're just passing the baby back and forth, or one person's pacing the floor with the baby, who's still really fussy and upset because what they want is to be in their pajamas, swaddled up, cozy, in the dark, getting ready to go to sleep.

So, yes, sometimes it means that for a few minutes we have to just let them be a little bit upset, because we are getting through to the other side where they will be calmer. One strategy for soothing your baby is to wear them in a carrier, especially newborns and younger babies, they love that. But sometimes you don't have the carrier handy or it's not on your body. Maybe it's a cloth wrap style and you need a minute to put it on.

But you know that your baby is going to be super calm as soon as they're in the wrap, so you can take a few minutes. You can put the baby down somewhere

## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

safe, even if they're upset, and you can take a minute to put that wrap on. Because you know that once that's all set up and the baby's in, they're going to calm down. It's totally fine.

The second thing to do, another drama I'm going to keep beating, is to calm yourself. So, we all know when babies get worked up, crying, upset, especially for the parents, especially for the birthing parents, it sends off these red alert alarm bells in your brain. You get all worked up too, and then they feed off of that, they think that you're worked up and upset, because you're their emotional thermostat. And then, they get even more upset.

So, this doesn't mean that you should feel guilty or shame yourself if you're getting upset that your baby's upset, and you're not in some perfect zen like, "Oh baby, it's okay," that's fine. It's normal. But anything you can do to try to calm yourself, even if it means handing them off to someone who might not be that good at soothing them or putting them down for a few minutes and stepping away so that you can have a deep breath, a sip of coffee, a quick shower. Whatever you need to do to kind of bring yourself to a calmer place.

I worked with a twin mom a bunch of years ago, and she had a friend who also had twins; they had met through that. And the friend didn't have help everyday like she did. This other mom, we were hanging out with her one day, and she was like, "Yeah, sometimes, when they're both fussy, I just go in the laundry room, I put the dryer on, I just shut the door, and I just spend five minutes in the laundry room. I can't hear them because the dryer is on. And then, I come out and I feel so much better." So, that is totally fine.

We don't like to think about these things, but when it gets to that "red line" stressful, that's when bad things happen. That's when babies get shaken. We don't want to get to that point. I'm not saying that you would, but just remind yourself that you being calm is going to help your baby calm down.

To keep yourself calm, you can also put in earplugs or headphones, or noise cancelling headphones. Some babies, if they have reflux or colic, or they have something going on and they're just high needs and sensitive, they're going to cry a lot. It doesn't help them or make you a better parent because you're

## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

listening to screaming in your ear at top volume. It helps you be a better parent if you are not going insane. So, it's fine to use earplugs, headphones, anything like that.

What are some other strategies if you've gotten to this point and your baby's crying? You've worked through what you need to work through; they're fed, they're changed, that's all done, and they're still crying. What comes next? A few strategies I really like are Harvey Karp's 5 S's. He wrote the book *The Happiest Baby on the Block* a million years ago. There's also a video that goes to it that's very 90s. He really recommends doing these five things. I think a lot of them we just do naturally, but he's really put it into this clever little mnemonic device.

The 5 S's are: Sway. Obviously, we're going to rock a baby, it's just a natural thing to do. So, swaying side to side. You can be bouncing up and down. You want your movement to match the intensity of the baby. So, if the baby is crying really hard, you don't want to be just gently swaying like a slow dance. You want to be rocking them pretty significantly, so that it sort of matches their intensity and meets them where they are. And then, as they come down, you can start doing that rocking, bouncing, swaying, a little slower.

The next S is: Shh. We know babies love that; they love shushing, they love white noise. They love things like that. So, you can do it with your mouth. You can use a white noise machine. You can throw some white noise on your phone, there are a lot of really good white noise apps. I have it on my phone so that if I'm out and about with a baby and they start crying or they need to go to sleep, I can just put that white noise on really easily wherever we are.

Another thing that works is throwing on the water. If you're walking around the house, you can take them into the bathroom and throw the water on. That's great white noise. Back in the old days, our parents used to run the vacuum or run the dryer. Now, we have these clever little white noise machines that will do the sounds without us having to vacuum or do laundry, which is fantastic.

The third S is: Suck. So, if you're using a pacifier... Babies love to suck, especially when they're brand new. It organizes their nervous system. It's instinctual. It's calming for them. I mean, you'll see. If you look at their body, it'll

## **Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents**

be flailing, they'll be jerking and moving all over the place, and when you give them something to suck on, whether it's a pacifier or your finger or a boob or a bottle, their whole body will just relax. Because all of that focus, all of that nervous system energy, goes straight to their mouth for the sucking process.

So, offer them something to suck. If you're not doing a pacifier, you can give them a super clean pinkie, whatever. A lot of babies really need to suck more than others. Some babies just suck more than others, you know what I mean? These babies, they have a high need for that. I think in that case, it's kind of unavoidable to give them a pacifier unless you want to be feeding them or nursing them all the time.

It drives me really crazy when someone with one kid is like, "Oh, I didn't give my baby a pacifier, so she's not addicted to it." Like, "It was your choice." It was not your choice. Your baby did not have a high need to suck so they did not need the pacifier. So, don't feel bad about that, especially in the newborn stage. You can always take it away later. It does not mean they're going to be taking it to college.

Another super important one is Swaddle. Babies love to be wrapped up. Before they are born, they are squeezed tightly in a womb. They are in somebody's belly all mushed up. Their whole body is folded in a little ball, and then they come out, and all of a sudden, we expect them to be flat on their back, stretching their limbs out. They can't control them yet. They're flailing all over the place. They're hitting themselves in the face. They have the startle reflex; it's waking them up.

Swaddling really helps with that. So, get that baby wrapped up. If you don't have a swaddle handy, you can also just hold them close and kind of hold their arms down to just sort of simulate a swaddle with your arms and make them feel like they are safe and secure.

And then, the last one is the side or stomach position. Obviously, we're not putting them down like this, but it's perfectly safe to hold them on their side in your arms, or hold them on their stomach, like up against your chest or up on your shoulder. They really like that. I think our vision of a baby, before we have



## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

one, is sort of from a cartoon, or somebody in a movie holding a baby doll flat on its back in their arms.

That's just not comfortable for them, and honestly, it's not comfortable for you either. So, hold them in that side or stomach position. If you watch the Harvey Karp video, he actually holds the baby out like a tray and he's swaying back and forth, which seems weird and kind of scary. But you can just as easily hold the baby close to your body in that side or stomach position, where they feel comfortable, and you're sort of recreating that womb environment.

So, those are the 5 S's: Shush, swaddle, sway, suck, and side or stomach position. Now, back to rocking. There are also some special rocking techniques that you can do that, if the baby is just really losing, will really break them out of it. You can find what works for you and what works for your baby. But I find, generally, that big body movements will make a difference.

Something that I like to do is kind of a deep knee bend. Just drop your knees and then come back up. Just bend your knees really deeply and come back up. Stick your butt out; I call it the "dip rock", because you're kind of like dipping down.

I can't do this for long, I'm not strong enough, so I save this for when it's really, really dire and I just cannot get this baby to calm any other way. But if you're in better shape than I am, you might be able to do it for a while. This, again, can be really good when they're at that red line and you just can't break through it.

Another thing I like to do, that really helps with the rocking and making things less stimulating for them, in addition to of course, dimming the lights, taking them to a quieter room, putting the white noise on, removing all that sensory stimulation, is... I call it the "bird method". What that is, is you're holding the baby in your arms, and you put over your shoulder a burp cloth, or a small blanket or a towel, really anything you get your hands on, and you sort of create a curtain over the baby's face so they can't see.

I call it the bird method, because if you've ever had a pet bird, or known anyone who has a pet bird, you throw a towel or blanket over the cage at night so that the bird will go to sleep. So that they can't see anything, and they will go to

## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

sleep. You're going to do the same thing with the baby. Obviously, we're not covering their faces. If you put it over your shoulder, there's plenty of airflow going in from the side.

Just taking away that visual stimulation, even of making eye contact with you. Because they love that, that's so stimulating to them. So, if they're really tired, and they have the option to look at your face and make eye contact rather than fall asleep, they're going to do that. But I will tell you, 9 times out of 10, I throw that burp cloth over my shoulder, they can't see, I peek in a couple minutes later and their eyes are closed, and they're done.

Another thing that works, a lot of times people think that the problem is a dirty diaper. So, they lay them down on the changing table and all of a sudden, the baby's calm on the change table. It's not because their diaper is bothering them. I honestly don't really think wet diapers bother babies all that much, because their diapers are wet pretty much all the time.

I think that sometimes you're both sort of overstimulated by the physical contact of touching each other. Yes, of course, babies love to be held. It's super important. I'm not saying your baby wants to be put down all the time and doesn't want you to hold them. But sometimes, whatever is going on, putting them down on the changing table, they suddenly calm down.

So, try it. It can't hurt. Obviously, don't walk away. Put them down in the crib or the bassinet if you want to walk away. But sometimes, just doing something different, putting them somewhere different, will break that cycle, and will calm them down.

If you are in public, don't worry about being judged. I already said that I just want to remind you of it. Now, the last thing is: What if the baby actually has gas, reflux, colic, possibly a food allergy, and might be getting sick? If the baby is just crying and crying, you want to check for these things. Check their temperature. If this is something that's constant, that's happening all the time, that could be a sign that something is going on. They might have an allergy. They might have reflux.

## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

You want to check with your pediatrician about that. Especially if they're doing things with their body, like becoming sort of stiff as a poker, arching their back, arching their neck way back in a sort of a backward C. That usually shows that they're in some kind of pain.

There are a couple of different techniques you can use for gas, if they're struggling with that, that I really like. You can do a circular massage on their belly, in a clockwise motion. Now, you only want to go downward pretty firmly. You don't want to come up as firmly, because what you're trying to do is get the gas moving downward, or the poop or whatever's happening, you want to get it moving downward. You can do any kind of massage on their stomach in that downward motion.

A lot of people recommend riding bicycles with their legs. So, lay them on their back and move their legs as if they're on a bicycle, like pedaling those legs. A technique I really like that I call the "fart machine"... That earned me the nickname "The Fart Queen" from a client. Thank you for that... while they're laying on their back in that position, you start pumping their knees into their belly, and then, just really gently, fold them in half. Bring their toes up to their face or to their ears. You'd be surprised what babies are able to do.

I mean, obviously, we're not forcing it. But just gently putting that pressure on? A lot of the time I get a fart, and a lot of the time I get poop. So, if you feel like that's what's bothering them, do some of these physical movements to get that going.

If you suspect reflux or an allergy, talk to your pediatrician. Don't be afraid and don't hesitate. They get these questions all the time. They're happy to help and would rather see you resolve it sooner rather than later.

Colic is, honestly, I think a word that gets thrown around a lot to mean a lot of different things. I have known some babies in my life that are what I would describe as "true colic", where they just cry. Who knows what the underlying reason is, they're just screaming their heads off all the time. And then, at about three months, it just stops. It turns off like a switch. It's crazy.

## Ep #38: Soothe Your Crying Baby: Holiday Survival Tips for Parents

So, if you're in that situation with your baby, if the pediatrician says, "I don't know what this is, I guess it's colic," you kind of just have to live with it. Again, protect yourself; get earplugs, get noise cancelling headphones, get some help. Hand the baby off as much as you can. Wear them in a carrier a lot, they really like that.

I have to say that when I have met with friends and family members and clients who say their baby's colic, they're generally pretty calm when I'm there with them probably just because I have been doing this for so long and any professional caregiver is going to have a lot of tricks up their sleeve. So, if you bring in a professional, maybe they can help you.

But at the very least just make sure to protect yourself. Take care of yourself. Don't let yourself get overstimulated, go crazy. People have legit PTSD from baby colic and baby crying. So, do not be afraid to take care of yourself. Hand the baby off if you want to, totally fine. Get people to help you. Rotate help in. It's totally fine.

Remember, at the end of the day, babies cry. They're just expressing their feelings. It's not your fault. You didn't do anything wrong, okay? They're just expressing their feelings because they're human beings, and you are doing an amazing job as their parent.

To be sure you never miss an episode, be sure to subscribe in your favorite podcast app. We'd also love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Instagram @happyfamilyafter or at our website [HappyFamilyAfter.com](http://HappyFamilyAfter.com). On our website you can also leave us a voicemail with any questions or thoughts you might have, and you can roast your baby. Talk to you soon.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to [www.HappyFamilyAfter.com](http://www.HappyFamilyAfter.com).