

TOP

Tips on parenting



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LET IT SNOW

by Anne Tapp, Ph.D., & Ginny Muller, Ph.D.

The first snowfall of the season is thrilling. We rush outside to greet it, open-mouthed to catch snowflakes on our tongues. We lie in the cold powder to make angels and throw freezing spheres at ones we love. Snow transforms our gray world into something splendid.

Children have a natural curiosity about snow that can be used as a gateway into science exploration and genuine conversation. Snow crystals are born in the clouds when water vapor freezes on a particle of solid material like dust. When the cloud temperature is at the freezing point or below and there is enough moisture in the air, ice crystals form around this particle. As the water vapor condenses and freezes, the complex pattern of the snowflake forms. See magnified flakes and read more about snow and snowflakes at <http://www.snowcrystals.com/>

Making snowmen, angels, and forts are great old standbys. Here are a few more snow activities to add to your repertoire.

We lie in the cold powder to make angels and throw freezing spheres at ones we love.

Flaky Science

To view your own flakes, place a few sheets of black construction paper in your freezer. This will ensure that snowflakes will not melt upon contact with the paper. After filling the paper with snowflakes, use a magnifying glass to view the different patterns. Observe each flake's unique shape and count its number of sides.

Tasty Flakes

Fold a flour tortilla in half, and then in half again. Depending on the age and temperament of the child, either use kitchen shears to make some v-shaped cuts along the folded edges, or allow the child to nibble along the folded edges. Either way, attempt to get through all of the layers and try not to tear the tortilla in the process. Open the tortilla, and place it flat on a lightly greased cookie sheet. Discuss how much the tortilla now looks just like a really big snowflake. Allow the child to sprinkle the tortilla with shredded cheese. Use mozzarella if there is a desire to end up with a white snowflake. Place in a hot oven until the cheese melts, and remove it to a plate and enjoy.

Mini-meteorologist

When snow is in the forecast, tape a ruler to the inside of an empty container and set it in an open space. Measure the level in the can after each snowfall. Find your local weather forecast at <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/>

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Let It Snow...

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Track Detectives

Snow is a great canvas for tracking animals. Use this site to check the tracks, including the human kind, you have observed: <http://www.bear-tracker.com/>

Van Gogh in Snow

Make snow pictures with spray bottles filled with various colors of Kool-Aid® or water tinted with food coloring. Use these colors to add some pizzazz to snowmen as well.

Snow Chefs

Send your cooks outside to collect loose, clean snow (the best is found just below the top layer) or substitute shaved ice. Mix 3 cups with 2 tablespoons milk, ¼ cup sugar, and 1 teaspoon vanilla extract to make snow ice cream.

If Jack Frost is making the temperatures just too chilly, try these snow boredom busters:

- Indoor snow making: <http://www.kidsdomain.com/craft/snow.html>
- Virtual Snowflake Maker: <http://snowflakes.lookandfeel.com/>
- Make one of 300 paper snowflakes from beginner to expert level: <http://www.papersnowflakes.com/patterns.htm>

See the snowfall in your area from the comfort of your home by checking out these webcams in the chilly state of Michigan, where the big beautiful blue lakes of summer turn gray and snow covered in the winter. Some young children who live in warmer places enjoy visiting these sites and talking about how winter in Michigan is different than the winter weather in their backyard. Here are a few sites to visit:

Michigan City area:

- <http://www.leonardsworlds.com/stateguide/indiana.htm>
- St. Joseph: <http://www.woodtv.com/global/Story.asp?s=399264>
- Holland: <http://www.woodtv.com/global/Story.asp?s=690275>
- Grand Haven: <http://www.lakemichigancam.com/>
- Muskegon: http://bsd.torresen.com/web_cam/
- Ludington Harbor: http://www.ludingtondailynews.com/web_cam/
- Manistee and Frankfort area: <http://www.9and10news.com/Weather/SkyCams/>

Enjoy the winter and all of the weather it brings. The winter provides so many opportunities for conversation. Follow up on the real world or virtual snow experiences, curl up with your small person, and enjoy some good literature to accompany your snow adventures. May the snow that falls through the season bring you joy, and may you throw more freezing spheres than you receive.

Suggested literature to accompany your snow adventures:

- Bauer, Caroline Feller. *Snowy Day: Stories and Poems*. Harper, 1987.
- Beck, Ian. *Teddy's Snow Day*. Lerner Publications, 2002.
- Bunday, Nikki. *Snow and People*. Carolrhoda Books/Lerner Publishing, 2001.
- Keats, Ezra Jack. *The Snowy Day*. Viking, 1962.
- Keller, Holly. *Geraldine's Big Snow*. Mulberry, 1998.
- Knudsen, Michelle. *Winter is for Snowflakes*. Random House, 2003.
- Lewis, J. Patrick. *The Snowflake Sisters*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2003.
- Nelson, Robin. *A Snowy Day*. Lerner Publications, 2002.
- Root, Phyllis. *Grandmother Winter*. Houghton Mifflin, 1999.
- Schertle, Alice. *All You Need for A Snowman*. Harcourt, 2002
- Siddals, Mary McKenna. *Millions of Snowflakes*. Clarion, 1998.
- Simmons, Jane. *Little Fern's First Winter*. Little, Brown/Orchard Books, 2001.
- Steig, William. *Brave Irene*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986.
- Tripp, Nathaniel. *Snow Comes to the Farm*. Candlewick Press, 2001.
- VanCleve, Janice. *Janice VanCleve's 203 Icy, Freezing, Frosty, Cool and Wild Experiments*. John Wiley & Sons, 1999.
- Waldman, Neil. *The Snowflake: A Water Cycle Story*. Millbrook Press, 2003.
- Wick, Walter. *A Drop of Water*. Scholastic, 1997.
- Wong, Herbert Lee. *Tracks in the Snow*. Henry Holth and Company, 2003.

~Anne Tapp, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Teacher Education at Saginaw Valley State University in Michigan. Her areas of expertise include curriculum and instruction, early childhood education, science methods, and educational technology.

~Ginny Muller, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Teacher Education at Saginaw Valley State University in Michigan. Her areas of expertise include early childhood education and literacy acquisition.





book review

Reading Aloud "Easy Chapter Books"

by Sylvia Read

When reading aloud to your child, do you usually choose picture books? That's great! But you might consider adding what are sometimes called easy readers. Easy readers are often several short stories in one volume arranged in the form of chapters. But unlike chapter books for older readers, these books have a liberal sprinkling of illustrations throughout, short lines, lots of white space, and sentences that almost always end at the end of the page instead of continuing on to the next. Also, unlike the chapters in books for older readers, the chapters in easy readers are self-contained stories that are linked thematically, but they do not require the reader or listener to remember a continuous plot from chapter to chapter. These books contain lots of commonly used words like "is," "the," "and," "they," and so on, which are great for building memory of these important sight words.

Another useful feature of easy chapter books is that there are several books in a series all featuring the same characters. The familiarity of the characters and the kinds of events the characters experience makes the stories easy to understand, which frees up brainpower to focus on words. As you read aloud these books, preferably over and over as many times as your child wants to hear them, you can begin to point to words as you read and encourage your child to watch the words as your finger moves along each line. You can stop, strategically, at common words like "the" or character names like "Frog" and see if your child can chime in with the appropriate word. When they do (and they usually do), you can say things like, "Wow! You can read ____." Or "What

a reader you're becoming!" After several readings of a book, you can also ask the child to go on a word hunt finding the words they know on a page or two.

As children near the time when they're ready to read, another great strategy is to do repeated readings. First, you read the book aloud all the way through. The second time you and your child read it aloud together. Your child's voice will lag behind yours by a half second or so, which makes this second pass through the book almost an echo reading. Then, if they seem interested and ready for it, the third time through, they can try reading alone. Even when they have trouble with words they forget or can't figure out, if they have you there to support them, success is almost guaranteed.

These kinds of books are often found in the library grouped together in a section called Easy Readers. The following series allow for maximum fun and success:

- *Frog and Toad* books by Arnold Lobel
- *Henry and Mudge* books by Cynthia Rylant
- *Minnie and Moo* books by Denys Cazet
- *Fox* books by James Marshall
- *Little Bear* books by Else Holmelund Minarek



~ Sylvia Read is a former 1st and 2nd grade teacher who now teaches language arts and children's literature classes to preservice and inservice teachers at Utah State University.

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HOW TO CALM YOUR CRYING BABY

by Elizabeth Pantley, author of “Gentle Baby Care”

When we’re pregnant or awaiting adoption, we dream about our baby-to-be. We always envision those beautiful Hallmark card scenes: charming baby smiling up at peaceful mother’s face. We read books in advance of the big day about how to care for a newborn — how to bathe, feed, and dress her — and then we feel somewhat prepared. However, a crying baby was never part of that idyllic vision, so this takes us by surprise. But the fact is, all babies cry at one time or another. Some babies cry more than others, but they all do cry. Understanding why babies cry can help you get through this phase and respond effectively to your crying baby.

WHY DOES MY BABY CRY?

Simply put, babies cry because they cannot talk. Babies are human beings, and they have needs and desires, just as we do, but they can’t express them. Even if they could talk, very often they wouldn’t understand why they feel the way they do, they wouldn’t understand themselves well enough to articulate their needs, so babies need someone to help them figure it all out. Their cries are the only way they can say, “Help me! Something isn’t right here!”

DIFFERENT KIND OF CRIES

As you get to know your baby, you’ll become the expert in understanding his cries in a way that no one else can. In their research, child development professionals have determined that certain types of cries mean certain things. In other words, babies don’t cry the same exact way every time. (Other child development experts, also known as mothers, have known that for millennia.)

Over time, you’ll recognize particular cries as if they were spoken words. In addition to these cry signals, you often can determine why your baby is crying by the situation surrounding the cry. Following are common reasons for Baby’s cry, and the clues that may tell you what’s up:

Hunger: If three or four hours have passed since his last feeding, if he has just woken up, or if he has just had a very full diaper and he begins to cry, he’s probably hungry. A feeding will most likely stop the crying.

Tiredness: Look for these signs: decreased activity, losing interest in people and toys, rubbing eyes, looking glazed, and the most obvious — yawning. If you notice any of these in your crying baby, she may just need to sleep. Time for bed!

Discomfort: If a baby is uncomfortable — too wet, hot, cold, squished — he’ll typically squirm or arch his back when he cries, as if trying to get away from the source of his discomfort. Try to figure out the source of his distress and solve his problem.

Pain: A cry of pain is sudden and shrill, just like when an adult or older child cries out when they get hurt. It may include long cries followed by a pause during which your baby appears to stop breathing. He then catches his breath and lets out another long cry. Time to check your baby’s temperature and undress him for a full-body examination.

Overstimulation: If the room is noisy, people are trying to get your baby’s attention, rattles are rattling, music boxes are playing, and your baby suddenly closes her eyes and cries (or turns her head away), she may be trying to shut out all that’s going on around her and find some peace. It’s time for a quiet, dark room and some peaceful cuddles.

Illness: When your baby is sick, he may cry in a weak, moaning way. This is his way of saying, “I feel awful.” If your baby seems ill, look for any signs of sickness, take his temperature and call your healthcare provider.

Frustration: Your baby is just learning how to control her hands, arms, and feet. She may be trying to get her fingers into her mouth or to reach a particularly interesting toy, but her body isn’t cooperating. She cries out of frustration, because she can’t accomplish what she wants to do. All she needs is a little help.

Loneliness: If your baby falls asleep feeding and you place her in her crib, but she wakes soon afterward with a cry, she may be saying that she misses the warmth of your embrace and doesn’t like to be alone. A simple situation to resolve ...

Worry or fear: Your baby suddenly finds himself in the arms of Great Aunt Matilda and can’t see you; his previously happy gurgles turn suddenly to crying. He’s trying to tell you that he’s scared: He doesn’t know this new person, and he wants Mommy or Daddy. Explain to Auntie that he needs a little time to warm up to someone new, and try letting the two of them get to know each other while Baby stays in your arms.

Boredom: Your baby has been sitting in his infant seat for 20 minutes while you talk and eat lunch with a friend. He’s not tired,



hungry, or uncomfortable, but he starts a whiny, fussy cry. He may be saying that he's bored and needs something new to look at or touch. A new position for his seat or a toy to hold may help.

Colic: If your baby cries inconsolably for long periods every day, particularly at the same time each day, he may have colic. Researchers are still unsure of colic's exact cause. Some experts believe that colic is related to the immaturity of a baby's digestive system. Whatever the cause, and it may be a combination of all the theories, colic is among the most exasperating conditions that parents of new babies face. Colic occurs only to newborn babies, up to about four to five months of age. Look for patterns to your baby's crying; these can provide clues as to which suggestions are most likely to help. Then experiment with some of the ideas in this list and in the rest of this article.

- If breastfeeding, feed on demand (cue feeding), for nutrition as well as comfort, as often as your baby needs a calming influence.
- If breastfeeding, try avoiding foods that may cause gas in your baby, such as dairy products, caffeine, cabbage, broccoli, and other gassy vegetables.
- If bottlefeeding, offer more frequent but smaller meals; experiment with different formulas with your doctor or health care provider's approval.
- If bottlefeeding, try different types of bottles and nipples that prevent air from entering your baby as he drinks, such as those with curved bottles or collapsible liners.
- Hold your baby in a more upright position for feeding and directly afterwards.
- Experiment with how often and when you burp your baby.
- Offer meals in a quiet setting.
- If baby likes a pacifier, offer him one.
- Invest in a baby sling or carrier and use it during colicky periods.
- If the weather's too unpleasant for an outside stroll, bring your stroller in the house and walk your baby around.
- Give your baby a warm bath.
- Hold your baby with her legs curled up toward her belly.
- Massage your baby's tummy, or give him a full massage.
- Swaddle your baby in a warm blanket.
- Lay your baby tummy down across your lap and massage or pat her back.
- Hold your baby in a rocking chair, or put him in a swing.
- Walk with Baby in a quiet, dark room while you hum or sing.
- Try keeping your baby away from highly stimulating situations during the day when possible to prevent sensory overload.

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PARENT EDUCATION COMPUTER SOFTWARE

If you are looking for ideas on how to manage your child's challenging behaviors, you may want to check out two new educational software products *Talking With Your Child* and *The Parenting Game*.



Talking With Your Child is a program that teaches parents how to respond when a child cries, shouts, argues, or throws a tantrum. The program teaches parents of younger and older children how to begin an interaction with their child, what to say, and how to end the interaction. Parents can also learn techniques for helping children who lose control or become aggressive.

The Parenting Game allows parents to practice behavior guidance techniques with animated characters. Parents choose different scenarios and characters of different ages that refuse to cooperate with a request of the parent. Then parents choose a behavior guidance strategy to respond to the child's defiant behavior. Parents receive immediate feedback about the effectiveness of the chosen strategy. Parents can also try out other strategies to improve children's behavior as well as support children who are behaving appropriately.

Talking With Your Child and *The Parenting Game* use research-based methods for helping parents respond to the behaviors of children and teenagers. A team of child development specialists, educators, software designers, and a 17-person Parent Advisory Council worked together to develop the programs under a partnership between *LetterPress Software, Inc.* of Logan, Utah, and the *Developmental Therapy-Teaching Program* at the University of Georgia. For more information check out the *LetterPress Software, Inc.* website www.lpssoftware.com or call 1-888-561-9500.



How to Calm Your Crying Baby

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- Lie on your back and lay your baby on top of your tummy down while massaging his back. (Transfer your baby to his bed if he falls asleep.)
- Take Baby for a ride in the car.
- Play soothing music or turn on white noise such as a vacuum cleaner or running water.
- As a last resort, ask your doctor or health care provider about medications available for colic and gas.

WHAT ABOUT FUSSY CRYING?

There are plenty of times when you can't tell if your baby's crying is directly related to a fixable situation: hunger, a soiled diaper, or a longing to be held. That's when parents get frustrated and nervous. That's when you should take a deep breath and try some of the following cry-stoppers:



Hold your baby. No matter the reason for your baby's cry, being held by a warm and comforting person offers a feeling of security and may calm his crying. Babies love to be held in arms, slings, front-pack carriers, and (when they get a little older) backpacks; physical contact is what they seek and what usually soothes them best.

Breastfeed your baby. Nursing your baby is as much for comfort as food. All four of my babies calmed easily when brought to the breast — so much so that my husband has always called it “The Secret Weapon.” And my babies are very typical. Breastfeeding is an important and powerful tool for baby soothing.

Provide motion. Babies enjoy repetitive, rhythmic motion such as rocking, swinging, swaying, jiggling, dancing, or a drive in the car. Many parents instinctually begin to sway with a fussy baby, and for a good reason: It works.

Turn on some white noise. The womb was a very noisy place. Remember the sounds you heard on the Doppler stethoscope? Not so long ago, your baby heard those 24 hours a day. Therefore, your baby sometimes can be calmed by “white noise” — that is, noise that is continuous and uniform, such as that of a heartbeat, the rain, static between radio stations,

and your vacuum cleaner. Some alarm clocks even have a white noise function.

Let music soothe your baby. Soft, peaceful music is a wonderful baby calmer. That's why lullabies have been passed down through the ages. You don't have to be a professional singer to provide your baby with a song; your baby loves to hear your voice. In addition to your own songs, babies usually love to hear any kind of music. Experiment with different types of tunes, since babies have their own favorites that can range from jazz to country to classical, and even rock and rap.

Swaddle your baby. During the first three or four months of life, many babies feel comforted if you can re-create the tightly contained sensation they enjoyed in the womb.

Massage your baby. Babies love to be touched and stroked, so a massage is a wonderful way to calm a fussy baby. A variation of massage is the baby pat; many babies love a gentle, rhythmic pat on their backs or bottoms.

Let your baby have something to suck on. The most natural pacifier is mother's breast, but when that isn't an option, a bottle, pacifier, baby's own fingers, a teething toy, or Daddy's pinkie can work wonders as a means of comfort.

Distraction your baby. Sometimes a new activity or change of scenery — maybe a walk outside, or a dance with a song, or a splashy bath — can be very helpful in turning a fussy baby into a happy one.

READING YOUR BABY'S BODY LANGUAGE

Many times, you can avoid the crying altogether by responding right away to your baby's earliest signals of need, such as fussing, stiffening her body, or rooting for the breast. As you get to know your baby and learn her signals, determining what she needs will become easier for you — even before she cries.

This article is a copyrighted excerpt from *Gentle Baby Care* by Elizabeth Pantley (McGraw-Hill, 2003).





LISTEN WITH YOUR HEART

by Elizabeth Pantley, author of “*Kid Cooperation and Parent Parenting*”

Think back to when you were growing up, and all the times when you felt self-doubt, confusion, and frustration. It’s tough growing up! You can help your children get through the bumps and bruises of childhood by simply being there for them. Children need to know that when the whole world feels like it’s crashing down around them, they have one safe, secure place to go, and one bottomless source of unconditional love.

Listening is as much a skill as giving a speech is a skill. It’s not just a matter of picking up sounds: active listening involves an array of behaviors that express your attention, empathy, and respect. Listening to your children in this way will go far toward convincing them of your unconditional love. Keep these guidelines in mind when your child has something important to say to you:

1. Put down your paper or dishtowel. Shut off the TV. Maintain as much eye contact as your child seems comfortable with. Make body contact, such as a hand to the shoulder, if that seems appropriate. Often, when children are trying to express a problem, thought or concern, their parents say they are listening, but half of their attention is somewhere else. You can’t con a child this way. Typically, a few minutes of sincere, attentive listening is worth more than an hour of letting your child talk while you carry on with another activity.
2. Don’t rush to jump in with solutions, ideas, or lectures. Often, children just need a sounding board. They need another person listening to give them an opportunity to figure out exactly what they want to do. Solving your child’s problem may give you the relief of ending his discomfort; but, in the long term, it’s worth far more to him to get the support he needs to formulate solutions on his own.
3. Demonstrate that you’re listening by asking appropriate questions and making “listening” sounds such as: “Hmmm,” “Oh,” “Really?” “Darn!” “Wow!”
4. Validate your child’s fears and feelings. When our children come to us with negative emotions, it’s far too tempting to minimize them: “Oh, don’t worry about it.” “There’s nothing to be afraid of.” These comments do much more harm than good. It’s important for children to learn to trust their own feelings and to listen to them. By brushing them off, you’re giving your child the message that his or her feelings are wrong or unimportant. You can validate your child’s feelings instead with such comments as, “That sounds embarrassing.” “It can hurt to feel left out.” “That must be frustrating.”
5. Help your child to focus on possible solutions, rather than getting mired in the problem. If the situation isn’t one that can be solved — if it’s a condition rather than a problem — encourage your child to express his or her feelings fully, and then move on. Help your child use forward thinking phrases like, “I bet you wish ...” or “Wouldn’t it be nice if ...” or “What do you think you’ll do now?”

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Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education
 College of Education and Human Services
 Utah State University
 6705 Old Main Hill
 Logan, UT 84322-6705

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Editor: DR. HEIDI MALLOY
 (651) 793-1337 • heidi.malloy@metrostate.edu

Managing Editor: NISSA BOMAN
 (435) 797-8629 • nissa.boman@usu.edu

TOP Article Review Panel:

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Submission inquiries should be directed to Heidi Malloy. Please direct all other questions, suggestions, or comments to Nissa Boman. TOP's web site is: www.coe.usu.edu/ecc/web/top.html/

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