

## ExchangeEveryDay

### Five Things NOT to Do to Babies

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*He who wants to blame sometimes finds the sugar sour.*  
*-German Proverb*

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Writing in an article in *Psychology Today*, Darcia Narvaez, Ph.D., outlines five things she urges every parent and caregiver to avoid doing to babies:

#### **"1. Ignore them (don't)..."**

Why is a companionship relationship particularly important for babies? The first three years of life is a time when tacit (non conscious) understanding of how the social world works is developed and it gets wired into how the brain works...With responsive care, the brain's systems learn to work well and thereby keep the person healthy and socially engaged. What is learned during early life will be applied ever after to relationships (unless changed with therapy or other significant brain-changing experiences)...

#### **2. Let them cry (don't)**

Imagine being in pain and asking for help and being ignored. How does that make you feel about yourself (bad) and about your family (angry)? It's so much worse for a baby because he is in the midst of rapidly growing brain systems that are learning their dance patterns for social living and for physiological functioning (health)...

Caregivers must pay attention to the nonverbal signals babies give (restlessness, frown, grimace, flailing arms) and nip discomfort in the bud. This is what wise grandmothers do. Whatever babies 'practice' in the early months and years creates pathways in the brain that will be used again and again. So if you want a disagreeable, uncooperative, aggressive child (and adult), let him cry. Otherwise, keep babies happy. Distressing a baby regularly will build a disagreeable child that will distress the community later...

#### **3. Leave them alone (don't)**

Solitary confinement is one of the worst things you can do to a human being and eventually leads to psychosis. Babies are built to be physically connected to caregivers. They do not understand why they are alone. Babies internalize a sense of wrongness and badness that will color their lives. Imagine being suddenly left alone in a strange land where you cannot move or take care of yourself. It would be terrifying, even if you understood what was going on. Why do this to a child...

#### **4. Not hold them whenever possible (please hold them)**

Babies are meant to be held. This should start immediately. First impressions of you and the world are fundamental. Can they relax into being? Learning a deep relaxation and sense of peace is what they will carry forward into life. If they don't have a regular experience of relaxing into loving arms, they may never learn to relax and let go...

## **5. Punish them (don't)**

Some parents spank or hit their babies. This is very bad news. Corporal punishment might be an immediate release of frustration for the caregiver but, like most aggressive acts, it has long term negative effects... Warm, responsive parenting is one of the best predictors of positive child outcomes (e.g., getting along with others, doing well in school). Responsive caregiving means attending to the individuality of the child in the particular situation. So caregivers have to be emotionally present, not distracted by their own worries, phones or work."

**Source:** "[Five Things NOT to Do to Babies](#)," by Darcia Narvaez, PhD, *Psychology Today*, April 27, 2014.

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