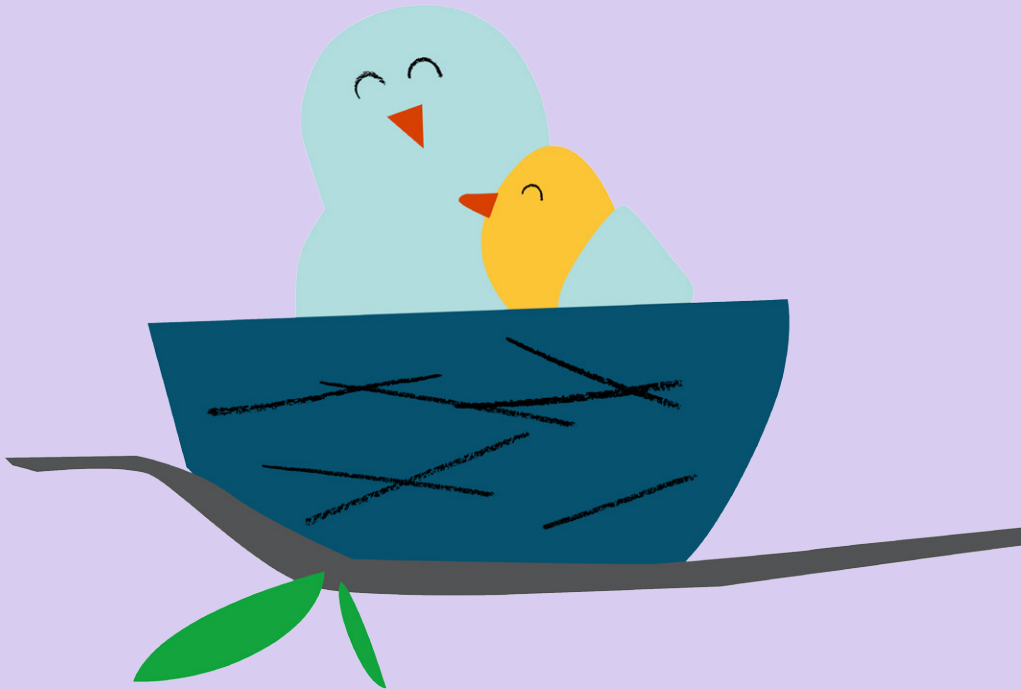


**NSPCC**

..... NEED-TO-KNOW GUIDES .....

# **Handle with care**

How to keep your baby safe



EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

# What's inside

Keeping your cool	03
How babies like to be held	05
Coping with crying	07
Who can I talk to?	09
We're here for you 24/7	10



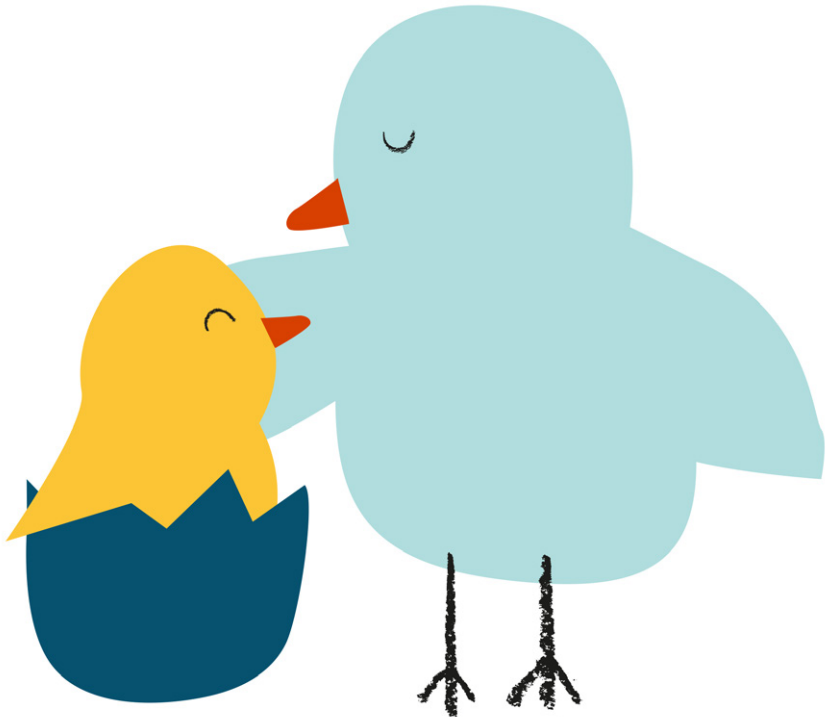
**EVERY FAMILY  
IS DIFFERENT, SO MAKE  
THIS GUIDE YOUR OWN**  
You can make notes on it,  
customise it – whatever  
works for you.

Holding your baby close is something you'll probably naturally want to do right from the start. But you may be a bit nervous to begin with.

It's important to understand that rough handling, especially shaking, can seriously injure your baby. But injuries caused by shaking don't happen accidentally during normal play. So this shouldn't stop you cuddling, playing and doing all the things your baby really enjoys.

# Keeping your cool

Never shake a baby. Babies are fragile,  
so be gentle and supportive.



A baby's head is big and heavy compared to the rest of its body. Their head flops when it's not supported – that's because their neck muscles aren't strong enough to hold it up yet.

Shaking makes the head move backwards and forwards very quickly, with a lot of force. When this happens, tiny blood vessels can tear and bleed inside the baby's brain, causing problems such as:

- blindness
- deafness
- fits
- learning difficulties
- brain damage, or even death.

### Can shaking harm older children?

It's most dangerous for babies under 12 months, but shaking can cause the same serious injuries in older babies and toddlers.

### Can other kinds of rough handling cause injuries?

Yes, particularly hitting a baby on the head. Throwing babies in the air may seem like fun, but it can be dangerous. Stick to gentle games until children are much older.

### Why would anyone shake a baby?

Some parents or carers may lose control and shake their baby in a moment of anger or frustration, especially if the baby cries a lot or has problems feeding. Many don't realise the damage that shaking can do, and some may think that it's better than smacking.

### Important advice

Even if your baby seems to have stopped breathing, don't shake them. Doctors advise flicking the soles of the feet, rocking the cot or picking up the baby, supporting the neck. If your baby has stopped breathing, then call 999 right away.



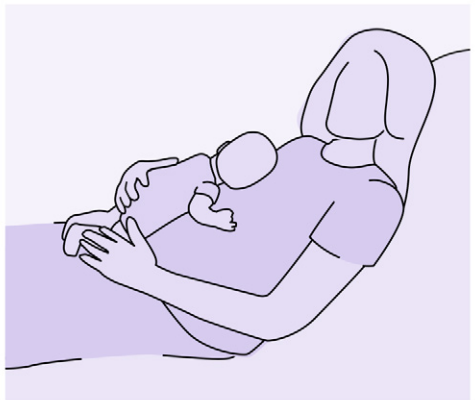
### Remember

**It's never OK to shake or smack a baby. If you do ever lose control and shake a baby, get medical help straight away, preferably at your local hospital. Don't delay. The longer you wait, the worse the injury could be; it could even lead to death.**

# How babies like to be held



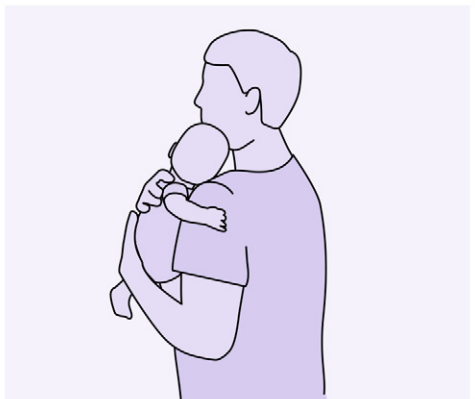
Cuddled up close to you



Lying on top of your chest (but avoid this if you have been drinking or smoking, or feel like you might fall asleep)



With your arm around their tummy and their back against your body



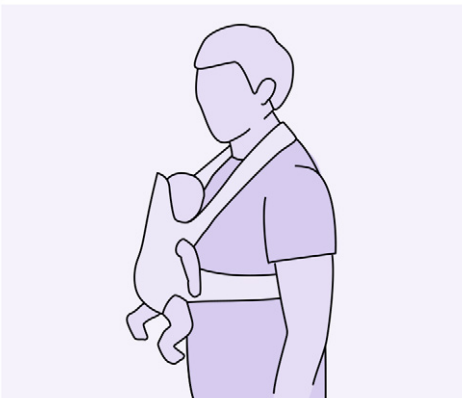
Upright looking over your shoulder, with their head supported

What babies don't like

- Being held with their heads or backs unsupported
- Being held at arm's length – this makes babies feel insecure
- Rough handling, such as being gripped too tightly or having a bottle or dummy pushed into their mouth
- Being picked up very suddenly
- Very rough play
- Shaking – this can cause serious, permanent injuries or even death



Cradled lengthways in your arms – a perfect position for smiling and talking to each other



In a sling – a useful way to keep your baby close, with your arms free to do other things

Babies also like being stroked and massaged gently.

Most of all, babies need to have their heads and necks carefully supported.



# Coping with crying

It's completely natural for your baby to cry, but that doesn't make it easy to handle as a parent. We've got tips and advice to help.



Crying is the only way that your baby can tell you how they feel or what they need. If you've done all the usual checks (hunger, thirst, nappy change) and the crying doesn't stop, try:

- cuddling (remember, picking up and cuddling a crying baby isn't "spoiling" them)
- gently rocking your baby in a cradle or pram
- singing
- walking up and down with them in your arms or in a sling
- playing music.

However, if the crying seems unusual for your baby or you think they may be unwell, talk to your health visitor or GP.

**If the crying ever feels too much to handle:**

- Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Put your baby down in a safe place like a cot or pram and go into another room, but go back to check on your baby if they go quiet.
- To calm yourself down, sit for a few minutes, perhaps with a cup of tea and the TV or radio to help take your mind off the crying. Once you

feel calmer, go back to your baby.

- Ask a friend or relative to take over for a while.
- Try not to get angry with your baby, as this will only make the crying worse.

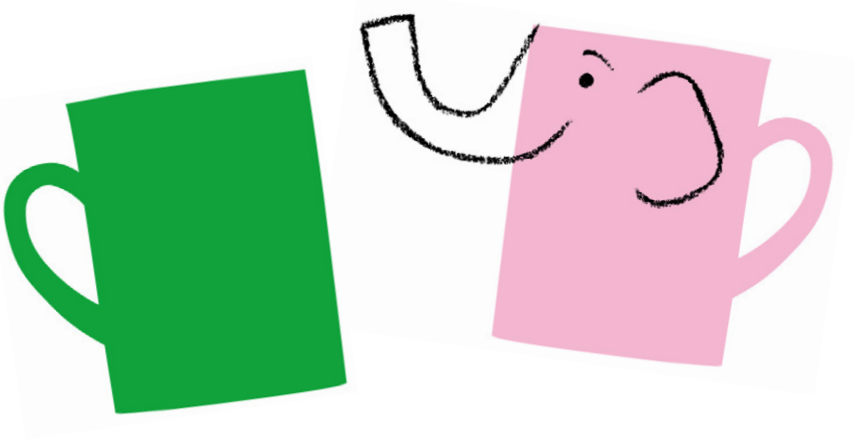
Never let things get so bad that you feel desperate. There are lots of ways you can get help. Talk to your health visitor or get in touch with one of the contacts listed in the *Who can I talk to?* section at the back of this booklet.



“Leaving babies to cry for long periods can affect their brain development and is also stressful for everyone. It’s a myth that you can spoil a baby with too much attention.”

**Chris Cloke**

NSPCC parenting adviser



# Who can I talk to?

Parenting can be hard, but you don't have to go through it alone. If you're looking for advice, information, or just need to talk, there are plenty of places that can help you.

**Local services** such as your health visitor or GP can give advice about any aspect of caring for your baby.

## Parenting advice

**Family Lives** provides help and support on all aspects of parenting and family life, and runs Parentline.

**0808 800 2222**  
[familylives.org.uk](http://familylives.org.uk)

**Parenting NI (Northern Ireland)** has support and advice on parenting and family life.

**0808 8010 722**  
[parentingni.org](http://parentingni.org)

**ParentLine Scotland** gives free telephone advice to any adult caring for a child in Scotland (provided by Children 1st).

**0800 028 2233**  
[parentlinescotland@children1st.org.uk](mailto:parentlinescotland@children1st.org.uk)  
[children1st.org.uk](http://children1st.org.uk)

**Family Information Services** in Wales provide information, support and guidance on all aspects of childcare and services for children and young people.

[familyinformation.org.uk](http://familyinformation.org.uk)

**Cry-sis** is a helpline providing help for parents of excessively crying, sleepless or demanding babies. Lines open seven days a week, 9am-10pm.

**08451 228669**  
[cry-sis.org.uk](http://cry-sis.org.uk)

# We're here for you 24/7

If you have any questions or worries,  
feel free to get in touch with us.

Our trained experts at the NSPCC helpline  
can listen to any worries you have about  
looking after your child, or any tough  
decisions you're facing.

Reading this guide may have also made  
you think about other children. Contact  
us if you're worried about any aspect  
of their safety, and we can help.

Call **0808 800 5000**

Email **[help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)**


Or talk to us online at **[nspcc.org.uk/help](https://nspcc.org.uk/help)**



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# Something every parent goes through

**Babies are fragile and need to be handled carefully. As a new parent, you might feel unsure or nervous about things like holding and soothing your baby. This is completely natural, and we're here to help.**



We've got lots of practical advice and tips for safe, positive ways to hold and care for your baby. So you can keep your baby safe, and give them the best possible start in life.