

Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome – by Vimala McClure

By [Vimala](#) on October 14, 2013

Iowa hospitals have developed what they call the **Period of Purple Crying**, a program helping parents and caregivers understand the frustrating features of crying in normal infants that can lead to shaking or abuse. They have promoted the program for two years and report that 80% of Iowa birth families receive the prevention material upon leaving the hospital.

The acronym PURPLE is used to describe specific characteristics of an infant's crying, a developmental stage that will pass. New parents receive tiny purple hats to raise awareness for the PURPLE crying program. "A baby can never die from crying, but they can die from being shaken," says Stephen Scott, executive director of Prevent Child Abuse Iowa.



Infant massage can help address each of the tips laid out in the PURPLE crying program:

P — Peak of crying: Your newborn may cry more each week; the most at two months, then less at four to five months. **Infant Massage:** Your newborn is not fully developed at birth and has a very sensitive digestive and respiratory system. Being in a new environment, with food given in a completely new way is stressful, and this new way of digesting can be painful. Parents can relax themselves, warm the atmosphere, and gently massage the baby's tummy (using the clockwise strokes given in *Infant Massage, a Handbook for Loving Parents*), then provide rhythmic comfort. It is okay for you to step away if you can't handle the crying; let your baby know you are there, swaddle baby for comfort, and allow him/her to cry until you are calm enough to provide relaxing care.

U — Unexpected: Your newborn may cry more each week; the most at two months, then less at four to five months. **Infant Massage:** If you are able to massage your baby, this crying period may be considerably less in duration or not at all. The baby needs help in getting his/her digestive system "up to speed" and then there will be little or no crying.

R — Resists soothing: Your baby may not stop crying no matter what you do. **Infant Massage:** If your baby doesn't respond to massaging the tummy area and rhythmic soothing, he/she may carry stress from the birth experience, and may need to cry, as crying is the only means of communication he/she has. After you calm yourself, stay with your crying baby, using swaddling, rhythmic soothing such as rocking or walking and patting his/her back rhythmically. When possible, introduce massage, starting with the legs and moving to the tummy, gently and rhythmically stroking with a light natural oil; sing or talk to your baby and make eye contact when you can.

P — Pain-like face: A crying baby may look like he's in pain, even though he's not. **Infant Massage:** If a crying baby looks like he's in pain, he probably is. Massage the legs and tummy every day using the strokes suggested in *Infant Massage, a Handbook for Loving Parents*. Of course, first step away and calm yourself.

L — Long lasting: Crying can last as much as five hours a day or more. **Infant Massage:** When massage is delivered properly and daily, it is unusual for crying to last more than a couple of hours a day. Regardless, remember that crying is your baby's only way to "talk," and if necessary step away and relax yourself. Crying is okay.

E — Evening: Your baby may cry more in the late afternoon and evening. **Infant Massage:** If you can massage the baby in the early afternoon, it will help the baby release built-up tension and thus the need to cry in the evening (the “five o’clock fussies”).

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