

Good Baby Syndrome. Findings from Pre and Perinatal Psychology

"I feel my baby is trying to tell me something, but I don't know what.' This is something I often hear from parents, especially mothers. When I began working with babies, more than 20 years ago, as a Craniosacral Therapist, I also had the distinct impression that the babies were communicating something I could not fully grasp. Then I heard about Karlton Terry, an American psychotherapist, who was working in Switzerland and specialised in pre and perinatal psychology. This is a branch of psychology, that draws together researchers and therapists from a broad range of backgrounds, who are interested in how our prenatal and birth experience impacts us. What Karlton had to teach so amazed me that I ended up training and then assisting with him for the next 10 years. Not only did we get to access our own womb and birth memories, we were also introduced to a new way of working with babies, that began to make sense of what I had been seeing earlier.

Karlton's work, which was itself, rooted in decades of researchers who had preceded him, was especially refined and precise. Two important concepts he introduced me to were 'baby body language' (BBL) and 'memory crying'. BBL consists of meaningful gestures and movements, that are related to a womb or birth experience that a baby is still feeling. It arises from the baby's embodied experience and signals that something which occurred prenatally or during birth has not been fully integrated yet. One of the most obvious examples of BBL is when a baby repeatedly touches a place on the head that was compressed during birth. BBL is often accompanied by an emotional charge, which is expressed as 'memory crying'. This may be angry, sad or fearful in tone. Most parents have no idea about memory crying and respond to it as if it signifies a present-moment need, such as hunger, boredom or tiredness. As this does not work, both baby and parents become increasingly distressed.

When we talk about memory crying, we are not talking about a narrative memory, such as 'yesterday I went to the shops etc'. It is a 'implicit' or 'body' memory. Yet it carries with it a story that needs to be heard. Just as adults do, babies need to communicate their experience. Babies 'tell their stories' of what was difficult for them prenatally and at birth through the combination of BBL and memory crying. Integrative Baby Therapists are trained to help parents to empathically support babies to tell their stories. Whilst almost every book for parents is geared towards getting babies to be quiet, Integrative Baby Therapists advocate for the baby's need to be heard. Empathically mirroring babies'

experience enables them to feel relationally connected and supported in releasing the inner pressure at the core of their story. When this happens the memory crying, which is often dismissed as colic, is either dramatically reduced or ceases altogether.

If babies are left to cry on their own or repeatedly have a bottle or dummy stuck in their mouths to shut them up, they may give up on expressing themselves. This can be mistaken for contentment. We call this 'Good Baby Syndrome'. When people talk about a 'good' baby, they usually mean a quiet baby. But when babies give up on expressing their needs, it has consequences. Later in life it may predispose us towards low self-esteem, depression, a lack of trust that our needs can be met and poor emotional regulation. Many parents feel under pressure to keep their babies quiet and doubt their own instinctive feeling that 'my baby is trying to tell me something.' The findings of pre and perinatal psychology offer new possibilities for babies, parents and the future. When we are heard early in life we feel more valued, trusting and truly content