

# The Baby Calmer

A constantly crying baby can leave new mums distraught but one unique practitioner is pioneering the way to quiet.

Kylie Welsh reports

The shrieking sound of a new born baby crying is alarming for any new mum, even though babies need to communicate through crying. When this crying is continual, uninterrupted for long periods and there is no consoling the baby, the effects on mum and baby take on deeper physiological and psychological effects.

Medical professionals often diagnose babies that cry continuously as having colic (stomach pain). The 'Rule of Three' within the medical industry says that colic exists when an otherwise healthy baby cries for at least three hours a day, three days a week and has been doing this for at least three weeks. The problem with this definition is that it equates colic only with excessive crying. However, as new research unfolds, it is becoming clear that babies and their crying are more complex.

Soon after Anne discovered this new approach, a former work colleague came to her for help. At the time the new mother was experiencing severe stress and exhaustion as a result of several weeks of trying everything possible to settle her inconsolable new baby. She knew about Anne's research and trusted Anne to help her try to settle her baby.

"After only a few minutes, her screaming six-week-old baby was calm and relaxed in her mother's arms, and for the first time in a month, took a full bottle and slept for more than 10 minutes. The baby's mother kept looking at her watch and couldn't believe it when one and a half hours had gone by and her usually screaming baby was still calm...and still asleep." Anne knew then that this approach worked and made the commitment to study under Dr Harvey Karp and gained the required

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Anne Thistleton has become known as 'The Baby Calmer' and she is currently Queensland's only qualified parent educator in a pioneering new approach to calming babies.

Anne holds both a Master of Education and a Master of Counselling from the Australian Catholic University and she has also completed post-graduate training in Expressive Therapies.

"In my final year at ACU we had a guest lecturer called Dr Michael Yapko. He is an internationally known expert in the area of treating depression. I hadn't yet decided how I might like to work in the counselling field, until he mentioned how post-natal depression is an increasingly under-disclosed and under-treated disorder for many women. This information led me to examine the many causes of post-natal depression in women, and I found that post-natal depression is highly co-related with infant crying and maternal exhaustion."

Anne began researching infant crying and maternal exhaustion and came across the ground-breaking work of American Paediatrician and Child Development Specialist Dr Harvey Karp. Dr Karp's practice of baby calming developed when he learnt that the Kung San tribe of Southern Africa was "colic free" and that, 90 percent of the time, Kung parents could calm their crying babies within 30 seconds. His further research and teachings indicate that although a baby's nine months (or three trimesters) inside a woman is a time of unbelievably complex development, in many ways, babies aren't always really ready to be born after three trimesters in the womb.

Even though newborns have some abilities that demonstrate their readiness to be in the world, at birth, a newborn, according to Dr Karp, is still really a foetus. His theory is that for the first three months outside the womb, infants want to be made to feel like they are still back there. The next best thing, apparently, is to make them feel at home by surrounding them with the comforting sensations they enjoyed 24/7 in the womb.

qualification to start practising here.

Originally a primary school teacher, Anne now specialises in working with young babies and their parents. "When parents learn how to calm their crying baby, their confidence increases, as well as their desire to spend more quality time bonding with their baby," says Anne.

Many women feel that they should have been able to do this instinctively, according to Anne, and they feel guilty when they can't stop their baby crying. "Calming a crying baby is not something that we know how to do by instinct alone. Instinct tells us that we need to pay attention to our baby's crying, and that it really upsets us to hear our baby cry, but calming a crying baby is a skill. And as with most skills, it needs to be learnt," she says.

A baby crying not only affects the mum and the baby, but also relationships with spouses, other siblings and often evokes uninvited interference from others trying to 'help out'. Often all this attention only adds to the mother's feeling of frustration, inadequacy and despair. Through learning techniques to calm and soothe their baby, mums can take back control and start to build their confidence again.

Author Jo Tantum also aims to help new parents feel in control with her new book *Baby Secrets*, published by Penguin and now available in Australia. Tantum has been working with parents and their babies for 21 years in the UK as a 'sleep nanny' and she shares her secrets of success in a comprehensive guide offering such simple advice you might wonder why you hadn't thought of things before, but Tantum's style is calming and clearly encourages confidence in her subjects. *Baby Secrets* takes new parents through the early weeks of a new baby's life and shows parents how they can enjoy it and what to do when things seem to go wrong. From simple feeding techniques and even how to hold baby, it's an empowering survival guide (RRP \$29.95 at book stores).

For more information see [www.thebabycalmer.com.au](http://www.thebabycalmer.com.au).