

# Preterm Infant's Early Crying Associated With Child's Behavioral Problems and Parents' Stress

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## KEY WORDS

preterm infant, crying, behavior, parenting stress

## ABBREVIATIONS

CBCL—Child Behavior Check List

PSI—Parenting Stress Index

All authors are responsible for the reported research. All of the authors have participated in the concept; the design, analysis and interpretation of data; and the drafting or revising of the manuscript. In addition, all authors have approved the manuscript as submitted.

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**WHAT'S KNOWN ON THIS SUBJECT:** Preterm infants are at an increased risk of regulatory difficulties during infancy and of behavioral problems in childhood. In the full-term population, persistent crying problems that last beyond 3 months of age have been related to later behavioral problems.



**WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS:** Excessive crying by a preterm infant may reflect an increased risk for later behavioral problems and higher parenting stress even years later. Therefore, it is clinically relevant to assess systematically the crying behavior of preterm infants.

## abstract

**OBJECTIVE:** To study how the early crying behavior of preterm infants at term, 6 weeks, and 5 months of corrected age is related to later behavioral problems at age 3 and 4 years and parenting stress at 2 and 4 years.

**METHODS:** The study group included 202 live-born, low birth weight infants (birth weight  $\leq 1500$  g) born from January 2001 through December 2006 at the Turku University Hospital, Finland. A Baby Day Diary was used to assess the preterm infants' crying behavior at term, 6 weeks, and 5 months of corrected age. The children's behavior was assessed using the Child Behavior Check List at 3 and 4 years old, and parenting stress was assessed by using the Parenting Stress Index when the child was 2 and 4 years old.

**RESULTS:** The duration and frequency of crying bouts in infancy was associated with Child Behavior Check List scores at 4 years old and to both mothers' and fathers' stress when the child was 2 and 4 years old.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Early excessive crying, especially if lasting up to 5 months of corrected age, is a clinically relevant signal in preterm infants because it may reflect infants' regulatory problems and/or parenting stress. The crying behavior of preterm infants should be systematically inquired about at well-baby clinics. *Pediatrics* 2014;133:e339–e345