

THE FREE GUIDE

Two Nervous Systems

How to meet your baby's storm without trying to end it



You cannot change the water. You can be the steadier vessel beside the small boat, so the storm is never weathered alone.

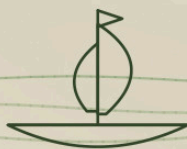




If you asked for this guide, you most likely know this scene: your baby is screaming, arching, inconsolable. It may be the middle of the night, or day, or a time you don't fully know when. What you do know is that all of you is saying do something, fix this, make it stop. Partly for you, yes. But mostly for them, to take their distress away.

So you bounce harder. You shush louder. You run the list of everything that could possibly be wrong. The louder they get, the higher your own body climbs the same ladder of panic they are on. Once it's over, or sometimes during, you may be tempted to search Google, ChatGPT, any tool you have - all to mine the depths of your baby's distress, for one reason and one reason only... to end it.

The point of this guide is not to eliminate all of those things, because they are the most natural parts of the stress of motherhood. Instead, I want to offer you an invitation: to see your mothering role differently. Here to nurture, not to fix; to weather with, not to stop the storm.



Your job is not to end the storm

When your baby seems to be falling apart, the natural instinct is to treat the crying as a problem to be solved. Stop the noise, restore the quiet. Perhaps you're even conscious of an attempt to prove your worth as a parent by how fast you can make the distress disappear.

What this guide is here to offer is accompaniment in that process. Because the storm is real, it is happening. And yet, trying to end it is the wrong target. A baby's nervous system does not yet know how to come back down on its own. That is not a flaw; it is simply not built yet. Their nervous system's capacity and resilience get built slowly, over thousands of small moments, by being met inside the storm by someone steadier. That someone is you.

"You are not making the crying stop. You are making sure they are not alone inside it."

Looked at this way, the real job in the meltdown is not to fix the baby, and not to manufacture calm. Ending the storm is not the mandate. Instead, you must be the vessel that does not capsize. You meet the storm in your seaworthy ship, and you stay alongside your infant's small, flailing boat until the water settles. You are not making the crying stop. You are making sure they are not alone inside it. And that's not wafty or irrelevant.

Stopping crying signifies many things, including adaptation. The cessation of the expression does not always mean that the system is calmed, however. It means that, for whatever reason, their system chose to stop. In terms of situations such as using "cry it out" methods for sleep training, the cessation of crying is actually learned helplessness. Crying doesn't mean that anybody is coming, and thus the system ceases to express its needs because it simply knows they are not going to be met.

In the same way, meeting the need - going to the baby - does not necessarily and automatically quiet the crying. Nor should it, not all the time. In fact, in many cases the crying of an infant is occurring because their system simply cannot handle all of the inputs and outputs it's trying to be with. In these situations, your presence cannot calm the crying immediately because it literally does not (and cannot) take away the overstimulation. Instead, your system becomes the safe space in which they can allow their overwhelm to take them over ... and *then* settle. They don't settle because you're there. They settle because you being there allows them to feel safe enough to feel what's there, and then settle safely into that. That is when the wave ebbs and their vessel relaxes.

So the question then becomes, what do you actually do? Is "being with" enough? Is there any magic to this process? And, most importantly, how can you ensure that your system meets them in the best way for their storm to move through them in its own timing?

Two nervous systems, one room



two systems, reading each other beneath thought, finding one rhythm

Your baby has a nervous system. You have a nervous system. And those two systems are not sealed off from each other. They read each other constantly, beneath thought, faster than words.

Your baby cannot understand your reassurances. But they can feel the rate of your heart against their chest, whether your arms are loose or rigid, whether your breath is high and fast or low and slow. They are not listening to what you say. They are reading the state you are in.

This is why the body matters here, and it is also why I will never call the body a private vault of stored stress. The body is the place where the meeting happens. It is the medium of contact between you and this small person, the channel the whole conversation runs through before either of you has a word for it.

Here is the part that changes the job. You cannot steer your baby's nervous system. You can only manage your own. But it is the steadiness of the bigger system, the ship, that levels the water for the smaller one. Your capacity is the lever on their experience.

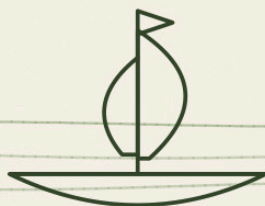
Capacity is not the same as calm

Here is where most advice goes wrong, simply because "stay calm" is not only unhelpful, but it also misses the point. Calm is not in you when your baby is in the storm. Anything that asks you to remain calm is asking an impossibility.

The result, when you attempt to stay calm, is performed serenity; your face seems relaxed, but internally you are anything but.

Babies are not fooled by a calm face on a panicking body. They read the truth underneath, every time.

So the goal is not calm. The goal is capacity.



Capacity is not the absence of feeling. It does not mean you are unbothered, or blank, or serene. It means your ship, while it pitches and takes on water, does not let the small boat's thrashing topple it. This is about allowing the one thing that supersedes your stress to be the loudest thing in the room: your desire to be of service to your child to outweigh the storm you feel you are in.

Capacity can be found with a long, slow exhale. It can be found as you breathe your own steadiness down into your body. Some nights, honestly, it is found by going a little numb to get through the hardest minutes: embodied as far as you can be, and as un-bodied as you need to be for the rest. All of it counts. The one move underneath all of them is the same. Do not let the small boat's movement steer the big one.

Your baby's distress is information about them. Your attention is valid, your curiosity is warranted, and your absolute attendance is the bare minimum. But it being there, and it continuing even when you are present, says nothing about you. Not unless you let their storm knock you over into your own dysregulation. Their storm is not a verdict on your mothering. Your quieting of their storm isn't either. Your job is to keep your whole little fleet pointed through the storm, and to weather it right there alongside your little one.





And yes, there are some nights - some zeniths of emotion - where this is impossible. Your frustration, emotion, and distress will topple you all. And that, too, is OK. Because those nights are the ones where your little one witnesses something else: your ability to rescue everyone from the depths.

Think about it. Have you ever just abandoned your fleet fully? It's unlikely. But every one of us will have had those moments where we're all sunk at the bottom of the ocean. Here again, it is you - the adult, with more capacity - who finds the life rafts you have on board your vessel, and fishes everyone out. All exhausted, all beaten up, all battered by the experience - but all undoubtedly still present, still part of the same fleet.

This guide does not exist to lecture you about the "success" of your sailing, nor to evaluate the duration of the mission as any kind of indicator of efficacy. It truly doesn't matter if some nights you all sink, and some nights you float serenely into the next day.

The central essence that this guide is trying to impart is simple: "being with" beats "stopping the distress" - every single time. And the "being with" is important not because it calms the storm, but because it gives the storm company as it moves through.

The reason we, at Mothercraft, believe this is important is because mothers have enough 'to-dos', and infants are going through a literal crash-course in being alive that is only ever going to bring them distress at points. We focus on the core attachment science to understand that meeting needs equals being attentive to what is being asked, not to what is not. And most of the time, with nonverbal babies, we don't actually know what is being asked of us. Even if our infant could speak, they probably wouldn't be able to name it. Most of their cries mean, "it's too much, I am uncomfortable" - and the secret message behind that, always, is "I feel unsafe."



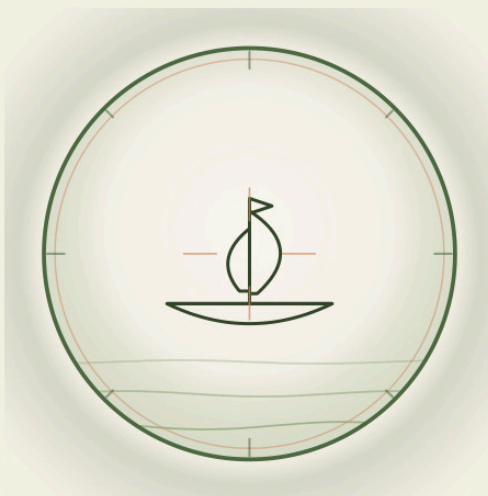
Your presence brings safety.



And that's why it's important that you don't focus on being calm. You being weirdly incoherent - calm face, anxious body - is not safe to your baby. You being there, in it with them, absolutely lending your spine and system to theirs for them to use - that's safety. That is how your infant knows you are the one that helps them allow things to move through. What is scary alone is easier when you are there.

So, what do you actually do?

You start with you. Not with the baby. That feels backward when it is the baby who is screaming, but it is the only door that actually opens. You cannot reach into their system and turn a dial. You can only offer them yours to borrow, so you make yours worth borrowing. When it is loud and you have gone blank and you do not know where to begin, this is where to put your breath and your hands. It takes about thirty seconds, and it is the most useful thing you will do.



The focus is your system, not the storm.

three small moves · about thirty seconds · start with you

Three small moves



One

Lengthen the exhale.

Not a big, performed breath. Just make the out-breath longer than the in-breath, three or four times over. A slow exhale is one of the only direct, physical levers you have on your own alarm. It is not a trick. It is wiring. Your baby, pressed against you, feels the change in you before you have finished the third one. You are not breathing to calm them down. You are breathing to become someone steadier for them to lean on.



Two

Find gravity, and the surface holding you up in it.

Most nights you are not standing for this. You are lying down, or sunk into a chair, with a small body on yours. So feel for whatever is underneath you, the mattress, the floor, the arm of the couch, and let your real weight settle onto it. Tell your own body the plain truth: *I am here, this is holding me, I am the steady one.* Gravity is pulling down on you the whole time, the way the sheer complexity of the world is pulling on your baby, harder than their new system can yet carry. And the surface beneath you meets that pull and holds you anyway, without you having to do a single thing to earn it. That is the relationship you are offering your baby: not the absence of the force, but a steadier surface to be held against while it moves through. You are held by the ground. They are held by you. Nobody in this is holding themselves up alone.



Three

Let your hands go heavy.

Bracing travels. Gripping travels. A rigid hold quietly tells a small body that something is wrong out here too. So let your arms get heavy and warm instead of tight, and slow everything you are already doing by half: slower bouncing, slower rocking, slower words. You are not trying to out-rock the storm. You are offering a slower water for them to find their way toward when they are ready.

That is the whole move. Steady your own vessel first, then stay close and lend your spine to theirs while the small boat finds its way back to the steadiness you are holding for both of you. Not making the storm stop. Keeping good company inside it.

Why your baby is the way they are



Everything in this guide is true for every baby. And every baby also arrives already themselves: their own thresholds, their own tempo, their own weather and their own way of meeting it. One needs winding down slowly along a long, predictable runway. One needs room and will fight a hold that is a fraction too tight. One floods in seconds and clears just as fast. One simmers for an hour. None of that is something you caused, and none of it is something you are meant to fix. It is the specific person you were handed.

This is where the rest of Mothercraft picks up. Once you can be the ship, the thing that makes the steadying easier is knowing the particular small boat you are actually steadying, rather than the generic baby in the manuals. That runs in three directions at once, and they matter equally: who your child is by their own design, what their body and yours are each holding and needing to move, and how the two of you meet and keep meeting. Yours as much as theirs, always. The more accurately you can see the real person in front of you, and the real one holding them, the less you fight the water and the more you can simply work with it.





TONIGHT

Tonight, just this

You do not have to end the storm. You do not have to be a ship that stays afloat every time. You have to be the steadier vessel, just a fraction steadier than the infant who is leaning on you. When the sleep hours are short, your capacity feels minimal, and the overwhelm feels just as present for you as for your infant, remember this: your capacity is still greater than theirs. And that is all they need.

Lengthen the exhale. Find gravity, and the surface holding you up in it. Let your hands go heavy. Stay. And trust that being with them is not the lesser thing you do while you wait to fix the real thing. It is the real thing.

On the nights it all goes under, when your own system is gone and the whole fleet sinks to the bottom together, that counts too. It might even count most. Because the next thing you do, exhausted and battered and still there, is find the life rafts and fish everyone out. That is what your child is actually learning, underneath all of it: that they are not alone in the water, that the storm is survivable, and that you come back. You always come back.

So let yourself off the hook of perfect. Aim for present, and returnable, instead.





WHERE TO GO NEXT

Start wherever you are tired

Want to understand the specific nervous system you are holding, and the one you are raising? That is what the rest of Mothercraft is for. Same steadiness, aimed at the real person in front of you.



Made with care, mostly around midnight.

— Victoria

At Mothercraft, we utilize AI to ensure quantity and ease of our output whilst we focus on the more important things: raising our children. What this looks like in practice, for the most part, is that AI is given the role of structuring and running first drafts of our ideas. From there, every word is reviewed - and often highly edited and expanded upon - by a real human with the lived experience of mothering. This is the best compromise we've found for ensuring genuine output, whilst empowering us to be where we personally most want to: with our babies.

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