



# **An Introduction to** **Aware Parenting**



**by**

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# Hello from me!

Hello, and a big warm welcome to you!

**This Introductory book focusses on certain aspects of Aware Parenting, namely understanding and responding to the feelings of babies and children. Aware Parenting includes so many more aspects of a baby and child's life.**

Aware Parenting is probably more likely to resonate with you if you've done any personal development, therapy, or counselling, because it's all about emotional development.

**There are seven parts to this book. I recommend reading all of the parts, whether you are pregnant, or have a baby, or a child, or if you work with parents or babies or children.**

However, the second half of Part Four goes into depth about listening to a baby's feelings. If you have a child rather than a baby, you might want to skim through that second half and go to Part Five, which is all about listening to toddler's and children's feelings.

**There are also audio and video versions of this book [HERE](#).**

I have loved making this for you, and I really hope that you enjoy reading it!

Much love,



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# Disclaimer

This book, and the audios and videos connected with it, offers suggestions for ways of being with your baby or child.

Repeatedly in the book, the author suggests that **you listen to your own intuition and your own observations of your baby or your child.**

**If you ever feel concerned about your baby or child's crying, or any behaviour, please listen to this, and have it checked out by a competent medical professional.**

More crying, or more high-pitched crying, can be an indication of physical pain. Please always listen to your own intuition if your baby or child cries more or the crying is high pitched.

These suggestions may not be suitable for children suffering from certain physical or emotional problems.

This book is not intended to replace psychotherapy or help from medical professionals.

If there is severe trauma in the family, these suggestions may be insufficient to help children heal.

The author shall have no liability nor responsibility to any person with respect to any damage allegedly caused directly or indirectly by the information contained in this book or in the matching audios or videos.

## **Part One ~ The introduction to the Introduction!**

Hello and a big warm welcome to you!

**I wonder what drew you to Aware  
Parenting?**

And I wonder how much you know about it  
already!

I am going to assume that you are completely new to it, so my apologies if you hear things  
you already know.

I hope you will find it useful, anyway!



**Aware Parenting is so different in so many ways to mainstream beliefs about  
human beings, babies, children and parents, that I think it can be helpful to  
hear these things lots of times!**

I also want to add that Aware Parenting is just one way; one set of beliefs.

What I really value is for parents to really listen to themselves.

**For some people, Aware Parenting really resonates.**

For others, it doesn't.





*For me, that is the most important thing - listening to what each of us resonates with, and valuing that.*

**I also really value acceptance and compassion for ALL parents.**

I trust that we all choose a parenting style that fits the way we think about the world, combined with our own life experiences, including as babies and children.

*For me, this isn't about wrong or right.*

**It's about listening to what resonates for you.**

And if Aware Parenting DOES resonate with you, then you could have a go of it, and let your baby or child tell you whether it does what it says it does.

What I love about Aware Parenting is that we really can observe our baby or child, and actually see the things that are talked about here.

**So I always say, please don't do this just because you've read Aletha Solter's books or articles, or my articles ~ instead, do it because it resonates with your heart, and when you try it out, your child really shows you how helpful it is for them (and for you!).**



## **About Aletha Solter, Ph.D, who created Aware Parenting**

Aletha Solter is a Swiss/American developmental psychologist, who studied with **Jean Piaget** in the 1960's, and earned a Ph.D. in 1975.

When her son was born in 1977, she searched for books about **attachment-style parenting and non-punitive discipline** which also included the impact of stress and trauma on babies and children, and didn't find any.

She developed Aware Parenting, combining her experience as a developmental psychologist with her own experiences as a Mother.

**Her first book, [The Aware Baby](#), was first published in 1984 and revised in 2001.**

**If you have a baby or a toddler, this is the book I would recommend reading.**

She later wrote [Helping Young Children Flourish](#), which is about children from 2-8 years.

Her other books are [Tears and Tantrums](#), [Raising Drug Free Kids](#), and [Attachment Play](#).

**At the end of this course**, I'll recommend different books of hers depending on what your situation is.

Her two children are now adults, and she has two grandchildren.

She set up **The Aware Parenting Institute**, and there are now certified instructors in 17 countries.

Her website is: [www.awareparenting.com](http://www.awareparenting.com)





## About me

I also have a background in **developmental psychology**.

**I did a Ph.D. on postnatal depression and the mother-infant relationship at Cambridge University.**

During that time, I visited a lot of mothers and babies.

I talked to the mothers, and videoed them with their babies, and then I spent many hours going through the videos, millisecond by millisecond, observing their interactions.

(It was there that my love of observation to understand babies, developed - which is so important in Aware Parenting).

After that, I worked as a **Research Fellow, looking at newborn babies, where I again spent many hours observing babies, and also spent several years training as a psychotherapist.**

I worked as a **psychotherapist**, and what I learnt from the clients who came to me matched what I had learnt from developmental psychology - that **so many people were still looking for their feelings to be acknowledged by their parents, and to receive the acceptance that they hadn't experienced as children.**

**And as part of my training, I was in weekly psychotherapy for most of my twenties - and what I realised was how much my early experiences were affecting me and my life** ~I was born 10 weeks early and was in an incubator for the first five weeks of my life.

I moved to Australia when I was thirty, and focussed on **birthing and parenting** - both professionally and in my own life.

I trained in **HypnoBirthing** and then got pregnant. (I later worked as a **Calm Birth** instructor and used that in my second birthing).

**Whilst I was pregnant, I came across Aware Parenting on the Internet.**

**I had a big ‘aha’ moment!**

*Here was a form of parenting, that fitted with ALL the research I had studied and done myself, ALL the therapy training I had done, all about attachment and mirroring, ALL the work I did with clients, and ALL of my own inner journey.*

**AND it had this whole extra element, that I had only even vaguely considered before - that right from birth, babies can heal from daily stresses, as well as any trauma, through expressing their feelings with loving support.**

**Up until then, I’d always thought that we needed to wait until adulthood to heal from our birth and childhood experiences, but here was Dr. Solter showing that we ALL have a natural healing mechanism, RIGHT FROM BIRTH!**

I’ll tell you a bit more about my journey of Aware Parenting as a mother, a little later.

**For now, I’ll say that, when I observed how different my daughter was, when I started listening to her feelings when she was three months old, it was very clear to me that Aware Parenting was making a huge difference to her life.**

**For the first three months, I practiced what I call Classical Attachment Parenting, and it was though that, that I learnt that even if babies have a calm experience in utero, a calm birth, and their needs met, they still have feelings ~ and I’ll tell you more about that later.**

**I became passionate about Aware Parenting from then on.**

I set up a **local group** for parents.

I became an **Aware Parenting Instructor when my daughter was three.**

I was already writing articles for an Australian magazine, which I did for several years.

**I started seeing clients, and running introductory workshops.**

**My son was born when my daughter was four and a half, and they had a beautiful relationship - which I believe was due to Aware Parenting.**

I set up a **free online group** for parents.

I started **running workshops in Sydney, and then Melbourne.**

And I became a **Level Two Instructor** - which means that people can come to a six hour workshop with me which counts towards their certification as an Aware Parenting Instructor.

In 2014, I started **running online courses** on Aware Parenting, and self-compassion and getting free from guilt for Mothers and Women.

As of July 2016, my daughter is 14 and my son is 10, and what I love about Aware Parenting is that **I am still learning about it - and finding that it is just as relevant for us as parents, and our own inner journey of development, as it is for babies and children.**

**I've met hundreds of people through Aware Parenting, and have made a worldwide community of friends, have such a deep sense of purpose and passion through it.**

So, you will probably hear **my passion** shine through these words.

**And, I still want to remind you to listen to yourself and see what resonates for you.**





## **Babies have real feelings**

**As you read this, I invite you to stay compassionately connected with yourself and whatever feelings come up in you.**

**If you have a baby or a child or children and have done different things to what I will talk about, you may find yourself feeling uncomfortable feelings ~ such as anger, fear, worry, sadness, or guilt.**

**I invite you to listen to your feelings with loving compassion and to refrain from self-judgment (which is what leads to guilt).**

*The information might not resonate with you, and you might choose to stop reading.*

**Or you may want to learn more.**

**I want to let you know that if you want to start listening to the feelings of your baby or child, IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO START!!**

I said in the introduction that I'd only really had **an inkling about babies and their feelings** before I came across Aware Parenting, and I want to say a bit more about that.

When I was doing my therapy training, I learnt all about how important it is for us to **mirror the feelings of babies and children, so that they stay connected with the full range of their feelings.**

I remember when I was in my late twenties and I was spending the day with one of my closest friends, who had recently had a baby.

**Her baby began to cry, and she tried to do everything she could to stop her.**

She rocked her, she jiggled her, she shhh-ed her, and still her baby cried.

And for a few moments, **I wondered, “perhaps she has some feelings that she wants to express, and maybe she just needs us to hear her, and be with her, and mirror and acknowledge her feelings.”**

**But that didn’t really sink in, until I read *The Aware Baby*, which was the first of Aletha’s books that I read.**

**One of the basic elements of Aware Parenting is that babies cry for two reasons.**

**They cry to indicate their immediate needs.**

**They need closeness, they need nourishment, they feel uncomfortable (they have a wet nappy, or they are too cold or too hot), and they need us to do something about it.**

**And because Aware Parenting is a style of attachment parenting, it is really important that we do everything we can to meet those immediate needs, so that our baby learns that her needs are valuable, so we help her return to comfortableness, and so that she learns that others are dependable.**

**These all form the basis of secure attachment.**

But what is different in Aware Parenting to both (what I call) Classical Attachment Parenting and mainstream parenting, is that it sees that **babies don’t only cry to express immediate needs.**

**They also cry, like children and adults, because they have real feelings that they need to express, and to have heard.**

**In Aware Parenting, expressing these feelings, and being heard by a loving, attentive and available listener, whilst being held, actually helps the baby also experience that her feelings are valuable, that she is safe to feel her feelings, and that those feelings can be released from her body.**

**In Aware Parenting, this is also a part of secure attachment.**

**She learns that not only are her needs valuable, and honoured, but also that her feelings are valuable and honoured.**

Not only that, but **feelings are physiological things.**

**Just as when a baby poos, she gets rid of things that her body doesn't need, so when a baby cries in loving attentive arms, when all her immediate needs are met,**

**she releases stress hormones from her body,**

**and it helps her return to a natural state of being connected with herself and at peace in her body.**

**Let's stop and think about this for a minute.**

I always think that reflecting on our own experiences can help us feel in to whether something feels true for us.



## Have you had your feelings heard?

Have you ever had feelings bubbling in you, and you tried to do everything you could to distract yourself - Facebook, Instagram, chocolate, coffee, going for a run, tidying the house, and yet still, your body felt agitated and perhaps you found you took hours to go to sleep and then woke up in the night?

And have you ever had a big cry, perhaps with someone listening to you, and you cried and cried, and then afterwards you felt much more relaxed?

You could see all the colours more clearly?

You could feel that you weren't clenching your muscles (as much)?

You felt more connected with other people?

You felt relieved?

You slept more restfully that night?

*And does it seem plausible to you that babies might not be so different from us adults?*

**That their feelings are real feelings; true feelings?**

And even more than that, because they haven't developed cognitively like us - they have very little idea of time, and much less understanding of what is going on, **might their feelings be even more important?**

Does it seem plausible to you that babies might feel a whole range of feelings?

**Curiosity, interest and wonder?**

**Joy and happiness and delight?**

**Fear and confusion and overwhelm?**

**Sadness and loss and grief?**

*And does it seem plausible to you that they might want those feelings heard?*

**I'd like to invite you to imagine you are with a friend.**

You've had an upsetting day.

Perhaps you had an argument with your partner or a family member; perhaps you felt frustrated trying to learn a new thing on your computer; perhaps you went to a huge shopping centre and felt overwhelmed by the crowds; perhaps you phoned your Mum and she judged your parenting and didn't listen to you.

*What would you want from your friend?*

How would you feel if you started telling her about your day, and **she kept on interrupting you, offering you food, asking you if you're sure you're not hungry, offering you drinks, offering you your phone, patted you, shook you, and kept interrupting you and what you were trying to say?**

If you have a friend or partner who is willing to have a go at this exercise, you could do it - **take turns being the one trying to speak, and the one who is trying to stop the other one from expressing her feelings.**

**How do you imagine you would feel?**



I give this exercise in Aware Parenting talks to pregnant women and Mothers of babies.

And the kind of things they say are:

"I felt really frustrated."

"I kept on wanting to try to be heard."

"I gave up and just stopped trying."

"I just became flat and lifeless."

"I ate the food just to please them."

### *How about you?*

Then, in the exercise, I ask them this time to tell the story of their day, but this time the listener gives their full attention and presence, offering eye contact, nodding, showing that they are interested and that they are there with the speaker.

### **And then I ask them how they feel.**

Often it's things like:

"I felt relieved."

"I could go in to the feelings more and then come out the other side."

"I felt met and understood."

"I found myself wanting to share more."

"I felt safe and cared for."

**How do you imagine you would feel, or, if you did the exercise, how did you feel?**

**Might it be plausible to you that babies have real feelings?**

**And that how we respond to those feelings makes a difference to them?**

**Might it be plausible that they are a bit like us, and if we try to feed them, or distract them, or move them, that they might feel frustrated, or keep trying to be heard, or give up and stop trying, or do that thing just to please us?**

And if so, might that mean looking at some of the basic things about babies - like feeding and sleeping - in very different ways?

And that is why Aware Parenting DOES see many of baby's behaviours in different ways to other parenting paradigms.

(And children's behaviour too - we will come to that! And parents' behaviours too, of course!)

**And I'd like to invite you to check in with yourself right now to see how you are feeling.**



**How are you feeling when you read this?**

You might be feeling some uncomfortable feelings.

Perhaps this resonates with you, and you have done lots of feeding/ jiggling / distracting your baby when she cries.

Perhaps you are judging yourself or feeling guilty.

And I want to let you know that Aware Parenting is not only about how we are with our baby and child.

**It is also about our relationship with ourselves.**

Just as Aware Parenting is **non-punitive (ie. no punishments and rewards)**; we **can also learn to stop punishing ourselves.**

Judging ourselves, feeling guilty, or telling ourselves that we've done something wrong - these are all ways of punishing ourselves.

They are all things that we internalised when we were children.

**I wonder how it might be if, for even a few moments, you stopped punishing yourself, and simply listened to how you feel.**

Even for just five seconds.

And to acknowledge that feeling; "I feel upset/scared/worried/sad/shocked/curious/disappointed/overwhelmed."

**Does that feel different from punishing yourself?**



## **Sweet spots**

**Perhaps you are feeling uncomfortable at the idea of listening to a baby's feelings.**

Perhaps you feel **scared, or angry.**

*And I want to remind you that I have no desire to persuade you to believe anything.*

I have made this, only to give you information about Aware Parenting, **so that you can see whether it resonates for you.**

If it resonates for you, then I would love to share more with you.

And I want to also let you know that **our own feelings from the past can come up when we begin to talk about babies crying.**

**Whatever was done to us as babies and children when we cried will often bubble up when we think about a baby crying in the arms of a loving parent.**

**If we were left alone to cry, we may feel fear, anxiety, panic, or rage.**

We might have the thoughts, "How could you let a baby cry."

**But sometimes those feelings can be the feelings that we had when we were left alone to cry.**

**So, even though Aware Parenting is about holding a baby, making sure all of her needs are met, and if she is still crying, then giving her our full, deep, engaged, loving presence, and listening to her feelings;**

**The fact that there is crying in common between the two situations, means there is enough similarity to our own feelings of being left alone to cry, for us to go into our own feelings from our past.**

I call this the 'sweet spot' - it's when **an experience in the present reminds us of something in the past, where our feelings weren't expressed and heard, so the feelings come up to be heard now.**

When **our sweet spots get stroked**, we will feel much bigger feelings than the **present situation warrants**.

That is because **our natural healing mechanism is bringing us those feelings from our past**, so that they can be felt and heard and released this time.

It's the same for us as it is for children as it is for babies - **we keep on trying to feel, express, and have our feelings heard**, so that those feelings can be released from our bodies.



## **Learning not to fear feelings**

Or perhaps we were jiggled or rocked when we cried, or fed, or distracted, or given a dummy, or left alone and we started to suck our thumbs or clutch on to a soft toy or blanket.

And so we never had the experience from within, of crying when we were feeling confused or overwhelmed or sad, and being held in the loving arms of our parents, who were able to fully be with our feelings, without feeling scared or worried or anxious themselves, and thus feeling comfortable with uncomfortable feelings.

We didn't have the experience of learning that when someone really was with us, mirroring our feelings, we could go into those big feelings, and know that they came to an end.

We didn't get to fully be in those big feelings, and naturally come out the other side, feeling relieved and refreshed and at home in ourselves.



**We didn't get to experience our parents being able to be with all of our feelings, and transmitting that to us, so that we could be with all of our own feelings.**

**The majority of us had parents who were uncomfortable with certain feelings, or who believed that certain feelings meant unmet needs, or believed that feelings meant 'manipulation' or 'getting wound up' or 'being naughty', and so we learnt from them to fear feelings, to repress feelings, to dissociate from feelings.**

**Very few of us learnt that ALL feelings are our friends.**



## **Feelings are our friends**

How would it be to really know that?

**To not be scared of sadness, or fear, or overwhelm, or joy or delight or love or curiosity?**

How would it be to have ALL feelings as our friends?

**To feel comfortable with even the most uncomfortable feelings.**

To know when we need sleep, because we feel tired?

To honour when we feel hungry, and when we feel full?

To understand when we are overwhelmed?

To listen to when we feel upset?

**AND to honour our needs too** - our needs for connection, for closeness, to be heard, for rest, for nourishment, for play, for learning, for new experiences?

**And how would we learn that?**

**As adults, we can go on a long journey to reclaim our needs as valuable and our feelings as our friends.**

*yet for our babies and children, they learn from how we respond to them.*

**If we hold them when they need closeness, they stay connected with their need for closeness, and they learn to value that need.**

**If we feed them when they are hungry, stop when they are full, and generally don't feed them when they are upset, they learn to stay connected with their own needs for nourishment, and they learn when they are full, and the difference between hunger and upset feelings.**

**If we help them when they feel physically uncomfortable, and do something to remedy that, then they learn to trust their own physical needs, and to value them, and to do something about them.**

**If we listen to their overwhelm, they get to release it from their bodies, so that they can be open to new experiences again, and know in themselves when a situation feels too much for them.**

**If we listen to their fear and shock, they release those feelings from their bodies, so that they can stay trusting of the world, and know that fear doesn't need to be feared.**

**If we listen to their sadness and loss, they can let those feelings leave their bodies, they can know that sadness and loss are simply feelings, they learn to**

honour those feelings, and they are able to **fully experience life, without needing to protect themselves from loss.**

They learn that people and things come and go, and **because they can feel the feelings of the going, they can also fully feel the feelings of coming and having those connections.**

**So, the more we listen to their needs, and act on those needs, the more they stay connected with those needs, and value them, and act to meet their needs.**

**And the more we listen to their feelings, and mirror those feelings, the more they stay connected with those feelings, and value them, and respond empathically to their own feelings and the feelings of others.**



## **How are you feeling?**

I wonder how you feel, reading this?

**Can you imagine for yourself how it would feel if you really valued all your needs** - for closeness, for nourishment, for rest, for sleep, for protection from overwhelm, for empathy, to be heard, and so on?

If you didn't judge them or ignore them, but simply listened to them and acted on them?

**Can you imagine how it would be if you felt completely comfortable with every feeling?**

If you didn't ever need to push away a feeling with Facebook or Instagram or chocolate or coffee or shopping or tidying?

**If you could simply be with your feelings, without fear, without judgment, without comparison, without shame, because you knew that if you simply**

**listened to them with loving compassion, you would fully feel them and then they would move through you?**

**Can you imagine what would be needed to give a baby that kind of experience of life?**



## **Summary**

**Aware Parenting is based on three tenets: attachment, non-punitive discipline, and the understanding of how stress and trauma affect babies and children, and how it can be released and healed.**

One of the main **differences** between Aware Parenting and both Classical Attachment Parenting and mainstream parenting is the way it **views crying**.

**In Classical Attachment Parenting, all crying is seen as indicating an unmet need.**

**In mainstream parenting, there are different perspectives about why crying happens** - but in most cases, the important thing is seen to be to stop the crying, either through distraction or leaving a baby alone.

**In Aware Parenting, babies are seen to have real feelings that need to be heard, just as children and adults have feelings that need to be heard.**

**When a baby's needs are met, she learns to value her needs.**

**When a baby's feelings are heard, she learns that feelings are her friends, and she can heal from daily stresses as well as any trauma experienced.**



## Listening to yourself

I invite you to let what you have read percolate around.

Perhaps you would like to listen in to yourself.

**Did any of the information resonate with you intellectually or in your body?**

**Did you feel any uncomfortable feelings when you read it?**

**Are you willing to listen to yourself with compassion?**

**Would you like to find out more?**

**Aware Parenting is all about listening to our babies and children, AND listening to ourselves!**

If you want to find out more, I'd love to see you in Part Two!



## About Part Two

Next, I'll be talking about the causes of babies' feelings, and how feelings explain things like: babies taking a **long time to go to sleep, frequent night waking, frequent feeding, agitation, avoiding eye contact, thumb-sucking, and dummy sucking.**







## Part Two ~ Do babies and children have lots of feelings, and if so, why?

### How was Part One for you?

I wonder how it was for you, reading Part One?

Have you had any thoughts, questions, or feelings bubble up?

I want to remind you, that if you feel uncomfortable things, there are a number of things that might be going on:

~ **If you are feeling guilty or worried,**

when you remember what you have done, and what you are hearing now, I invite you to listen to yourself with compassion.

**Guilt** means that you are telling yourself that you should have done something differently.

**Are you willing to simply listen to your feelings, with deep compassion?**

~ Perhaps you might feel **sad** that you didn't have this information before.

~ Perhaps you might feel **worried** about your baby or child.

I invite you to **refrain from punishing yourself**, and listen to yourself with empathy.

~ If you are feeling **angry**, it may be that you are connecting with memories of how you were treated as a baby or child.

Again, I invite you to listen to yourself with **empathy**.

Perhaps your uncomfortable feelings **weren't heard**.

Perhaps you were **left alone to cry**.

Our uncomfortable feelings can come up to be heard and healed even after many years.

Are you willing to listen to those feelings, or ask someone else to listen to them for you?

**You may feel other uncomfortable feelings.**

**Perhaps Aware Parenting just isn't for you.**

Each parent resonates with what fits with our values and beliefs and experiences.

**If it doesn't fit for you, or resonate with you, then feel free to stop reading!**

There are no 'shoulds' here!

**I really value each parent listening to what feels true for them, and following that!**



## **But can babies really have lots of feelings?**

There is often a view that babies don't have anything much to worry about.

In fact, it wasn't that long ago that people believed that babies didn't have feelings, and in fact didn't even feel pain!

**But we've learnt so much about babies, since the 1950's.**

We've learnt about **attachment**, and that **a baby's experience in the womb affects her** afterwards, and that **her birth has a profound effect**, and that **how she is treated after birth** has a powerful impact too.

There is a lot of research that has been conducted, particularly since the 1970's, to indicate that babies are deeply affected by:

~ their experience in **utero**;

~ their experience during **birth**;

~ their experience during the **early weeks of life**.

And that they are affected by:

~ **frightening events**;

~ their **parents' stresses and feelings**;

~ **overwhelming** events;

~ big **changes**.

If we really put ourselves in **a baby's shoes**, and imagine how it is in the womb, how we are affected by our Mother's emotional currents, and the powerful physical experience of being born, and how deeply and incredibly different it is being out of the womb compared to inside the womb (the light, the noises, the air, the different sensations of digestion and respiration), we can understand that:

**It is a massive change for a baby.**

And what if we imagine **being without most of the concepts and ideas and understandings of the world**; which is how things are for a baby.

**They experience everything so fully** - without concepts, and without many filters.

They are exquisitely **sensitive**.

They feel fully and intensely.



## **But surely not babies who are carried everywhere?**

After **Bowlby** created attachment theory in the middle of the twentieth century, and then attachment parenting gained momentum in the sixties and seventies, **many parents began to carry their babies and keep them close.**

**Aware Parenting is a style of attachment parenting**, so it deeply values a baby and child's need for closeness and connection and prompt responsiveness.

**Closeness is one of a baby's primary needs.**

**And if a baby doesn't get much closeness, they are likely to cry more.** (Research studies have shown just that!)

**And yet, from an Aware Parenting perspective, even if a baby's needs for closeness and responsiveness are met, she will still have some uncomfortable feelings; probably every day.**

**Even if her birth was calm and relaxed**, being born is a powerful physiological experience.

If you imagine the huge forces that are being pushed against her body, you can imagine that she might have felt some feelings during the process.

**She was already a feeling being, whilst she was being born.**

*If you put yourself in her shoes, what do you imagine she might have felt?*

And if her birth wasn't calm, or there were challenges, or unforeseen events, you can imagine that she might have felt a lot of **feelings** then.

If there was a lot of **fear** around the birth and during the birth, she probably picked up on it and felt fear too.

And if your **child or children's birth was challenging or traumatic, and you are feeling worried or guilty now, I am sending you lots of loving compassion.**

*And I want to let you know that you can help your child heal from her birth experiences, whether she is a baby, or if she is now a child.*

Even if she was **held a lot after the birth and in the early weeks**, imagine all the things that **she didn't understand**.

Even a phone ringing, the noise of a car, being in a car, a vacuum cleaner, a washing machine, all these are noises that she hears and has no idea what they are.

She sees shapes and colours and light and as yet has **no concepts** for them.

She is **completely helpless and is completely dependent on others** to read her needs and respond to them.

And she is **easily overwhelmed** for these reasons - so, something that seems simple and easy for us, such as sitting in the living room with a few family members, might feel very different to her.

**Going in the car, going to shops, being in noisy places - babies have feelings in response to these.**

She might feel **curious**, but she might also feel **overwhelmed**.

She might feel **interested**, but she might also feel **scared**.

She might feel **excited**, but she might also feel **sad** at the loss of the warm, quiet, contained, muted light, of the womb.

When we really really step into the shoes of a baby, it can be easy to see the **huge range of feelings that she might naturally feel over the course of a day.**

So, even if things are all beautiful, **most babies will still have feelings.**

For example, **during each developmental leap, babies and children often feel frustrated.**

That's not something we can prevent.

The frustration is part of what drives them to master that new skill.

**And the more challenging any of those things are, the more feelings a baby will feel.**

And again, the research indicates that.

**Babies who have traumatic births cry more.**

And of course, with an Aware Parenting lens, you can probably see that this isn't a 'bad' thing ~ this is their **natural healing mechanism.**

The baby is **trying to express HOW SHE FELT during the birth.**

**She is trying to heal.**



**She is trying to be heard.**

**She is trying to release those feelings from her body.**

There is so much therapy around to help adults heal from their birth experiences.

But how amazing to not need to wait until then!

From an Aware Parenting perspective, **babies, children and adults naturally aim to heal from stressful and traumatic events, through crying with loving support.**

**(Also through yawning, shaking, laughing, playing and talking; we will talk about some of these later).**



## **What about children? What do they have feelings about?**

**Children will generally be less overwhelmed than babies.**

They have **concepts** about the world and **understand** much more, which makes things **less overwhelming**.

But children can still feel **overwhelmed**, for example at a big shopping centre, a new school, or even a birthday party. (I imagine you've seen a child have a huge tantrum at the end of their party, even though they had a wonderful time!)

They also have **words** and the capacity to be **understood** much more than we understand babies.

And yet, they are **highly sensitive to our responses to them**.

So even if we are **distracted** or have things going on for us, they are affected by our lack of presence. It's **painful** for them.

They are also affected by times that **we are feeling painful feelings**, or by **arguments** or **tensions** in the family, or times that we respond in **harsh** ways.

They are still **learning about the world and can be frightened when they learn new things**, such as about death.

They often have **big uncomfortable feelings when a new sibling is born**.

They can feel upset when **another child takes their toy, or says something hurtful, or doesn't want to be their friend any more**.

They can feel painful feelings when they **aren't understood, or their needs aren't met (such as for connection, choice and autonomy)**.

It can be easy to **overlook** these things, but they are **big things** to children.

And they feel feelings, intensely.



**But does it really matter if we don't listen to their feelings?**

**Each parent wants their child to have a happy, fulfilled, contented life.**

We want our children to be happy, don't we?

What do you most want for your child/ren?

And because of this, **of course we don't want them to feel sadness, or loss, or fear, or overwhelm, or confusion, or terror, or rage, or shock.**

**We want them to feel all the enjoyable feelings** - happiness, contentment, curiosity, joy, wonder, delight, and excitement.

And so, of course, **it is really natural that we would always try to stop our baby or child having uncomfortable feelings.**

**And we want to be loving parents.**

**We want to respond lovingly to our babies and children.**

So if our baby is upset, we will tend to think that there is something that we are not doing.

Some **need that we have not met.** Something we've missed out.

So it can feel **really scary if our baby cries.**

We want her to feel happy.

**We want to make sure we are meeting all of her needs.**

We want to do the utmost for her so she grows up with a healthy sense of self.

We often want to **protect her from the kind of painful experiences we felt as babies.**

And that is why **we will generally do things to stop any uncomfortable feelings.**

We will feed her.

We will jiggle her, or rock her, or pat her, or wear her in a sling, or put her in a stroller or push chair.

We will distract to her, sing to her, show her things, “shhhh” her, play white noise to her.

We will give her a dummy.

Or we will leave her alone to cry, until she stops.

**And depending on our baby, and depending on how many feelings she has, that might ‘work’ in stopping those feelings.**

If she had a fairly calm time in utero, a fairly calm birth, and a fairly connected and peaceful time in her early weeks, **it may be easy to make sure she never cries.**

That might mean feeding her more frequently during the evening.

It might mean rocking her, or patting her, or bouncing on the fit ball, especially in the evening.

It might mean singing and “shhh”ing.

**But for other babies, if she is more highly sensitive, or the pregnancy was stressful, or her birth was traumatic, or she was separated after birth, or she had surgical procedures, or there was stress in the family afterwards, that crying might just come tumbling out, even with doing all of those things.**

From an Aware Parenting perspective, that is because she is desperately trying to heal from those experiences.

**The feelings are so big and so present for her, that they can’t be held in.**

And this can be so painful for parents.



## **I wonder if you experienced these?**

Did your baby have a **relatively easy** start, and was it easy to keep her from crying?

Or did she have a **more challenging start**, and was it hard to keep her from crying?

**And if she did cry, did you feel scared?**

**Did you think you were missing out on meeting one of her core needs?**

**Did you think that she was in lots of pain?**

**Did you feel sad?**

**Did you feel frustrated?**

**Did you feel helpless?**

*Of course, it is really important to be sure a baby is not in pain when she is crying, and that all her needs are met.*

**A pain cry is often more high pitched.**

If we are breastfeeding mothers, being on a breast-feeding diet can be one important step if we are concerned that our baby is in physical pain.

**And of course, if you are ever are concerned that your baby is in pain, make sure you visit a medical professional.**

**Or perhaps your baby never cried, and you always found that you could stop her being upset.**

And yet, how would it be to go back and remember all that we've talked about.

The exquisite **sensitivity** of babies.

The big and full range of feelings that they naturally feel.

*That they cry for two reasons ~ immediate needs AND a need to release stress.*

Understanding that **all babies have some uncomfortable feelings**, and that **some babies have A LOT** and **other babies far fewer**, can really help parents.



## **But does it really matter part 2?**

Of course we all want our babies and children to be happy

**And of course, if we can stop an uncomfortable feeling, then it makes sense to stop it, by feeding, jiggling, rocking, distracting, singing, and so on.**

But the thing is, **although those feelings stop; they don't go away.**

**A feeling is a feeling.**

**If the feeling was there to express a need it's different - for example the feeling of hunger indicates a need for nourishment; when that need is met, the feeling goes away completely. The baby no longer feels hungry. The feeling was there to indicate the need, and when the need is met, the feeling goes.**

**A similar example is loneliness. If a baby is crying because she is lonely, and we pick her up and hold her close, then her stopping crying is because she no longer feels lonely. The need for closeness has been met.**

**But feelings that weren't there to express a need, do not go away if we do feed them for comfort, or distract them, or move them.**

Those other feelings don't go away when we do things like that;

because those feelings weren't there to indicate an unmet need,

those feelings were there to be expressed.

That thing isn't done to meet the need, it's done to stop the feelings.

There isn't the same match.

For example, perhaps a six week old baby is taken out to a noisy cafe for a couple of hours. Perhaps she felt overwhelmed and confused.

Perhaps when they return home, she starts to cry.

**Perhaps she is trying to express those feelings of overwhelm and confusion.**

Perhaps she is using her natural healing mechanism so that those feelings can leave her body.

**If we feed her or jiggle her or sing to her, she may stop crying.**

**But those feelings of overwhelm and confusion are still there.**

**You may have noticed something similar yourself.**

Perhaps you are feeling lonely, or sad.

And you try to distract yourself.

You look on Instagram, eat chocolate, or make an elaborate dinner.

**And then, when you are lying in bed, those feelings come back again.**

**Feelings are real things.**

*Feelings that aren't indicating immediate needs, need to be expressed, otherwise they stay in the body, ready to be expressed.*

**(And actually, that's a beautiful thing, because it means it's never too late to listen to feelings!)**



## **Feelings are physiological**

Because feelings are real, physiological, felt, things, then **whenever a feeling bubbles up in our baby, we need to do something if we are going to prevent that feeling coming out.**

Those doing things are those things like **feeding, moving, distracting, getting them to suck on something, or leaving them alone until they stop.**

At first, whenever a feeling bubbles up in our baby, and we aren't going to listen to those feelings, we need to do something to stop those feelings coming out.

**How does that work?**

~ **Sucking in itself creates a kind of dissociation** ~ a distancing from feelings.

That's why feeding, thumb sucking, dummies, and sucking on a blanket, all stop feelings bubbling out.



Perhaps you'd like to have a go next time you feel upset - suck on your thumb and see how you feel!!

Breast-feeding also has an added extra because it has a whole lot of beautiful hormones that create calmness after feeding, so that the milk can be digested.

~ **Movement also creates dissociation.**

You've probably felt it if you've swung on a swing, or been in the back of a car on a long journey.

And that's why movement such as rocking, jiggling, wearing in a sling, pushing in a stroller, and patting, can stop babies from crying.

**It wasn't that there was a need for movement that was being met; it was that movement was creating dissociation, so that the baby is no longer feeling that feeling.**

But the feeling is still there, in her body.

It's just that her consciousness has moved away from that feeling.

For a while.

~ **Distraction** is similar - it takes their attention away from what they are feeling.

~ **What about leaving babies alone?**

Well, that creates a kind of **dissociation** too.

They cry and cry and cry, and then core survival instincts come in - that we can imagine would be helpful if a baby was left alone and a sabre tooth tiger came along - going quiet and dissociating again.

You can see something similar if you have a pet rabbit who isn't used to dogs, and then a dog comes along. They **freeze**.

That's what a baby is doing when she is left alone to cry. She is going into **freeze** mode.

And again, I want to offer you lots of **compassion** here.

**If you have done these things to your baby, those feelings are still there, still within them, still waiting to be heard.**

*It's never too late to listen to feelings.*

(Or if you were left alone to cry as a baby, you might feel big feelings when you imagine babies being left alone to cry ~ it's a sweet spot).



**They learn to stop themselves**

**At first, it is us who stops them from expressing feelings.**

But of course, one of the most important survival missions for a baby is to **learn how to fit into the family and culture she is born into.**

**So, within weeks, she starts to respond to her feelings in ways that are related to how we respond to her feelings.**

*~ If we feed her when she is upset, she learns to ask for nourishment when she is upset.*

That can lead to a **baby who seems to need feeding more and more frequently, even as she gets older and her stomach can hold more milk.**

*~ If we move her when she is upset, she learns to move when she is upset.*

This can lead to a **toddler who never seems to be able to sit still.**

*~ If we distract her when she is upset, she learns to distract herself when she is upset.*

This can lead to a **baby who sucks her thumb, or moves from one activity to the next very quickly, or seems to need to be constantly entertained.**

And this is how relationships with feelings get passed on from one generation to the next.

**AND I want to remind you that it is never too late to start listening to feelings!**

*If a feeling isn't being expressed, then something needs to be done with it.*

Something physical, to **hold** it in.

In addition to those things above, that also means **muscle tension** (because that prevents the feeling from being felt).

**Have you ever had a stressful day and have had really tense shoulders, or a headache, or sore thighs?**

**Those are signs that you were repressing feelings rather than hearing them.**

So, to answer the original question, although it seems like the most loving and kind thing to stop our babies from ever feeling uncomfortable feelings, there are **consequences** to that - which includes **our babies learning to prevent their feelings** through things like feeding for comfort, distracting themselves, movement, sucking on something, or tensing their muscles.



## **Those feelings accumulate and show up in other ways too**

That isn't the only consequence.

As well as needing to use mechanisms to hold the feelings at bay,

when those feelings are held in, and more and more feelings get added to them, simply through the daily stresses and uncomfortable feelings that babies feel,

**then those feelings accumulate.**

Remember that feelings are **physiological**.

So, as more and more get added, they **accumulate** in a baby's body.

And as they accumulate, they feel more and more **uncomfortable**.

And we can increasingly **see that accumulation**.

I wonder if you've **noticed** any of these things?

~ **More movement, agitation, especially when feeding or going to sleep;**

~ **Their bodies get more tense - you can feel it in their muscles;**

~ **They take longer and longer to go to sleep** (because we need to feel relaxed to go to sleep);

~ **They wake up after shorter and shorter periods of time**, even though they are older (because feelings bubble to the surface more quickly to be expressed);

~ **They smile less and seem less happy** (because it takes energy to hold down uncomfortable feelings);

~ **They have an agitated tone to their vocalisations** (because these are low-key ways of trying to express feelings);

~ **They make less eye contact** (because when they look in your eyes, they see the love, and they connect with themselves, and that connects them with the feelings that they are trying to hold in);

~ **They wake up crying** (because they are trying to let out feelings);

~ **They come on and off** the breast or bottle, or kick, or wriggle, or suck intermittently, or fall asleep, or pinch (because the feelings are uncomfortable).



## **Working against their natural healing mechanism is hard**

Does this help to see why, when we work against our baby's natural healing mechanism, which is there to release uncomfortable feelings from their body, then **that is the cause of the main things that parents find challenging with babies:**

~ taking a long time to get to sleep;

~ waking up **after one sleep cycle**;

~ waking up **frequently** at night;

~ **waking up crying**;

~ **vomiting** frequently after feeds;

~ seeming to need to be **fed every hour, day and night**;

~ **crying in the car**;

~ **crying whenever they are put down**;

~ **agitation**;

~ **moving** around a lot when asleep.



## **Would you like to reflect?**

**If you have a baby, or a child, or several children, I wonder if you have noticed any of these things?**

*Have you noticed that you did certain things to them to stop them from crying, and then they started to ask for those things, particularly in the evening or before sleep?*

**Did you notice that over time, you saw more and more of those symptoms of accumulation?**

*Have you noticed in yourself, when you have feelings that aren't getting heard, that you do similar things,*

**such as tensing your muscles**, distracting yourself with Facebook or cake, feeling more agitated in general, eating when you aren't hungry, taking a long time to get to sleep, and waking up in the middle of the night and finding it hard to go to sleep again?

**Does it resonate for you that babies might experience unexpressed uncomfortable feelings in similar ways?**

That it feels uncomfortable to be holding in feelings?

Does that make sense too, then, that **although feeling and expressing uncomfortable feelings feels uncomfortable at the time**, that **after releasing them we might feel a whole lot more comfortable** than if we are constantly holding feelings at bay?

Might we feel a whole lot more **peaceful**, more **connected** with ourselves, more connected with others, and more connected with the world, than if we are tensing muscles, eating, moving, and feeling agitated, to stop feeling what we are feeling?



**I invite you to be very gentle with yourself, especially if this material is new to you.**

**It can bring up big and strong feelings in us, as we start to see these things.**

**Seeing these processes operating in ourselves can be eye-opening, and can stir up big thoughts, questions, and feelings.**

So, please make sure you talk to someone, or journal, or come and share on the Aware Parenting Facebook group, so that you get to express how this is for you.

### **Part Three**

Next, I'll be talking more about **the kinds of things we often see when babies have pent-up feelings, and how that relates to childhood challenges.**





## Part Three ~ What happens to unexpressed feelings?

### How was it?

I wonder how it was for you, reading Part Two?

I want to remind you, again, to **be very compassionate with yourself as you are taking in this information.**

I don't know how much of it was new for you, and how different it is to what you were already believing...

Yet I want to let you know that **learning these things can bring about big changes, and can bring up big feelings, in us.**

**Understanding how we learnt our relationship to our feelings from the way our parents responded to our feelings, can bring insights, but also sadness, mourning, and rage.**

**Understanding the power and impact of how we treat our babies and children can connect us with sadness and mourning, and, if we punish ourselves, to guilt.**

I want to invite you, if you feel any **guilt, to remember that guilt means that you learnt long ago to tell yourself that you should have done something differently.**

If you feel any guilt, I wonder if you would be willing to **invite a more compassionate part of you, that I call your Inner Loving Mother, to come and listen to you.**



If you are a **Mother**, you could respond to yourself as you would aim to respond to your child if she were in the position you are in now.

Or you may feel **angry**, telling yourself that someone should have told you this before, or something similar.

Again, I invite you to invite in your **Inner Loving Mother** to listen to yourself.

Another alternative is to **ask a friend, who you know can listen compassionately and empathically, to listen to your thoughts, feelings and needs**, without trying to fix things or make things better for you.

**Having someone listen to us empathically is so important, if we are wanting to listen to our baby or child empathically.**

We will talk more about how important it is for us to get our needs met, and for us to have our feelings heard, later on.

For today, I want to talk more about what we started in the last part.



## **The three consequences of not listening to feelings**

So, there are **three types of consequences we will often observe in our babies when we don't listen to all of their feelings** (and again, I want to remind you that we don't listen for really caring reasons).

I also want to remind you to stay compassionate with yourself.

**This is about gaining knowledge so that we can respond even more accurately to our babies and children, rather than judging or punishing ourselves for what we did or didn't do in the past.**



## **One ~ there are the symptoms of the accumulation of feelings:**

- ~ **agitation;**
- ~ **avoiding eye contact;**
- ~ **taking a longer time to go to sleep;**
- ~ **moving around in their sleep;**
- ~ **waking up more frequently;**
- ~ **waking up early;**
- ~ **smiling less;**
- ~ **making agitated vocalisations;**
- ~ **short attention span;**
- ~ **biting.**



## **Two ~ there are the symptoms of the ways we have taught them to respond to their feelings:**

- ~ **more frequent requests to be fed and more agitated feeding** (if we fed them when they were upset);
- ~ **clinging on to their Mum/Mom and crying with their Dad**, even though they are securely attached with Dad and Dad is attentive and loving (if we breast-fed them when they were upset);

~ **repetitive movement** (if we moved them when they were upset);

~ **not focussing on one thing for long, or distracting themselves** (if we distracted themselves when they were upset);

~ **disconnecting** (if we left them alone when they were upset);

~ **wanting a dummy or soft toy** (if we gave them those when they were upset).



**Three ~ there are things that they do to themselves to hold in feelings that we didn't teach them but which they discovered themselves to hold in feelings that we weren't listening to;**

~ **muscle tension;**

~ **clutching** on to a blanket or their clothing or ours;

~ **pinching;**

~ **sucking their thumb or fingers** (with a spaced-out look in their eyes, rather than exploratory sucking which means they have an alert look in their eyes);

~ **a spaced-out look in their eyes;**

~ **avoiding eye contact** (because if they look in our eyes and feel the deep love and connection, they cannot help but connect with themselves and their feelings);

~ **changing their breathing** ~ for example, making it shallower, again to prevent feelings being felt.



## How these behaviours develop as a baby becomes a child

These behaviours continue, yet sometimes change the way they look, when a baby becomes a child.

*If we try to remove one of these behaviours, without listening to the feelings that lie underneath, our child will simply need to do something else to deal with the feelings.*

For example, if a child's dummy is taken away, or smelly nail varnish is painted on their fingers to stop them sucking them, and the crying that lies underneath isn't heard, then **she will simply start doing something else to hold the feelings in.**

As parents or teachers get uncomfortable with certain behaviours as children get older, **those forms of the repression will change too.**

For example, if a child is teased at school for holding on to a soft toy or sucking her thumb, she may stop doing that and start doing something else instead, like carrying a pencil case everywhere with her, or chewing on the end of a pencil.



## How these behaviours develop as a baby becomes a child (list)

**One ~ the symptoms of the accumulation of feelings:**

~ **agitation** ~ this can become **hyperactivity**, for example if a child finds it really hard to sit still;

~ **avoiding eye contact** ~ this can continue, and can also morph into **not appearing to listen or cooperate, and into doing things that they know we don't want them to**;

~ **taking a longer time to go to sleep** ~ this can continue into childhood;

~ **moving around in their sleep** ~ this can continue, and may also become **nightmares**;

~ **waking up more frequently** ~ this may become **waking up to apparently have a drink of water** or similar;

~ **waking up early** ~ this can continue into childhood, when a child always wakes really early;

~ **smiling less** ~ this can continue into childhood, into **a child that never really seems really happy**;

~ **making agitated vocalisations** ~ this can turn into '**whining**' - I don't really like the term, because it is often used with judgment, but you know what I mean!;

~ **short attention span** ~ this can continue, and mean that a child **moves from one thing to the next, without focusing on one thing for long**. It might also mean **a reluctance to learn new things**;

~ **biting** ~ this may continue, or may morph into **clenching teeth**;

~ **hitting** ~ this is a new one that may develop, **even if a baby has always been treated in the most gentle ways**. Hitting is again a symptom of accumulated feelings that haven't been expressed.



## **Two ~ the symptoms of the ways we have taught them to respond to their feelings:**

~ more frequent feeding ~ this can become **often wanting to eat sweet things when upset;**

~ **clinging on to their Mum and crying with their Dad, apparently not wanting to be with Dad, crying for Mum when with Dad, and yet, when cuddling with Mum, going quite blank and not making eye contact;**

~ repetitive movement ~ this can also mean **hyperactivity**, as well as things like **head-banging, nose-picking, hair-twirling, nail-picking;**

~ **not focussing on one thing for long** ~ this can become **seeming to always want to be entertained and apparently not able to find entertainment in exploring the world**, or wanting to spend lots of time on an **iPad or screen**, or **desperately wanting a certain thing**, like a blue bowl or a toy in the shop, or a particular t-shirt;

~ disconnecting ~ this can become **wanting to be alone when upset, not sharing feelings;**

~ wanting a dummy or soft toy ~ this can continue, but may also morph shape if those things become judged as they get older. They might turn into **nail-biting and clutching on to a hard toy**. They might then become **biting on a pencil or clutching on to a mobile phone** when older.



## **Three ~ the things that they do to themselves to hold in feelings;**

~ muscle tension ~ this generally increases as children get older. **That's why these symptoms of repression get harder and harder to see as children get older;**

~ clutching on to a blanket or their clothing or ours ~ this may morph into **tensing up their hand**, where they would have been clutching on to something;

~ pinching - again, this may turn into **tensing their hand**;

~ sucking their thumb or fingers ~ this may continue or turn into **nail-biting, nose-picking, tensing the muscles in the mouth and neck**;

~ a spaced-out look in their eyes ~ this may continue, or may turn into **'daydreaming'**;

~ avoiding eye contact ~ this may **continue** and may also turn in to **not appearing to listen** to us, **not choosing to cooperate**, and **doing things they know we don't want them to do**;

~ changing their breathing ~ for example, **making it shallower, again to prevent feelings being felt**.

~ **avoiding new experiences, not wanting to try new foods, only wanting a restricted range of experiences, people and foods** ~ because new things and new foods help them connect with their feelings.



## **How these behaviours develop into adulthood**

### **One ~ the symptoms of the accumulation of feelings:**

~ agitation ~ **have you ever had a sense of 'antsyness' ~ as if you simply can't be still, be present, there's agitation and discomfort in your body?;**

~ avoiding eye contact ~ **have you ever noticed yourself not making eye contact with people, not really connecting with people** as you go about your day?



~ taking a longer time to go to sleep ~ have you noticed, at times of higher stress, that it can **take you much longer to get to sleep, even though you feel really tired?**;

~ moving around in their sleep ~ **do you ever notice that you get all tangled in the sheets, or you have nightmares?**;

~ waking up more frequently ~ **do you ever find yourself waking up in the middle of the night and thoughts are going round and round your head**, and even though you are desperate to go back to sleep, you stay awake?;

~ waking up early ~ **do you ever wake up really early, and then find it hard to go back to sleep?**;

~ smiling less ~ **do you ever feel just generally flat or not very happy?**;

~ making agitated vocalisations ~ **do you ever find yourself speaking in an agitated tone of voice?**;

~ short attention span ~ **do you ever find it hard to concentrate, and just keep on wanting to distract yourself with TV or screens or social media?**;

~ biting ~ **do you ever grind your teeth?**;

~ hitting ~ **do you ever find yourself slamming a door, or throwing things, or lashing out at someone with hurtful words?**



## **Two ~ the symptoms of the ways we were taught to respond to our feelings:**

~ more frequent feeding ~ **do you ever find yourself going to the fridge or cupboard when you aren't hungry, eating sweet things or drinking coffee or alcohol to avoid how you feel?**;

~ repetitive movement ~ **do you ever notice yourself twirling your hair, picking your nose (!), moving your leg repetitively?;**

~ not focussing on one thing for long ~ do you ever notice that you seem to want to be **constantly entertained, by screens, reading, social media, books, magazines, newspapers, shopping, and that you avoid stillness and quiet time with yourself?;**

~ disconnecting ~ do you ever notice that **you withdraw when you are upset, and don't talk, or reach out less to friends, or don't tell people around you what is going on for you?;**

~ wanting a dummy or soft toy ~ **do you ever find yourself clutching on to your mobile phone or your takeaway coffee cup?**



### **Three ~ the things that we do to ourselves to hold in feelings;**

~ muscle tension ~ **do you ever notice that you have really tense shoulders, a tense jaw, tension in your back, or a headache,** especially after doing something that you felt uncomfortable about?;

~ clutching on to a blanket or their clothing or ours ~ **do you ever notice yourself clutching your hands or arms?;**

~ pinching - **do you ever notice yourself tensing your fingers?;**

~ sucking their thumb or fingers ~ **do you ever notice yourself nail-biting, nose-picking, tensing the muscles in your mouth and neck, biting on a pen, or smoking, when you are upset?;**

~ a spaced-out look in their eyes ~ **do you ever notice that you are going about your day without really looking at people or things with presence and focus, or do you ever find yourself dreaming about the future, or a different life?;**

~ avoiding eye contact ~ **do you ever notice that you avoid looking in someone's eyes when you feel upset, because you know that if you do, you'll burst into tears?;**

~ changing our breathing ~ **do you ever notice that your breathing is quite shallow, and that you are avoiding breathing into certain areas of your body, and if you do that, for example in yoga or meditation, you can feel more fully?;**

~ **thinking** ~ **do you ever notice yourself going over and over certain thoughts, certain memories, self-judgments or judgments about others, thoughts about the future, or simply things that you will be doing later in the day, like making dinner?**



## **What's going on for you right now?**

**I wonder if you noticed yourself actually doing some of these whilst you were reading about them!**

*Thinking about the ways we learnt to repress our feelings, and the way that those ways get passed on from parent to child, can bring up big feelings in us.*

**Having these insights might make a huge difference for you.**

*What thoughts do you have right now?*

I invite you to write them down, or share them with someone.

**You might have had some ‘a-ha’ moments** ~ for example, if you sucked your thumb when you were a toddler, then bit your nails, and now you notice tension around your mouth and jaw when you are in stressful situations.

Again, **you may feel rage or anger, or sadness or grief, thinking about how your parents responded to your feelings.**

**And I invite you to listen to those, or have someone listen to you.**

*It's really natural for ALL human beings to want their feelings to be heard.*

It's really natural for you to feel rage or sadness, mourning how your parents and wider culture didn't listen to you.

*As you read this, I invite you to reflect on what you did as a baby, child, and as a younger adult, to hold in your feelings.*

**Do you notice a trajectory like this?**

**I invite you to take a few moments to reflect on your own experience and write it down.**

**Do you know what you did as a baby?** Did you have a dummy, suck your thumb, clutch on to a soft toy, or something similar?

**What about when you were a child?** Did you pick your nose, twirl your hair, cling on to a doll, or bite your nails?

**What about when you were a teenager and young adult?** Did you bite your nails, smoke, drink alcohol, take drugs, or watch TV a lot?

**What about now? What do you tend to do when you are upset?** Do you use social media, look at a screen, read a book, eat chocolate, go shopping, order things in your home, or get really busy?

**Remember to go slowly with this, stop if you need to, and talk to someone if you find painful feelings emerging.**

Realising the ways that **we learnt to suppress our feelings can bring up lots of feelings.**

You might feel **shocked, or surprised or sad.**

Alternatively, you might feel **interested, curious, excited or relieved,** to see these things.

And if you have **children** and you have **seen these kinds of trajectories, please again hold yourself with lots of compassion.**

**To even understand the process of the development of repression is rare amongst parents.**

**To understand what is really going on when your child is carrying a blanket around everywhere, or wants to be on the iPad for hours, means understanding them.**

*And remember, it is never too late to listen to more of your child's feelings, just as it is never too late to listen to more of your own feelings!*



**We can only be with feelings in our child that we can be with in ourselves**

**AND I want to let you know one thing.**

**The way we respond to our own feelings is often the way we respond to our baby and child's feelings.**

**Your parents responded to you in those ways because of the ways that they responded to their own feelings, which was deeply affected by how their feelings were responded to when they were babies and children.**

If your Mother wasn't able to be with her own feelings, she simply could not listen to your feelings.

If your Father wasn't able to be with his own feelings, he simply could not listen to your feelings.

More specifically, each of us can be present with **particular feelings**.

For example, perhaps your Mum could be with a bit of sadness when you were ill or injured, because her Mother was the same.

And perhaps your Dad could be with your exuberant joy, because his Dad could be with his exuberant joy.

But if your Mum never heard her deep sadness and grief heard, then when you started to show it to her, it would have connected her with her own deep sadness and grief.

**If she never experienced someone being with her when she felt sadness and grief, she would have never learnt to be comfortable with it, to stay with it, to simply be with it, knowing that it would eventually pass if she simply felt it.**

**And so she couldn't be present with your deep sadness.**

**She was too afraid to feel her own deep sadness.**



**We need to have someone being with us in our feeling to make it safe**

Remember how we touched on this earlier?

**When we are babies or children, and we feel a feeling that isn't indicating an immediate need, and someone is fully present with us, because they can be with that feeling in themselves, then we learn to feel comfortable with that feeling, even if it is uncomfortable.**

We learn that that feeling is our friend.

**We learnt that if we simply stay with that feeling, we will feel it in its fullness, and then it will eventually pass, and we will feel relieved and relaxed.**

*We need someone who is comfortable with that feeling, to be with us in that feeling, so that we learn, and internalise, to be comfortable with that feeling.*

**And then, we can be with someone else when they are feeling that feeling.**

That is like a presence virus!

The more presence with feelings there is, the more it gets passed around.

And I invite you to bring that presence to yourself, and your baby or child or children, if you are a parent.

**Whatever feelings you weren't able to be with in your baby were probably feelings that you weren't able to be with in yourself.**

*Does that resonate for you?*

I want to add one thing though.



**There are actually three reasons why we may not listen to our baby or child's feelings.**

One of them is that **we have similar upset feelings that we aren't able to hear.**

Another is that **we have lots of present-time unmet needs that are causing painful feelings** (we are just like babies - we can feel upset because of present time unmet needs, and/or because of past stresses and painful events and past unmet needs.)



And the third is that **we simply don't have the information we need**. For example, we may never have come across Aware Parenting and this kind of information about feelings before. We may have only learnt that all feelings indicate an unmet need.



## **We pass on our relationship to our feelings to our babies**

**We tend to pass on our ways of relating to our feelings, to our babies and children.**

For example, **if we tend to eat when we are upset, we may tend to feed our baby when she is upset.**

If we tend to **get moving when we are upset, we may tend to rock and jiggle our baby** when she is upset.

If we tend to **distract ourselves with things like screens when we are upset, we may tend to distract our baby with toys and books and singing** when she is upset.

And if **we leave ourselves when we are upset, we may tend to leave our baby** when she is upset.

*Do you notice a relationship between what you do with your own feelings and what you do when your baby or child is upset (if you are a parent?)*

What I love about this way of looking at things is that **it brings compassion to us all.**

**Our parents were only responding to our feelings in the way they did because that's how they responded to their own feelings.**

**The way we have responded to our babies and children's feelings is because of how we respond to our own feelings.**

And however you see **other parents respond to their baby crying or their child having a tantrum in the street simply reflects their own inner relationship to their feelings.**

And at the core, **Aware Parenting is all about compassion.**

Having compassion for ourselves as parents.

Having compassion for our baby and child.

Having compassion for our own parents.

Having compassion for other parents.



## **Aware Parenting has a very different way of looking at human beings**

What I LOVE about Aware Parenting is that it has helped me have a deeply compassionate way of perceiving all human beings.

**That we all come into the world with the capacity for love, awareness, contribution and connection.**

(I often talk about the 3 Cs - connection, cooperation, contribution)

**That is our natural state.**

**And if our needs get met, and all our feelings heard, then we stay connected to that naturally aware and loving state.**

But because of the culture we live in, and the beliefs of the culture, and what our parents learnt from their parents and school and culture, **we didn't get all our needs met or all our feelings heard.**

And the **less our needs got met, and the more traumatic events we experienced, and the less our feelings got expressed and heard, the more likely it is that we will actually do things like hurting others**, hurting animals, hurting ourselves, hurting the environment.

*The people who do the most hurtful things are the most in pain.*

It really moves away from the old paradigm of punishments and rewards, which evolved from the older belief of sin and possession. Instead, Aware Parenting is a **paradigm of understanding, compassion, and acting effectively to change the CAUSE of why someone does something.**

The more a person hurts another person, the more pain they are in.

**This DOESN'T mean letting people hurt other people and just being compassionate to them, just as it doesn't mean letting a child hit other children and JUST being compassionate to them.**

**Aware Parenting is not a permissive style of parenting.**

Aware Parenting **does** mean finding ways of having deep compassion for ourselves and others.

*Those times when we act in ways that we least want to, are when we are most in pain.*

Our **needs** for support, rest, empathy, encouragement, community, aren't being met.

Or **the situation is reminding us** of times when we were a baby or a child **and those feelings are coming up to be heard and healed.**

Or we are **simply needing more information, more understanding, different ways** of looking at what is going on.

**And the same is the case for our babies and children.**

*When our children do the things that we most find challenging  
(which are many of those things on those lists above!)  
They are actually **MOST** in need of compassion.*

**For a baby, she either has unmet needs or has feelings that she needs to express and release.**

**For a child, she either has one of those two, or a need for information.**

This is an incredibly different way of looking at babies, children, and adults.



**Instead of judging ourselves, feeling guilty, and comparing ourselves as parents,**

*we can increasingly learn to listen to our needs and feelings, set loving limits with self-judgment, self-shoulding, and self-comparison, listen to the feelings that come up from our childhood, and become increasingly self-compassionate.*



**Instead of resorting to disconnection, harshness, distraction, artificial consequences, rewards or punishments with our babies and children,**

*we can increasingly learn to meet their needs, listen to their feelings, set loving limits with any hurtful behaviour, and listen to the feelings that lie underneath.*



**And instead of judging others and feeling angry towards them, including our parents and other adults who do things very differently to us,**

*we can learn to be increasingly compassionate towards them - guessing their needs and feelings, understanding the stresses that they are going through now and have been through in the past, whilst also stopping ourselves from getting hurt by them.*



*And of course, this is a process that takes some time.*



**Being compassionate with ourselves as we learn, like we are with our child when she learns a new skill.**

I talk to many many parents who resonate with Aware Parenting, and **who expect themselves to practice ‘textbook’ Aware Parenting straight away.**

**But it takes time to learn to listen to our own feelings and our baby or child’s feelings.**

**It takes time to learn to value our needs and hear our baby or child’s needs.**

It takes time to **replace old ways of thinking.**

It takes time to **set loving limits with the judgments and shoulding that we learnt.**

It takes time to **differentiate between when a baby is upset and when they are hungry.**

It takes time to **feel confident that listening to feelings is helping our baby or child.**

It takes time to **observe the differences in our baby or child when we listen to her feelings, so that we have reassurance that it is helpful.**

It takes time to feel comfortable with **being really present with big feelings in our baby.**

It takes time to be feel comfortable with **really present with big feelings in our child.**

It takes time to **listen to enough of our own feelings from our own childhood so that we can listen to the big feelings of our babies and children.**

It takes time to **respond compassionately rather than harshly or reactively when our child hits or bites or doesn't listen.**

It takes time to **learn to set loving limits with ourselves** and our child in ways that really are loving, and that really are effective in helping us and them connect to the feelings underneath the challenging behaviour.

It takes time to **change our own relationship with our feelings and needs.**

*What I always say to parents, when they are judging them for not practising "textbook Aware Parenting" is ~*

**Remember that you probably never, or rarely cried in someone's loving arms, or had a tantrum with someone listening to you calmly and lovingly.**



**Remember that we live in a culture that is all about repressing feelings.**



**Remember that you have probably never seen anyone calmly and lovingly listen to their baby crying in their arms when the baby's needs were all met.**



**Remember that you have probably never seen anyone listen lovingly, calmly and compassionately when their child had a tantrum.**

*The usual ways we learn new things are through our own personal experience, and through observing, and learning from others.*

**And that is why having our own feelings heard can really help ~ because when we have experienced, first hand, the relief and lightness and relaxation that comes when we have a huge cry and someone is really present with us and listens, then we can really understand how beautiful it is.**

**And when we experience other people honouring and valuing our needs and feelings with compassion, we feel the relief and relaxation, and again, it helps us have confidence about how wonderful it is.**

**And when we hear the experiences of other people who are practicing Aware Parenting, it helps us learn more through hearing about their lives.**

*The beautiful thing is, that **WE CAN CHANGE.***

**And one of the most powerful and quick ways is to have someone value our needs and listen to our feelings.**

**When we experience that, then we can start to internalise it for ourselves.**

**We can start to value our own needs and be present with a wider and wider range of our feelings.**

**Because we have experienced it on the outside.**



*The more and more comfortable we feel with more and more feelings,  
the more we can be truly present with more and more feelings in  
our baby and child.*

Because we know, from the inside,

**that feelings aren't to be feared.**

**That feelings are our friends.**



**How are you feeling?**

**How do you feel now?**

**What are you thinking?**

I invite you to take some time to write down how you are feeling and thinking, and what insights you have had.

And if you have someone who you know will listen to you, perhaps you would like to talk with them about all of that?

**I wonder if you are seeing that Aware Parenting isn't just about a way of responding to our babies and children?**



**That actually, it invites us to change our way of thinking about human beings, including ourselves and our baby or child.**



**It invites us to value our own needs so that we can respond to our baby or child's needs.**



**It invites us to listen to more of our own feelings, so that we can listen to more of our baby or child's feelings.**



**It invites us to explore the ways that we disconnect from ourselves and our feelings, so that we can be more available for our baby or child.**

**And it invites us to be more compassionate to ourselves, our baby or child, our partner if we have one, our family and friends and the wider world.**



#### **Part Four**

**Next, I'll be talking about actually listening to crying; what it's like, what we might observe, how we might feel, and what we might need.**





## Part Four ~ Starting the process of listening to your baby or child's feelings

### How was it?

I wonder how it was for you, reading Part Three?



### **This is a process (and there's no one 'right' way!)**

I'm going to say it again, please be compassionate with yourself when you are going through all of this.

We learnt all these ways of protecting ourselves from feelings, and those were really important things.

*Protecting ourselves from our feelings kept us safe.*

*So, those mechanisms of repression and dissociation are to be valued and honoured.*

It isn't about trying to get rid of them all at once, or trying to get rid of them in our baby or child.

Remember what I said about if we try to get rid of one of these mechanisms without listening to the feelings that they are holding at bay, then another one will just come in it's place?

*The key is compassionately creating more space to listen to feelings.*

Finding people who can listen to us without judgment or trying to fix things ~ who can really listen with available attention and compassion.

And gradually learning to listen to more of our own feelings, so that we have less need of those protective mechanisms.

And it's the same for listening to the feelings of our baby or child.

*This is all about building our levels of comfort with being with their feelings.*

This is all about learning to be more and more present in our body with feelings, so that we can really be present and available and compassionate when they are expressing theirs.



## **Starting the process of listening to your baby or child's feelings**

First, I think it can be really helpful to connect with yourself.

That this way of thinking about babies and children **resonates** with you - that there is some part of you that feels a big “yes” when you read this information.

That this way of thinking **makes sense to you** - that your mind finds it logical and rational and everything fits together.

That you've **listened to, or asked someone else to listen to, any feelings that you might have when you remember what happened to you when you cried or tried to cry when you were a baby or child and cried.**

That you have some **support** if more feelings come up for you when you are listening to your baby, which is likely!

That you've **noticed some of the symptoms in your baby or child that we talked about before.**

That some part of Aware Parenting really resonates with your **values and what you want for your baby or child** - for example, perhaps you really want them to stay connected with their feelings, or you want to help them heal if they had a traumatic birth, or you want them to have fewer repression mechanisms, or you want them to tell you their feelings when they get older, or something else.

All these aspects are so important, because Aware Parenting is generally so different from how we were brought up, and from mainstream parenting culture, that **we need anchors to keep us connected with why we are choosing to do this.**

~ I call these your **North Star.**

*These are connecting with different parts of you:*

~ **The part of you that really resonates with this information;**

~ **Your mind, that understands the theory and finds that it all makes sense;**

~ **Your observer, who has observed some of those signs of accumulation or repression in your baby or child;**

~ **Your feelings** - which might be sadness about how you learnt to be with you feelings, or excitement about listening to your baby's feelings, or something else entirely!;

~ **Your needs** - which might be to contribute to your baby, or for them to share with you how they are feeling when they are a teenager;

~ **Your values** - which might be compassion for babies, wanting your baby to grow up comfortable with their feelings; trusting the innate knowing of the human psyche to heal, or something else!



## **Starting the process of listening to your baby's feelings**

**The rest of Part Four is all about babies. If you have a toddler or a child and you don't want to read about listening to a baby's feelings, please skip this and go to Part Five.**

It is completely up to you where you start!

One of my suggestions, however, would be **to observe your baby for a few days or more before you start.**

**Perhaps you will notice some of these things:**

~ Times in the **evening when she seems agitated**, and would start to cry if you did not feed her more frequently, or rock her or pat her or sing to her;

~ Times when **she wakes up and starts crying immediately**;

~ Times when **she is feeding and she's coming on and off or wriggling and squirming or sucking intermittently or falling asleep immediately**;

~ Times when you've very recently fed her and she is agitated or squirmy and you would usually feed her again;

~ Times when she is making **agitated vocalisations**;

~ Times when **she is avoiding eye contact**;

~ Times when she seems **tense in her muscles**.

*You might start to notice that there is a pattern to these observations.*

Perhaps she does these kinds of things whenever she is **tired**.

Perhaps she does more of these kinds of things **after you've had a busy day**.

Perhaps she does more of these kinds of things **when you are distracted**.

Perhaps she does more of these kinds of things **when you are feeling upset**.

*Once you've been observing for a while, you might start to notice that there is a time when you feel really confident that all her immediate needs are met, and that she is trying to express her feelings and release stress through crying with you.*

And that is where I suggest you start - at a time when you feel confident that all her immediate needs are met, and that you are quite certain that she is trying to cry to express feelings and release stress.



## Listening to your baby's feelings

**Some of the things you can do to help yourself and your baby are:**

**Finding a comfortable position to sit**, so that your back is supported and you can be comfortable holding your baby for a while.

*Having support for yourself helps you give support to your baby.*

**Checking in with yourself and making sure that you have enough spaciousness and availability to listen to your baby's feelings.**

**Checking in with yourself and making sure that you are confident that all of your baby's needs have been met.**

**Checking in with yourself and connecting with why you want to listen to your baby's feelings.**

**Then, simply hold her in a way that means that you can look in her eyes if she looks at you.**

One way I used to enjoy was sitting on a chair or sofa, having a foot stool under my feet so that I could have my knees up at an angle, have a cushion on my thighs, and have my baby lying on her back on the cushion so that we could look in each other's eyes, and I could hold one of her hands and hold her head, and she could kick her legs or push against my stomach.

But remember, **this is all about your intuition and your experience with your baby.** So you might find a way that really fits for you that is very different.



*Then, you might simply talk to your baby, and tell her that you are there with her, and you are listening, and that you'd love to hear anything she'd like to tell you.*

And then, **without rocking or bouncing or singing or jiggling, simply keep making eye contact if she lets you, keep being present in your body, keep connected with her, and see what happens.**

You may find that she starts to cry softly or intermittently, or doing what some people call 'fussing' i.e., moving her body more, making more noises, squirming, kicking.

And then her crying might get **louder and more intense.**



## **What can you do when she is crying?**

### **For yourself:**

~ keep connected with **why** you are doing this;

~ keep connected with your **own body and feelings;**

~ and keep **remembering that you can stop her at any time if you feel unsure** about what is going on. (**Any** crying in arms with all her needs met will help her release some feelings and will make a difference to her).



**For her:**

~ keep **connected with her;**

~ keep **holding her hand or head or touching her body;**

~ keep **inviting eye contact**

*(although she will probably close her eyes and not look at you when she is crying, because she is in her own experience);*

~ keep **gently telling her things like, “I’m here,” “I’m listening,” “I’m right here with you,” trust whatever comes to you.**



**What might happen for you when she is crying?**

~ **you might start finding yourself spacing out or dissociating.**

**That tells you that your own feelings are bubbling up.**

You could choose to either: **bring your attention back to your body and gently ask yourself what you’re feeling;**

or if you have a partner or close friend you could **ask them to listen to your feelings** whilst you’re listening to your baby;

**or you could gently tell her something like, “I see that you’re upset sweetheart, but Mummy/Mommy wants to be more connected with you when I’m listening to your feelings. I’m going to feed you/jiggle you now, and I’d love to listen to your feelings another time when I can listen more.” You could then listen to what was coming up for you, or ask someone else to listen to what came up for you.**

Remember that hearing and healing your old (what I call) “sweet spots” is also part of Aware Parenting.

*In the same way that when babies experience something in the present that is similar to something in the past that was painful that they didn't get to cry about, they get to heal from past experiences,*

When we as adults experience something in the present that reminds us of something in the past that was painful that we didn't get to cry about, those feelings emerge for us again, to be heard now.

So, if you feel tears bubbling up, and you have memories of being left alone to cry, or being told not to cry, or simply a sense of sadness/ loneliness/ grief without knowing why, then it is likely that your baby's feelings are “stroking your sweet spot.” (These are my terms, rather than Dr. Solter's).



*~ you might start finding yourself crying.*

*Many parents ask, “How is it for my baby if I cry when she is crying?”*

What I generally say is, **if you're still there being the parent, still listening to her and being present with her**, whilst also connected with your own feelings, **then that is you modelling being present and being comfortable with crying.**

But if you have gone in to such big feelings that you feel very childlike or small yourself, as if you really were a baby or a child, and you are losing your sense

**of being the adult and being there with your baby, then I don't think that is helpful for her.**

If that is happening for you, **it's probably preferable to explain to her**, as before, **that you will listen later**, and then phone a friend or give your baby to your partner or wait until she sleeps, and then have a big cry yourself, all the while receiving that sense of being heard, either by your friend, partner, therapist, or yourself.



**~ You might find that whilst she is crying, you remember things about her birth or the pregnancy or the early time after her birth.**

If that is the case, I invite you to **trust your intuition**.

**It is likely that she is crying to release the feelings from that experience.**

**You might want to talk with her about it.**

**You might find yourself instinctively touching her in a particular place on her head**, for example if she was forceps or ventouse, you may find yourself touching or stroking her where the forceps or ventouse were.



**What might happen for her when she is crying?**

**~ She might cry more intensely when you touch those places that you feel an intuition to touch (such as her head)**

As long as you are touching her gently, that is likely to indicate that it is **helping her connect with those feelings even more**.

You might want to **keep talking to her about what happened**, and what you imagine she experienced, and that you are here with her, listening, and that she made it; she got through, and that all is well now.



~ **She may arch her back.**

**That can indicate that she is re-experiencing her birth, or trying to complete something about her birth** ~ for example, if she was born by CS, she might be wanting to have that sense of mastery and choice of when to be born,

You can again **support her to arch her back and feel a sense of physical connection**, so that she gets to experience the arching, plus your physical and emotional support whilst listening to her feelings.



~ **She may kick her legs really strongly, and push them against you.**

You can provide gentle contact with her feet, so that she can push in that way.

Again, this can often be a re-experiencing, or even doing something that she didn't get to do during, her birth.

Finding a way to engage with her physically, so that she can really feel that physical connection, can often give a real tangible feeling of satisfaction and energy.

You might feel it too.



~ **She may move her arms around a lot.**

The younger the baby, the more I recommend holding one of her hands.

**I usually put my thumb in the centre of her palm, so that she can really feel the connection.**

I tend to think that having one hand connected and one arm free gives her the balance of support and freedom to move.



**~ She is likely to move around a lot.**

Babies don't cry like some adults do.

**The experience is a whole-body experience.**

**Her body movements are part of the releasing process.**

**They are part of what helps release the feelings.**

**They may be deeply related to her birth.**

For example, you may notice that she keeps getting herself in to a **particular position, that mirrors what happened during her birth.**

You might notice her **spiralling**, which mirrors the spiralling she did during the second stage. You can support her to spiral, and turn her around so that she can do it again, following her direction of movement.



**~ You might notice that the crying has a similar phasing to the waves or surges of your body as she was being born.**

This is particularly the case for younger babies.

It can be as if each cry mirrors when the muscles of the womb tightened and pushed, and the feelings she probably had in response.



~ **She may have tears.**



~ **She may not have tears.**



~ **She may get hot.**

**Heat is part of the releasing process.**



~ **She may sweat.**

Again, this is part of the **releasing process.**



~ **She will probably not look at you when she is in the intense phases of the crying.**

But will probably look at you again at times, to connect back in with your eyes and your love.



~ **The crying may build up and become very intense.**

## **What might happen for you when she is crying intensely?**

That is when our concerns, fears and sweet spots commonly get stroked.

**You might be concerned that she is in pain, or hungry, or has an unmet need.**

I invite you to take one moment to notice what your thoughts and feelings are at this moment - they are clues to your own relationship with crying.

*AND at any time you are worried, it is really important to know that you can stop her from crying.*

**Again, you could tell her something like,** “sweetheart, I’m concerned that you might be in pain/hungry/needing something, and so I am going to feed you/rock you/jiggle you, but if you do have more feelings to tell me about, I would love to hear them another time.”

You may find that the first time, you can listen to a certain amount of crying, and then the second time a bit more.

**Please go at your own pace, and keep listening to yourself and your baby.**

This isn’t about pushing yourself.

It’s about listening to yourself.

*If you aren’t listening to yourself, you won’t really be able to truly listen to your baby.*

Remember, that the important thing is authenticity, and really meeting her from where you really are.



If you are feeling really worried that she has an unmet need, but keep listening to her crying, then even if she doesn't have any immediate needs, she may pick up on your worry.

Aware Parenting is a democratic style of parenting.

That means its all about BOTH parents and children getting their needs met.

Listening to your needs and feelings is so important.

*AND I want to remind you that it is totally natural to feel scared or concerned or worried.*

OF COURSE you want to be completely sure that all her needs are met.

Of course you want to be completely sure that her crying in arms is helping her rather than harming her.

You have probably **never seen** anyone calmly and compassionately listening to their baby crying in their arms

You were probably **never held calmly and compassionately whilst you cried.**

You are learning SO MANY new things here.

This takes time, and practice, and self-compassion, and MOST OF ALL, observation of your baby.

**IMPORTANT NOTE ~ If her crying sounds high pitched, and you are not able to stop her from crying through the usual means, it could indicate physical pain. It is important to get medical**

## **assistance if you feel concerned that there is something physically amiss with her.**

The paradox is, as I have heard many parents tell me, **that the more they listen to their baby crying in arms, the more clearly they can tell if there is any sign of pain in the crying.**

**We get more attuned to the different types of cries through practice.**

If you are able to stop her from crying through feeding or rocking or distraction, it is more likely that she wasn't in physical pain, because the physical pain would still be there and still keep her crying.



### **How does the crying finish? (part one)**

*~ It is common that for the first few times, your own concerns or feelings will come up and you will stop her from crying more by feeding her, rocking her, or distracting her.*

I want to remind yourself to be compassionate with yourself here.

**Listening to any of her feelings, and helping her release any stress, will help her.**

I often see it like a sugar bowl!

Stress is like sugar going in to the bowl, and any bit of crying she does is like sugar leaving the bowl.

*Remember that idea of accumulation, and all those symptoms of accumulation?*

**ANY releasing she does will reduce the amount of feelings that she is holding in, and you will probably be able to observe that difference even after a small bit of crying.**

There is no such thing as getting it “right” or getting it “wrong.”

As long as you are **aiming to understand when she needs to release feelings, and to stay connected with yourself when you listen, that will be making a difference to her.**



**"How can I have reassurance that her crying is helping her?"**

The only way that you will really have full reassurance that it is helping her is by **observing her really carefully.**

Again, this all goes back to the idea of accumulation, and those three types of signs that you can see that she is holding in feelings.

*How many feelings she is holding in is something that you can actually observe.*

And that is the key to having reassurance.

After crying, compared to distracting, I invite you to observe her.

Making notes in a special **journal** can be a really helpful part of this process.

### **What kinds of things could you watch out for?**

Well, you could **compare the difference in her between if you feed her on and off all evening, or rock and jiggle her all evening, when she seems agitated** (or what others might call “fussy”), **and what happens if you listen to her crying in your arms when all her needs are met.**

Here are the things that I recommend looking at:

- ~ How much **eye contact** she makes;
- ~ How **relaxed** she is in her muscles;
- ~ The quality of her **presence**;
- ~ How much she **moulds** into being held;
- ~ How **long** she takes to go to sleep;
- ~ How much she **moves** around in her sleep;
- ~ How **long** she **sleeps** for;
- ~ The tone of her **vocalisations**;
- ~ How long she **concentrates** on something;
- ~ How **calm** she is when she’s feeding.

I know that **the only thing that gave me reassurance, time after time after time with my children**, was that over and over and over again, I saw that if I tried to distract them from their feelings, or if their feelings accumulated, they would **avoid eye contact**,

**be more tense, move around more when sleeping, sound more agitated, move more when breast-feeding, and concentrate for less times.**

If I was listening to plenty of feelings, they would **make lots of eye contact** (my daughter was like a little Buddha after her first cry-in-arms at 3 months), **they would feel relaxed in their bodies, they would exude a quality of peace and calm and engaged concentration, they would sleep peacefully and for longer, they would smile more, they would feed calmly,** and so on.

*Aware Parenting is all about listening to your baby and listening to yourself.*

**In the first place, you need to listen to yourself to know that it resonates with you.**

*Then, the next step is listening to your baby and then observing what she tells you about how she feels after crying in your arms.*

**Oh, and there's a P.S. here. You will probably notice that the signs of accumulation leave in a particular order.**

For example, you may notice that after you have been listening to her crying for a few times, her vocalisations stop having a quality of agitation, and she moulds in to your body more, and she sleeps for longer periods, but she is still waking frequently.

It's almost as though the feelings were in a tall glass jar, and on the side of the jar are markings.

**As feelings get released from her body, she feels less and less uncomfortable and more and more comfortable.**

Those markings reflect that - for example, “happier vocalisations” might be near the top, and “calm feeding” might be lower down, when more feelings have been expressed.

**You might want to notice your baby’s own particular order of signs of accumulation!**



## **How does the crying finish? (part two)**

*~ As you gain more confidence in your ability to know when she really needs to cry, and that all her needs are completely met, and she isn't uncomfortable, then you will be able to listen to more of her feelings.*

**Younger babies**, if given the opportunity, will often have **shorter and more frequent cries throughout the day**.

Once babies become a bit **older**, they may have **longer and less frequent cries, for example before every sleep**. (We'll be focussing on sleep in Part Six).

**You may notice that the crying starts off more quietly and more intermittently, and then becomes more intense and more consistent, and then becomes more quiet and intermittent again.**

*The crying may then become more and more intermittent, until there is a sense of completion ~ she will either become very calm, and*

*make eye contact, and have a quality of presence, or she may fall asleep.*

**Or there may be another phase, or cycle, where, if you invite more connection and go for more presence, she will cry more intensely again.**



**Again, in the earlier stages, you may probably be wanting the crying to be shorter, and may be trying to make it finish.**

**You will probably be really relieved when the crying seems to be getting less intense, thinking that she is finished.**

**You may be upset, or frustrated, or confused, if she seems to have finished and then starts another round of crying.**

**And again, please be compassionate and accepting of yourself and where you are at.**

**It naturally takes time to be comfortable with longer and more intense crying, as you build confidence in the process by observing how crying is helping her.**

**If your baby is older, and you are newly listening to her feelings, she will have accumulated more feelings, and so you may not see such a sense of completion each time.**

**Yet, you will still be able to observe some differences in her afterwards.**



*~ As you get more comfortable with crying, and see how it helps her, and see that she is not crying ABOUT crying, you will probably be willing to help facilitate longer and more intense crying sessions, by inviting more connection, by changing position to allow more eye contact, and by talking to her and inviting her to tell you everything.*

**The longer and more intense the crying is, as long as you are calm and connected, the bigger chunk of feelings she is expressing and releasing, and the more difference you will likely see in her behaviour.**



**Do you want to listen to 100% of her feelings? Here's my experience:**

**When I first started practicing Aware Parenting, in 2002, when my daughter was a baby, I thought that I would be able to listen to 100% of her feelings, and that she would never have any control patterns!**

As time went on, I realised that that wasn't going to happen!

**I thought I WAS listening to all her feelings.**

From the age of 3 months to one year, she would generally have a cry every evening; her Dad and I would tag-team the process of listening to her. The cries were usually between 30 minutes and an hour to an hour and a half, but sometimes longer or shorter.

And I listened to her at other times too, but on the whole, it was one main daily evening crying session.



**And I thought that was ALL of her feelings.**

She had a very calm (but very long!) birth, I was relaxed during the pregnancy, we had a lovely time in the first months of her life, with me carrying her everywhere, co-sleeping, avoiding overstimulation, etc. etc.

**I was even surprised that she had as many feelings as she had, given the life she had** (remember that thing about how we underestimate how many feelings babies have!)

And, as I mentioned, **I could really see the difference in her.**

For the first three months, I had fed her A LOT.

And at first that seemed to be really helping her.

She probably only cried for one minute in that first three months.

But increasingly, **she was showing signs of accumulation.**

She was **no longer sleeping with her arms above her head.**

She was **vomiting** after a lot of feeds (of course, I realised that I was feeding her when she needed to cry and she was completely full already!!).

She started to become a bit **agitated** at times, and she started to make **less eye contact.**

If I hadn't seen those signs, I would have probably fed her every hour until she was about 10!

But I saw that it wasn't helping her.

So I and her Dad started listening to her feelings when she was three months old.

**And I could clearly see what a huge difference that made for her.**

**She was very calm and yet beautifully alert. She slept for long periods. She concentrated for long periods.**

*But by the time she was 18 months, it was very clear to me that there were a lot of feelings that I had been missing. I realised that there were still a lot of times that I was feeding her when she actually needed to cry.*

When I gave birth to my son, when my daughter was four and a half, I was by then an **Aware Parenting Instructor** and had listened to many more hours of **my daughter crying.**

(She would generally have a cry before bedtime for the majority of evenings for her first three years. In retrospect, I think that she “caught up” with quite a few of the feelings that the breast-feeding had been still repressing.)

It was really clear from her behaviour at four and a half that it had helped her.

**She had an incredibly calm presence that people commented on.**

Not calm dissociated, but calm present.

At two and three years old I could take her into a shop with delicate things and she would handle them with great care.

**She could concentrate for long periods of time with calm focus.**

I remember the time that she and her grandmother spent 4 or 5 hours playing with ‘Hama beads’ when she was three.

**She was incredibly gentle with other children, pets, and us.**

**She loved learning new things.**

**Her muscles were incredibly relaxed, yet strong. She was rarely tense.**

**She slept easily and peacefully, from infancy onwards.**

**She loved closeness and eye contact.**

*But I could still see that there were feelings that I hadn't heard.*

**When my son was born, I wanted to make sure that I was really diligent about differentiating between when he was hungry and when he was upset.**

I wrote a **journal** about all his behaviours, like I did with my daughter.

**And he did a lot more crying in arms than her.**

And again, I observed him.

And I noticed some things that I hadn't noticed in her.

**He smiled A LOT; in fact his smile lit up his whole face** (she didn't smile much).

**He had a quality of lightness in his eyes and face.**

**He was even more interested than her in food** (I often find that babies who are breastfed when they need to cry often are reluctant to eat any solids, and show little interest in them).

**He was even more relaxed and moulded in to hugs even more.**



**Do you want to listen to 100% of her feelings? Here's what parents often say:**

*Parents often come and say to me, "But I'm 'doing' Aware Parenting; I'm listening to my baby's feelings, but he still sucks his thumb/wakes up frequently/ looks spaced out."*



*And what I remind them of, is that whatever proportion of his feelings they ARE listening to, IS making a difference to him.*

**He is feeling more relaxed and more comfortable than he would be if he weren't expressing his feelings.**

(Remember that glass jar with the signs of accumulation up the side!?)

**But that few of us, especially when we are what I call, "first-time, first-generation" Aware Parents, will clearly be able to 100% understand when our baby has feelings to let out.**

*Most of us will find it challenging to differentiate between hunger and a need to release.*

Most of us will tend to veer on the side of thinking there is a need to be met, and try to fix things, or change position, or subtly distract our babies.

*It is a huge step to go from the kind of parenting that we received, to expect ourselves to be able to 100% meet our baby's needs and listen to 100% of their feelings.*



*And so, whatever proportion of his feelings we AREN'T listening to, those will be showing up.*

As we talked about before, they will show up in **three ways**:

**One ~ him feeling the agitation in his body**, and moving around a lot during the day or during sleep, or finding it hard to go to sleep, or waking up frequently, or waking up early;

**Two ~ him doing things to prevent himself feeling the feelings** that he has learnt from us ~ such as feeding frequently, or moving, or distracting himself;

**Three ~ him doing other things to prevent the feelings coming out, that he discovered himself when we weren't listening** - such as thumb-sucking, clutching on to something, pinching, or biting.

**What can you do if you notice those things?**



*~ The first is to have self-compassion.*

**Listening to ANY feelings is an amazing thing!**



*~ The second is to check in with yourself.*

If you aren't getting enough sleep, relaxation, empathy, support, enjoyment, listening, then it can be **very hard to listen to lots of feelings.**

Sometimes, **even if you are offering lots of listening to your baby, she might not cry even if she needs to, because she senses the feelings you are holding in.**

She's waiting for you to let out those feelings, so you have enough spaciousness and availability to listen to her feelings.



*~ The third is to observe your baby and yourself.*

*1 ~ Feeding is one of the main things to observe.*

Does she regularly **come on and off the breast** (or bottle), is she **agitated** whilst she feeds, does she **kick** and move around a lot, does she **suck intermittently**, or **fall asleep quickly**?

**All these are signs that you may be feeding her when she needs to cry.**

She is showing you in her behaviours what she really needs.

**What can you do then?**

The detail of that is a bit beyond the scope of this Introduction.

You can find out more about what alternatives you have, in [The Aware Baby](#), or through having a **consultation** with Dr. Solter, myself as a Level Two Aware Parenting Instructor, at [www.marionrose.net](http://www.marionrose.net), or another Aware Parenting Instructor, or you can hear it in my [Aware Parenting Babies Q and A Vault](#).

*2 ~ You may notice that there are times when you are distracting her from her feelings,*

such as taking her out of the eye to eye gentle holding, to put her over your shoulder.

Or perhaps singing to her and rocking and jiggling her in the evening.

**Finding out when you are stopping her from crying, and bringing your presence and attention to her at those times, is one way of helping her.**

*3 ~ If she is sucking her thumb, you may need to do more to help her express her feelings.*

Again, this goes beyond the scope of this Introduction.

**I talk about this elsewhere** (for example in free articles on my main website [www.marionrose.net](http://www.marionrose.net) in my [Aware Parenting Babies Q and A Vault](#), in my free Aware Parenting Facebook groups, and in the [Aware Parenting Babies Course](#). I also recommend reading [The Aware Baby](#), to understand Aware Parenting more.

The most important thing to remember is that she is repressing feelings because she has learnt to do that, and that **these mechanisms of repression are simply what I call “flags’ that tell you that feelings are bubbling.**

*The remedy or antidote to repression and dissociation is usually more connection, more presence, more invitation for feelings, and less of us distracting at other times.*

As Dr. Solter recommends in [The Aware Baby](#), it's not helpful to remove a baby's thumb from her mouth.

There are other things you can do - attachment play is one of them.

(You can read about that in Aletha's book [Attachment Play](#). I also have free articles about it on my [www.marionrose.net](http://www.marionrose.net) website and I have an [online course on Attachment Play](#) too.



## **Invitation for reflection**

We went in to a lot of depth today. I wonder how you are feeling?

**You might be pregnant and not have your baby yet.** If that is the case, I invite you to spend time around mothers and babies, and observe how you want to respond if a baby starts getting agitated or starts to cry. Being pregnant is a wonderful time to heal your own sweet spots around what happened to you when you cried. I have a free article about that on my [www.marionrose.net](http://www.marionrose.net) website.

**You may have a baby and haven't yet listened to him crying in arms.** If that is the case, how are you feeling after all of this? Is this resonating with you? Have you had a chance to talk to someone about how you feel?



**You may have a baby and have started listening to him crying in arms.** And you might have lots of questions. I highly recommend reading [\*\*The Aware Baby\*\*](#) by Aletha Solter. You might also be interested in my [\*\*Aware Parenting Babies Q and A Vault\*\*](#) - it's 10 hours of audios of answers to questions that parents commonly ask me. You can also find lots of free articles at [\*\*www.awareparenting.com\*\*](http://www.awareparenting.com) and [\*\*www.marionrose.net\*\*](http://www.marionrose.net)

**You may have a toddler or a child** and wonder how all this applies to being with them. If that is the case, you might want to keep on reading; Part Five talks about toddlers and children.



### **In the next Part**

I'll be talking about toddlers and children, and how the process of Aware Parenting changes and develops.



## Part Five ~ Listening to your toddler or child's feelings

### How was it?

I wonder how it was for you, reading Part Four?

Or perhaps you have a toddler or child and just read the beginning part of Part Four?

I want to let you know that if you are finding that you are feeling more upset in general since starting this course, or if your child is crying more already, that this is very natural. As soon as we start drawing attention to feelings, they will often start coming out more!

Remember self-compassion, and reaching out to people who you know will listen to you.



### Starting the process of listening to your toddler or child's feelings

**The rest of this section is all about toddlers and children from 2-8.**

There is no one way to practice Aware Parenting. It is all about applying the principles and practices in your own unique combination.

One of my suggestions is **to observe your toddler or child for a few days or more before you start.**

**Perhaps you will notice some of these things:**

~ Times in the **evening when she seems agitated**, and perhaps starts crawling or running around more, being more active, and moving from one thing to the next;

~ Times when **she wakes up and starts crying immediately**;

~ Times when she is asking for feeding or food very frequently;

~ Times when she falls over or bangs her head and asks for feeding or food straight away;

~ Times when she is making **agitated vocalisations, or if she's speaking, talking in a 'whiny' tone**;

~ Times when **she is avoiding eye contact**;

~ Times when she seems **tense in her muscles**;

~ Times where she seems to **want to be carried all of the time**;

~ Times when she **doesn't seem to want to be curious in learning about the world**;

~ Times when **she asks for something, and you give it to her, and she is still agitated**;

~ Times when **she asks for something, and you give her something slightly different, and she has a big reaction**;

~ Times when you **gently set a loving limit and she has a big reaction**;

~ Times when you **offer her something that isn't quite what she wanted, and she suddenly cries or arches her back**;

~ Times when she **wakes up frequently at night**;

~ Times when she **hits or bites or throws things or is rough** with other children or pets;

~ Times when she is **sucking her thumb, or clutching a toy or blanket**;

~ Times when she is **sucking on her clothes**;

~ Times when she is **repetitively twirling your hair or pinching your skin or similar**;

~ Times when she is **repetitively twirling her hair or picking her nose**;

~ Times when she starts to have a **tantrum**.

*You might start to notice that there is a pattern to these observations.*

Perhaps she does these kinds of things whenever she is **tired**.

Perhaps she does more of these kinds of things **after you've had a busy day**.

Perhaps she does more of these kinds of things **when you are distracted**.

Perhaps she does more of these kinds of things **when you are feeling upset**.

Perhaps she does more of these kinds of things **after she has been separated from you**.



## **Adding attachment play to the mix**

Babies, toddlers, children and adults, **release stress and trauma, and express feelings like sadness, overwhelm, fear, and so on, through crying.**

**But there are other ways that we release feelings from our bodies.**

*Trembling, yawning, sweating and shaking are other ways that we release feelings.*

You may have noticed yourself **shaking** if you just stepped off the edge of the kerb and a car zoomed past.

You may have noticed yourself **sweating** if you are in a situation where you feel nervous.

**But there is another release mechanism that we can use really purposefully with toddlers and children. (And actually we can use it with babies too!)**

And that is **laughter**.

**(As long as there is no tickling involved!)**

*Laughter releases lighter fears, worries, and powerlessness.*

Have you ever been to see a comedian, or watched a comedy or been laughing with a friend?

You might notice that the things that comedies and comedians talk about are things that have a bit of an edge to them.

**They might be things that we feel a bit uncomfortable or embarrassed or worried about.**

For example, mothers-in-law, death, disability, and so on.

**We laugh to release these feelings from our bodies.**

**And babies, toddlers and children naturally have these mechanisms.**

**They will try to play and laugh to release feelings.**

**And often this release mechanism can be misunderstood.**

For example, if your toddler does something you don't want them to do, and you get a bit harsh or angry, and they laugh, then you might think that they think it is funny.

But nothing is further than the truth.

**It's much more likely that they are feeling scared.**

**Understanding this can make a HUGE difference to parents.**

Children will laugh and play when they are trying to release uncomfortable feelings from their bodies and when they are trying to make sense of things in life.

*So they will often naturally laugh when they are a bit scared, and also before bedtime, to release the feelings of the day.*

I talk about sleep in the next part!

**So, perhaps there is a time when you notice that your toddler gets really active, initiates lots of play, or does funny things. Those are also part of releasing.**

**She can release these lighter fears through laughter.**

**If you want to find out more about the specifics of laughter, I recommend reading Aletha Solter's [Attachment Play](#) book.**

**I also have an [online course on Attachment Play](#), which is based on Dr. Solter's book.**

*It's important not to try to get her to laugh if she is already crying or having a tantrum.*

Those are times to simply be with her and her feelings.

*It's also important to understand that laughter and play do not replace crying and tantrums.*

Laughter and tears release and express different types of feelings.

**But attachment play can be used in many of the situations that parents find challenging.**

**And laughter and attachment play often free up feelings a bit and pave the way for crying or tantrums.**

*You might have already noticed that after lots of connection, laughter or playing, your toddler or child might have a big cry.*

**We can easily think, "But you had such a lovely day; why are you crying?"**

So it can really help to know that the connection and laughter actually helped loosen up the more uncomfortable feelings.

And you've probably noticed that too - **it's much easier to cry when you are feeling connected with someone, and warm, and have had some fun or laughter first.**



## **How can you respond in these different situations?**

I'll go through the following scenarios:

1 ~ If she's having a **tantrum** or **crying** spontaneously;

2 ~ If she is **inviting play and laughing**;

3 ~ If she is using a **repression mechanism**;

4 ~ If she is **biting, hitting, throwing things, or being rough**.

5 ~ If she is showing **accumulation symptoms** such as not listening, not cooperating, doing things she knows we don't want her to, moving a lot, and 'being demanding'.





## If she's having a tantrum or crying spontaneously

### What might you do?

If she's having a tantrum or crying spontaneously then you can just **move in close and be with her, telling her that you're listening.**

Toddlers and children **need closeness when they are crying, but unlike babies, they don't always need to be held.**

**Come close and invite connection, invite eye contact, be present with her, and see what happens.**



### What might she do?

~ **She might come in close and want to be held whilst she continues crying.**

If that happens, you can just **hold her and be present with her, and tell her that you're with her and you're listening, until she finishes.**

~ **She might come in close and want to be held, and then stop crying.**

If she looks **engaged and makes eye contact once she has come in close**, then it tells you that she was needing closeness.

**But if she looks spaced out and feels tense and disconnected, it tells you that she is probably disconnecting from herself and her feelings.** That can happen if she was often breast-fed when she needed to cry, or often distracted when she needed to cry. And it's really common, so again, **please be really compassionate with yourself if this happens.** You might want to go for some **attachment play** at this point!

Something like, "Where are you? Are you hiding? Where is she? I thought I saw her here a minute ago!" This is called a **separation game** and can **help her reconnect with you and thus herself and her feelings.**

~ **She might want to stay where she is and continue crying.**

If that happens, you can just **keep being present, offering eye contact, telling her that you are there with her and you are listening.**

~ **She might start moving away from you.**

If that happens, it's important to **stay close with her.**

She needs to **feel connection whilst she is crying for the crying to be healing.**

So, if she starts to crawl or walk away, then I would follow her and keep inviting eye contact and talking to her.

**The more connected she feels, the more intense the expression of her feelings will generally be.**

**You will generally find that once she naturally finishes the crying or tantrum, that she is happier, more at peace, more smiley, more willing to cooperate, and sleeps more easily and peacefully.**

**(And of course, please listen to yourself and your intuition in all of these situations. These are just suggestions. The most important thing is to listen to your intuition, and observe your child, and work out what is going on from those two pieces of information.)**



## If she is inviting play and laughing

### What might you do?

~ You can join in and really meet her where she is.

It can be most helpful to bring about laughter by pretending to be the less powerful one, or pretending to be scared, or letting her chase you or pretend to scare you or pretend to be knocked over.

~ You might find yourself getting tired or frustrated or drifting off into thoughts about the future.

Connection and attachment play can bring up our own feelings, just like it can bring up our child's feelings.

You might be curious about what memories or feelings might be being stirred up.



### What might she do?

~ If she laughs when you do something (as long as it isn't tickling), then keep on doing it!

~ If she isn't laughing but is enjoying the game, then keep doing it!

~ If she starts to cry, then stop what you are playing and just be present with her, offering eye contact and telling her that you are there with her.



**If she is sucking her thumb, twirling your hair, pinching your skin, playing with a mole you have, clutching on to a soft toy, picking her nose, asking to be fed or for food frequently, clinging on to you, or doing other protection patterns (actions that protect herself from her feelings.)**

### **What might you do?**

There are **two** things you can start with ~ **connection, or connection plus attachment play.** And you might move to the **third thing of connection plus loving limits** after some while of practicing these two.

#### **~ Connect**

The most helpful first thing is to move in for **close connection.**

Aim to **offer eye contact, talk to her gently, and stroke her thumb or the hand** that is holding on to the toy or pinching your skin or clinging on to you.

You might then use **attachment play to help create some connection and release.**

Remember what we talked about in the section on repression, and **how she is doing this to hold in feelings.**

**She needs connection to help the feelings come out.**

Attachment play can be a really helpful thing here.

#### **~ Play attachment play**

~ With **thumb sucking** you could suck your thumb too and making all kinds of funny noises or funny expressions, or popping it out of your mouth with a big “pop”, or pretending that it has funny tastes, or asking to suck her thumb, and loving it or being surprised that it tastes of some funny taste.

~ With **hair twirling**, you might make a funny noise every time she does it, or pretend to fall over every time she does it (these are called contingency play and power-reversal games).

~ With **pinching your skin** or playing with a mole, you could also pretend to make a noise every time she does it, or fall over, or make a funny face. (You may need to set a loving limit if it hurts you.)

~ With **clutching on to a soft toy**, you could pretend to be the voice of the soft toy and start saying funny things.

~ With **picking her nose**, you could ask if you could join in, or you could ask what flavour it is and ask if you can (pretend to) eat it, and then do a big, over-the-top “yummmmyyy” or “yeeeeuukk”, or you could pretend to do it yourself.

*Inviting connection and attachment play helps loosen up her feelings, and helps her know that she is not alone with them.*

I see these **repression mechanisms** as a bit like **frozen** places.

When we move in with **warmth**, it **unfreezes the ice so that the feelings can move and be released, sometimes as the water of tears.**

With all of these repression mechanisms, I find it really helpful to remember that they are **flags**.

**It's not about taking away these things** - because when she is sucking her thumb or doing any of these things - the action **she is doing is the way in.**

**Connecting THROUGH the repression mechanism is the way to connect with her and her feelings.**

## ~ Set a loving limit (see below)

Even if you are setting a **loving limit**, as I talk about below, **you are still connecting THROUGH her repression mechanism/protection pattern.**



## What might she do?

~ **She might laugh** ~ then keep on doing it for as long as you can! She is releasing feelings like discomfort, uncertainty, fear and powerlessness!

~ **She might seem to enjoy it, but not laugh** ~ then still keep doing it for as long as you can. You are offering connection at the point of the protection pattern, and that will be making a difference, even if you don't see it then and there.

~ **She might avoid eye contact and seem to do that repression mechanism more** ~ then you might want to stop what you are doing and reconnect with yourself. Were you trying to get her to do something? Were you feeling connected? Were you being a bit too forceful? Once you connect with yourself, you might choose to just go for more simple connection, as above, or you might try a different flavour of attachment play.

~ **She might move into crying** ~ **if she does start crying, then you can just be with her**, inviting eye contact, telling her that you are there and you are listening, showing her love and affection.



## **If she is biting, hitting, throwing things, or being rough with other children or pets**

Again, remember that this is all about **understanding the causes of a child's challenging behaviours.**

When they are **hitting, or biting or throwing things, they are probably feeling fear or overwhelm or agitation or rage.**

This is so different from **older beliefs that children are doing things because they are inherently “bad”, or because they need to learn to be loving, or that they are doing it on purpose to hurt us or manipulate us.**

Those are all **old-fashioned beliefs** that come from ideas that were around a few hundred years ago, when children were seen to be **sinful, and crying was seen as a symptom of possession.**

**From an Aware Parenting perspective, all children are naturally cooperative, connected, and compassionate.**

**It's only painful feelings coming from unmet needs or stressful or overwhelming events that cause them to act in those challenging ways.**



### **What might you do?**

You have **two choices.**

You can either move in with **attachment play or loving limits.**

It's important to remember that from this perspective, **the reason she is doing those things is because she either has an unmet need, (such as for connection or choice), OR because she has a need for information, OR because she has painful feelings that have accumulated.**

As adults, **we often tend to think she needs more information**, and we can easily just tell our children, over and over again, that we don't want them to bite/hit and so on.

**But a need for information is actually the least likely cause of these behaviours.**

**It's much more likely that she is expressing a need, or a need to release.**

### **~ Attachment play**

You can move in with **attachment play to meet her need for connection and also release through laughter.**

### **What might you do?**

~ For example, **if she is hitting**, you could move in close with a pillow, and say something like, "oh, you're not going to hit me are you? I'm just a poor wee pillow?" (thank you to my colleague Sam Cuming who created this game!)

This is called a **power-reversal game.**

~ Or you might move in and say something like, "Looks like you need a million kisses!" or, "Don't chase me to the bedroom for a rumble on the bed!"

You can see from these games that **this really is very different from the punishments and rewards model, which is based on the belief that children are inherently unsocial and need to learn to be compassionate.**

Aware Parenting is based on the premise that **even toddlers and young children are inherently compassionate, and if they are not acting in those ways, they either have unmet needs or unexpressed feelings.**

**When we meet the needs and help them express the feelings, they can return to their natural compassionate selves.**



**What we are doing is creating change at the level of the cause of those behaviours.**

That makes these strategies both **compassionate AND effective!**

The thing with attachment play is that there is **no one game that will bring connection and laughter to every toddler or child.**

So it is a **practice to try different forms to see what is more likely to bring connection and release through laughter for your child.**



**What might she do?**

~ She might start **laughing and showing in her eyes and body that she is feeling connected** again, and show no more desire to do the challenging behaviour.

~ She might show that she is **more connected** and then **start crying.**

~ She may **keep on trying to hit or bite, or even do it more.**

In that last case, **it is probable that the feelings that underly the hitting or biting or throwing things are right close to the surface, and they are deeper than laughing will help with.**

In that case, **you may need to set loving limits to help them express the sadness, fear or rage through tears and tantrums.**



**~ Set Loving Limits**

Loving Limits are **completely different from punishing limits.**

**When connection and attachment play aren't enough to stop things like hitting or biting or roughness, we may need to step in and set a loving limit.**

Although of course we are wanting to **prevent someone getting hurt**, the other **main purpose of loving limits** is to **stop the challenging behaviour** so that the **feelings that are causing it can come out.**

**The more those underlying feelings come out, the less likely it is that our child will act in those ways, because they won't be feeling those things underneath.**

**Those feelings won't be sitting inside them, making them feel uncomfortable.**

*So loving limits are based on two things:*

*1 ~ Stopping the behaviour;*

*2 ~ Offering empathic, compassionate connection;*

It's this **combination** which makes it possible for our child to express the underlying feelings.



**What might you do?**

~ I usually recommend saying something like, ***“I won't let you hit me, sweetheart, and I'm right here with you.”***

See how there is the **limit** ~ ***“I won't let you hit me;”***

And the **empathic compassionate connection** ~ ***“sweetheart, and I'm right here with you.”***

~ We will also communicate that **nonverbally**:

**The nonverbal limit** ~ that might be gently preventing their arm from hitting or throwing;

**And the nonverbal compassionate connection** ~ the tone of our voice, our coming close, the quality of our movements, the look in our eyes.

*~ I don't recommend saying things like:*

*"We don't hit in our family."*

**Why? for two reasons:**

Because she has just hit. Where does that place her in the family? **This can lead to our child believing that they aren't a part of the family, which will be painful for them, which will increase the painful feelings, which will increase the challenging behaviours.**

And because **"We..."** doesn't provide the kind of connection required to help her feel the underlying feelings.

*~ not do I recommend saying:*

*"It's not okay to hit,"*

**Why? Again, for two reasons:**

Because children can often turn **"it's not okay"** into **"I'm not okay,"** which leads to shame, which is an incredibly uncomfortable feeling, and which may then create more challenging behaviours rather than less!

And again, because **saying, "It..."** doesn't create connection so that she can let out the feelings.

The power of,

**“I won’t let you...”**

is that **it is a direct “I” statement. It comes from us.**

*I statements create connection.*

*And connection is what is required to help our children let out those painful underlying feelings.*



**What might she do?**

**~ She might start crying and raging:**

If that happens, you could just keep there with her, **setting loving limits verbally and non-verbally** (you might find that reminding her of the loving limit when the feelings get quieter helps her cry more intensely again, thus helping her release more feelings).

**~ She might do that thing even more:**

If that happens, you could:

**Check out whether you are feeling relatively calm.** If you are coming in to set a loving limit but **you are feeling angry or frustrated**, you may not be providing enough loving compassion to help her go into her feelings. You might be able to remind yourself the importance of being loving and calm here.

**Try a different verbal or nonverbal loving limit**, for example, using slightly different words or slightly different way of being with her and preventing her from doing

the behaviour, for example, “I see that you’re upset, and I’m not willing for you to hit me,” or holding her hand in a different place, or more gently, or coming in closer.

~ **She might even then, keep doing that thing even more:**

This tells you that **you probably haven’t quite got what I call the “sweet spot.”**

If that’s the case, then:

**You may need to build up connection at other times using more non directive child centred play** (what I call ‘Present Time’) and **power-reversal games**. You can **read about this in Dr. Solter’s book [Attachment Play](#)**. I also have a **free course called [Powerful Present Time Practice](#)** on my [www.marionrose.net](http://www.marionrose.net) site which goes into this in much more depth.

~ **She might stop, but go very quiet, flat, and disconnected**. In this case, she is probably dissociating. If this happens, **you could just gently be with her, offering gentle connection and warmth and love.**



**If she is showing accumulation symptoms such as not listening, not cooperating, doing things she knows we don’t want her to, moving a lot, or being ‘demanding’**

Remember all those **symptoms of accumulation** we talked about before?

Having lots of **pent-up feelings** feels really uncomfortable.

I imagine you know that for **yourself** - when **you avoid being present in the moment** because **there are too many uncomfortable feelings** there?

**When a child has accumulated feelings, it feels uncomfortable for them.**

**It disconnects her from her true nature, and her desire to connect, cooperate and contribute.**

**So, when your child isn't apparently listening or responding to you, isn't cooperating, is moving around a lot, not sitting still, 'fidgeting', and doing things she knows we don't want her to, she is trying to deal with that discomfort.**

I imagine you have experienced that too.

I certainly have!

**Have you ever found that when you are feeling really agitated, and your child says, "I'm hungry," or "will you play with me?" that you respond harshly, or avoid looking at her, or don't even reply at all?**

**Old paradigms of human beings said that when children did things like that, that they were being 'naughty', or 'misbehaving', or being 'disobedient' or 'oppositional'.**

**But Aware Parenting asks us to put ourselves in our child's shoes.**

To believe that **their true nature is calm and aware and present.**

To believe that **she actually really wants to cooperate with us and contribute to us.**

And if she isn't doing those things, she actually **needs help from us.**

She needs **help to feel connected again with her true nature.**

**And to be connected with her true nature, she needs us to connect with her, meet her needs for connection, and to help her release those feelings that feel so uncomfortable to her.**



## What might you do?

### ~ Lovingly connect with her

~ You could go **close** to her, **invite eye contact**, speak **warmly** and lovingly to her, invite **hugs** and **warmth**, and generally show your love to her.

### ~ Play attachment play games with her

~ If she **isn't apparently listening**, you could go close to her and **pretend to talk in funny voices, different accents, pretend languages**, or to talk to a teddy or car next to her, wondering where your child is. You could start making **nonsense requests** like, "make sure you put the phone on the ceiling, and put your shoes in the bath."

~ If she **isn't cooperating**, such as not putting her clothes on, you could **pretend to put her clothes on you, or put her t-shirt on her feet, or pretend that you can't find her**. If she isn't coming to the car, you could **pretend that you've lost her, or pretend to be a puppy going to the car**, or ask her if she wants to race to the car. If she isn't letting you brush her teeth, you could **pretend to brush all the other parts of her**.

~ If she is **moving around a lot**, you could **join in with her and be as exuberant as her**. Meet her in her energy level, **invite her to chase you and pretend she keeps catching you, play rough and tumble**.

~ If she is being '**demanding**', you could **pretend that she is the queen and you are the servant**, and ask her if you could pick her nose or get her some gold, or do anything else for her.

~ The more **over the top and nonsensical and goofy** you are, the more likely it is that she will feel a deep sense of acceptance of herself, plus connection, and, if she is laughing, a deep sense of relief.

(You can read many more suggestions for attachment play in Aletha Solter's book [Attachment Play](#), in my [attachment play article](#) on my [www.marionrose.net](http://www.marionrose.net) site, or in my [Attachment Play Course](#).

### ~ Set loving limits

If she is doing something that she knows that you don't want her to do, it is **likely that she has feelings that she is needing help with expressing.**

She's trying to find a context to let them out.

This is very different from the old fashioned belief that she is 'deliberately trying to wind you up.'

**Setting a loving limit as soon** as you realise what is going on for her; "I won't let you play with the lamp, darling, and I'm here with you," is likely to **bring the feelings out before you start getting frustrated too.**

Remember, it isn't just about stopping her doing the action - **it's more about stopping the action so that she can let out the underlying feelings, so that she doesn't want to do that action any more.**

**So, if she doesn't stop, see if you can avoid getting more frustrated and demanding, and go for more connection and compassion instead.**

**She would stop if she could.**

**She needs your help with the feelings that are causing the behaviour.**





## Why can it be so hard to respond in compassionate ways?

~ **When our child dissociates**, and goes blank or doesn't seem to listen to us, it can stir our own feelings ('stroke our sweet spots') **from when we were children and our parents or teachers didn't respond to us.**

**The more we can listen to those younger parts of us with compassion**, or ask someone else to listen, **the less likely our own sweet spots will get stroked** when our child does that thing, and the **more we will be able to give them the kind of connection and attachment play they need.**

~ **When our child bites, hits, or acts harshly**, it can remind us of times that **we were treated harshly, either by our siblings, parents, teachers, or children at school.**

Again, **listening to those younger parts of us with loving compassion**, and/or asking someone else to listen to those feelings from back then, means that we release them, making us more available to be compassionate and available, and to set loving limits rather than harsh limits or disconnection.

~ **When our child doesn't appear to listen to us, or doesn't cooperate**, it can remind us of **times when we were children and we needed things** or asked for things from our parents, siblings, friends or teachers, **and they didn't respond to us.**

And yes, you know what I am going to say! **Listening to those younger parts of us**, or having someone else listen to them, frees us up to be really present with our child and offer them what they need so that they can connect with their true nature again!

~ When our child is '**demanding**', it can remind us of **when we were children and were told we 'had to' or 'should do' things by parents or teachers, and we felt powerless to choose.**

And yet again, **the key is listening to these feelings of the younger parts of us**, so we can hear what our children really need from us!

I've loved developing **my Inner Aware Parents**, who listen to the needs and feelings of the younger parts of me!

(And yes, I have articles and courses on that too!)



## **How are you feeling?**

Talking about these things can **stir up our own feelings**.

~ Perhaps, when I **talk about connecting with your child or doing attachment play with her**, you feel **worried that it will 'reward' her behaviour and she'll do it more often**.

Remember that this is based on a **different set of beliefs about human beings**.

**If you're upset and acting in ways that you don't enjoy with your children, what do you think would be more helpful?** Someone acting harshly towards you, or someone connecting with you and listening to you?

The beauty of Aware Parenting, as I said earlier, is that **you can try this out for yourself**.

**Experiment** with these ways for a day or a week and see what changes in your relationship with your child, their behaviour, and the joy you feel in parenting!

~ **Perhaps you feel resentful or angry when you read about doing attachment play**.

Just like with children, this can signal **unmet needs or past painful feelings**.

Perhaps you aren't getting enough sleep, support, nourishment, or stimulation for yourself.

*It's very hard to connect, do attachment play or set loving limits if our cup is empty.*

~ Or perhaps you remember your parents responding to you with harshness or disconnection when you did some of these behaviours.

We can feel painful feelings sometimes when we imagine giving our children things that we didn't receive.

I invite you to **be compassionate with yourself** as you explore all of this material.

And that's why **Aware Parenting isn't just about understanding our child's needs and behaviours and listening to her feelings**, it is also so much about understanding our needs and behaviours and listening to our feelings.

### **In the next Part**

I'll be talking about **sleep, and how differently Aware Parenting views sleep for babies and children.**





## Part Six ~ Sleep and Aware Parenting

### How was it?

I wonder how it was for you, reading Part Five?



### Aware Parenting and sleep

Aware Parenting has a very different way of looking at sleep to most other parenting paradigms.

**From an Aware Parenting perspective, babies and children need to have three things to sleep:**

**1 ~ To feel tired;**

**2 ~ To have a sense of connection;** (Babies need to be held or for us to be right there whilst going to sleep, and young children often still need closeness when going to sleep.)

**3 ~ To feel relaxed.**



*Secondly, tiredness itself is not seen as inherently painful or upsetting.*

Instead, **when we are tired, whether we are babies, children or adults, we are less able to repress our feelings.**

I see that as part of our **natural mechanisms** as human beings.

In order to **sleep more peacefully and calmly, we have an inbuilt way of being more likely to release any pent-up feelings, when we are tired.**

See how different this is to most other approaches?

**When babies and children are tired, their natural release mechanism will try to operate - so that they can release the feelings of the day and any accumulated feelings, so that they can go to sleep more easily, and sleep more peacefully.**



## **What do we often see when this natural process is happening?**

~ **they might ask more frequently for whatever ways we have taught them to repress feelings.**

This might mean breast-feeding more frequently, wanting the dummy, moving around more (if we rocked and jiggled them), or wanting more and more books to be read to them (if we read to them or distracted them when they were upset.);

~ **they might use ways that they have discovered themselves to repress their feelings.**

This might mean sucking their thumb, picking their nose, twirling their hair, rubbing their ear, sucking their clothes, or clutching on to a toy;

~ **they might show signs of pent-up feelings in their bodies.**

They might be running around a lot, or moving from one thing to the next, or avoiding eye contact, or apparently not listening;

~ **they might show signs of dissociation.**

Such as clutching on to us but with a sense of tension and disconnection;

~ **they might try to release through play.**

For example, starting to be 'silly' or funny or goofy or jumping on the bed or jumping on your back;

~ **they might try to release through trying to cry or have a tantrum.**

It's kind of like an **inner struggle between how we have taught them to be with their feelings, and their natural release mechanisms.**

And again, I invite you to be very **compassionate** with yourself here.

**The majority of the world tries to repress crying and tantrums. You really are not alone here.**

*And it is never too late to start listening to your baby or child's feelings!*



**Working against the healing mechanisms**

Because we don't really understand these healing mechanisms, we often work against them.

**~ Our baby keeps trying to cry to release the feelings of the day,**

and we might respond by feeding more, or jiggling, or rocking, or wearing them in a sling, or giving them a dummy, or reading them books, or taking them in the stroller, or patting them.

**~ Our toddler starts acting in 'silly' ways,**

and we might get frustrated and try to get them to calm down.

**~ Our child keeps asking for different things and still feeling agitated,**

and we keep on trying to fix it for him and wonder why he still isn't happy.

**~ Our child starts to have a big reaction to a small thing,**

and we try to distract them or get harsh with them.

**In other words, we try to calm them down by stopping the playing and laughing and crying.**

**But then we prevent their natural release mechanisms from operating.**

**And that is incredibly hard work, and can result in us feeling frustrated, and them feeling more and more agitated.**

**And then we feel surprised that they are taking a long time to go to sleep, or wake up frequently.**



## Working with the healing mechanisms

But if we **cooperate with these natural healing mechanisms**, then our baby or child can let out their feelings, and feel naturally calm.

**Instead of trying to get them to calm down, we can cooperate with their natural mechanism that actually brings true calm.**

When we try to calm them down (which usually means repressing their feelings), it just **pushes the feelings down.**

**Those feelings will inevitably come up again.**

Often when they reach the **end of a sleep cycle and are in lighter sleep.**

They will often **wake up again and again**, seeming to want that same thing again that got them to sleep in the first place.

And they will often **wake up early** in the morning.

**Whereas, the more we listen to those feelings, the more those feelings actually leave their bodies, and the more truly calm and relaxed they feel.**



## So, how does this work again?

Let's make this even clearer.

**If we try to calm babies down, that looks like:**

~ frequently breastfeeding;



~ rocking, jiggling, bouncing, wearing in a sling;

~ distracting with singing, reading books, white noise;

~ giving a dummy;



**If we try to calm children down, that looks like:**

~ distracting with singing, reading books;

~ giving them a screen to distract them;

~ asking them to calm down;



**And this often results in:**

~ moving around a lot during sleep;

~ tension during sleep;

~ waking up frequently during sleep;

~ waking up early;

~ waking up crying.



## What could we do instead?

### For babies:

1 ~ **Listen to their tiredness cues**, and knowing when they are tired (eg. rubbing eyes);

2 ~ **Offering plenty of connection** before sleep (such as through holding in arms or carrying);

3 ~ **Offering opportunities for attachment play** (such as peek-a-boo) and **crying in arms**.



### For children:

1 ~ **Listening to when they are tired**;

2 ~ **Offering plenty of connection before sleep** (such as 10 minutes of non directive child centred play);

3 ~ **Offering opportunities for attachment play** (such as rough and tumble, chasing games where they chase you and you keep on getting surprised when they catch you, and separation games like hide and seek)

**and setting loving limits where needed** (for example at the end of present time, or if they start getting rough during attachment play).

Remember, that we can expect challenging behaviours to come up - this isn't them being annoying, this is them signalling that they need help from you to express and release uncomfortable feelings.



## How do we know what to choose?

The important thing is to meet them where they are.

~ If they are **already close to tears**, then **attachment play probably isn't the way to go** - simply **offering closeness** might be enough for them to cry.

~ But if they are **jumping up and down on the bed and pretending to be a monster**, then **joining in with them and meeting their energy level and pretending to be scared of the monster**, is probably where they are at.

~ If they are **asking for you to read them yet another book and you've already read ten**, then setting a **loving limit** is probably the way to go.

**Trusting your intuition and following your child, you are likely to find the most helpful strategy at the time.**

You can **use these approaches at nap times, and also if your baby or child wakes up and is already crying.**



## What are the common effects of creating plenty of connection and release before sleep?

~ They **move around less in their sleep**;

~ Their **muscles are more relaxed during sleep** - they might return to sleeping with their arms above their heads;

~ They sleep for **longer periods**;

~ They are more likely to wake up **feeling happy and refreshed.**

And again, **remember that this is an accumulation model.**

If you are starting this when your child is one, or five, she will have some **pent-up feelings** to express and release and it might take a while before you notice a difference in her sleep.

AND, as I talked about in earlier parts, we are likely to see differences in their behaviour, such as more eye contact, more relaxed muscles, and so on.

*What I LOVE about this approach is that it means that parents don't need to choose between their needs or their baby or child's needs.*

**Parents can have restful sleep.**

**Babies and children can have their connection, attachment and release needs met.**

**Parents can feel empowered in knowing that they can help their babies and children sleep more peacefully.**



**What might your first steps be?**

Perhaps you might like to **observe your baby or child for a few days.**

A **journal** is really helpful for this!

**How do you usually tell that they are tired?**

What kinds of **behaviours** do you commonly see them doing when they are **tired**?

**How do you usually respond?**

Writing this down can be really helpful!



**Which, if any, of these behaviours do you think might indicate that:**

1 ~ she is **repressing** feelings through methods she **learnt**:

2 ~ she is **repressing** feelings through ways she **discovered** herself:

3 ~ she is showing that she feels **agitated** in her body:

4 ~ she is **trying to release through laughter**:

5 ~ she is **trying to release through crying**:



The next step might be to **notice what most appeals to you.**

**Would you like to do some more attachment play?**

**Would you like to listen to some crying?**

**Is there a time when you have most available attention and energy to do attachment play or listening to crying?**

*And then, you could just have a go.*

Remember, **ANY attachment play, and ANY listening to crying, will make a difference for your baby or child.**

She will get to experience being heard, and she will get to release some feelings.

Once you have had a go, I invite you to write down how it was for you, or talk about it to someone you know will really listen to you.

Pouring in connection, attachment play, and listening to crying can bring up feelings for us, and listening to those feelings will give us more spaciousness to go back the next day and offer more connection, attachment play and listening to crying.

*You can take your own timing, and go at your own pace.*

This approach takes time and practice.

There is a big learning curve to taking in very different ways of thinking and responding.

I invite you to be very gentle with yourself.

And if you want to dive deeper into this, I have a [\*\*Sound Sleep and Secure Attachment with Aware Parenting Course\*\*](#).



## **What came up for you?**

Where there any ideas that you had an 'aha' about?

Did you have any big insights about your child's sleep, or your own sleep?

Did you have any big feelings?

Did you remember anything about your sleep as a baby or a child?

**What are you needing now?**

### **In Part Seven**

I'll be talking about the journey of Aware Parenting, and where you might go from here.



## Part Seven ~ The next step on your journey

### How was it?

I wonder how it was for you,  
reading part six?

This is the last part, and it's really about  
the journey of Aware Parenting.

From my own journey practicing Aware  
Parenting since 2002, and from talking  
to many parents since becoming an  
Instructor in 2005, I have learnt a few  
things:



### 1 ~ It's a gradual learning journey

Aware Parenting is often completely **different** from how we were raised, and from the culture we live in.

It takes time to learn to **read our baby or child's cues**, practice **attachment play and loving limits and listening to crying**.

It takes time for us to **become more comfortable with feelings**.

It takes time for us to **change our beliefs about why babies and children do things**.



And most of all, it takes time for us to **change our relationships to our own feelings and needs and our own protection patterns and the internalised voices of our parents and teachers.**

It takes time for us to **shift beyond the guilt that we feel when we tell ourselves we ‘should’ do certain things, and the shame that we feel when we tell ourselves that we’re ‘bad’.**



## **2 ~ We each will have our own style**

Our own **experiences** during infancy, childhood, teenage years and early adulthood, and the **beliefs** we acquired, the **stresses and traumas** we experienced, and the ways we **repress** or **dissociate** from our feelings, will mean that **each of us practices Aware Parenting in different ways.**

Some of us will **focus on meeting the needs of our babies and children, others will focus on attachment play, others on crying.**

Some of us will want to listen to some crying, others will want to listen to all of our child’s feelings.

There is no one ‘right’ way.

**There isn’t really ‘perfect’ Aware Parenting because each of us is on our own journey.**



### **3 ~ We will tend to start with our child first, and then apply it to ourselves**

Over the years, I've seen that parents start with their baby or child, and then **begin to realise that this is so much about their lives too.**

**We may learn to value our needs, and reconnect with the power of crying and laughter again.**

**We may stop judging ourselves and punishing ourselves and start to trust our own preferences and wants.**



### **What is your next step on the journey?**

There are many resources for you on the journey!

Do you want to **read books, or articles or newsletters?**

Do you want a **consultation?**

Do you want to **join a Facebook group?**

Do you want to **do an online course?**



## Books

I highly recommend reading ALL of Aletha's books.

However, if you want to read one at a time, this might help:

If you have a **baby**, I recommend starting with [The Aware Baby.](#)

If you want to **understand crying and tantrums and have a baby or a child**, I recommend [Tears and Tantrums.](#) (The picture on the front is of my daughter and her Dad!)

If you want to learn more about **attachment play**, I recommend [Attachment Play.](#) (The picture on the front is of me and my son!)

If your child is **2-8 years and you want to learn more about democratic discipline and all the other facets of Aware Parenting**, I recommend [Helping Children Flourish.](#)

If you have a **baby to a 25 year old and you want to understand how you can apply Aware Parenting to make it less likely that your child turns to drugs**, I recommend [Raising Drug Free Kids.](#)



## Websites

Aletha Solter's website is at [www.AwareParenting.com.](http://www.AwareParenting.com)

My main one is at [www.marionrose.net](http://www.marionrose.net)



## Facebook groups

There are many Facebook groups - there's [international one](#), there is an [Australian](#) one, and groups for [Melbourne](#), the [Gold Coast, Byron Bay](#) and [Canberra](#). There is a [U.K.](#) one and a [Dutch](#) one. There is one dedicated to [Attachment Play](#), and more!



## Aware Parenting Consultations

You can find out about consultations with Aletha Solter [on her website](#) - she offers consultations by Skype all over the world.

You can find out about consultations with me [on my main website](#) - I am a Level Two Aware Parenting instructor and offer consultations by Skype all over the world.

You can find out about other instructors [here](#) - there are instructors in 17 countries!



## Free Articles

There are plenty of free articles on Aletha's [on her website](#) and [on my main website](#).



## Videos

You can see videos on [My You Tube Channel](#)



## Newsletters

You might like to sign up for [my regular newsletters.](#)



## Resources

From here, you might be interested in my [Aware Parenting Babies Q and A Vault](#)



## Online Courses

I have many online courses on Aware Parenting. You can find them all on my [www.marionrose.net](http://www.marionrose.net) website.

You might like the [Aware Parenting Babies Course](#), co-run by me and my colleague Helena Mooney.

You might want to learn more about Present Time (non directive child centred play), in my free [Powerful Present Time Practice.](#)

You might want to find out more about attachment play, in my [online course on Attachment Play.](#)

You might want to go deeper into Aware Parenting and sleep, in my [Sound Sleep and Secure Attachment with Aware Parenting Course.](#)

You might want to explore your and your children's relationships with screens in my [Kids, Screens and Aware Parenting Course.](#)

You might like to dive deeper into Aware Parenting in my [Living Aware Parenting Course.](#)

You might like ongoing material and community, in my  [Aware Parenting Virtual Village](#)

You might like to apply Aware Parenting to your homeschooling journey, and join my  [Aware Learning Community.](#)

You might like support and learning to become an Aware Parenting Instructor, in my  [Aware Parenting Instructor Mentoring Course.](#)



Thank you SO much for reading this book! I'd love to hear from you if you want to let me know how it was for you! You can email me at [lovingbeing@iinet.net.au](mailto:lovingbeing@iinet.net.au)

**Much love,**



*B.Sc. Ph.D. Dip.Couns. Dip.Psych.*

*Level Two Aware Parenting Instructor*

[www.marionrose.net](http://www.marionrose.net)

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