II. Your Baby's Earliest Feelings: The Positive Feelings

What do your baby's positive feelings look like?

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How Does Your Baby Express Her Earliest Feelings?
What Do Feelings Look Like?

Last time we talked about your baby's earliest feelings. We introduced the idea that human beings are born with about 8-10 reactions, or feelings, which turn into our more complex adult emotional life. Today we explore what these feelings look like - that is, how your baby expresses her feelings. In a future discussion, we will examine how feelings work.

The human face is made up of many small muscles. These muscles help give the face its expressiveness. The face is a wonderful area for communication. The infant cannot talk. "Infant" means "incapable of speech." So the infant uses its face, along with vocalizations and bodily movements, to express what's going on.

Studies show that babies prefer to look at human faces more than anything else. They especially focus on the eyes and the mouth. The eyes and mouth have the most muscles in the face and can send the most overt and subtle messages. Thus, the baby and the adult communicate largely through their faces. The adult will also use words, which the baby will gradually learn and hook up with feelings. As we will discuss another time, things can get complicated and confused because the words of the adult may not accurately label the feelings of the baby; in addition, adults are able, to some extent, to mask and distort their basic innate feelings.

So here we go. One way to understand feelings is to divide them up into positive and negative feelings. There are two positive feelings: interest and enjoyment. There is one transitional or "re-setting" feeling, surprise: surprise seems to clear or re-set the nervous system to prepare it for the next stimulus. There are six negative feelings: distress, [anger](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/anger), [fear](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/fear), [shame](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/embarrassment), disgust, and dissmell.

You might wonder: why are there more negative than positive feelings? Great question! It may be because it is more important for your baby to let you know when there are problems than when things are going well. Negative feelings, as we'll see, are really "SOS" signals. Negative feelings are your baby's way of saying "Please help! I am in trouble - something is wrong here!"

Today, let's start with the positive and transitional feelings. We will describe each feeling, how it is expressed, and show you pictures.

**Positive Feelings**
*Interest* (curiosity): The feeling of interest or curiosity is seen in your baby's exploring. Interest is the root of our learning and [creativity](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/creativity). The facial expression includes the baby being focused, looking and listening, engrossed. The eyebrows may be slightly lifted or slightly lowered; the mouth may be a bit open.

*Enjoyment:* Your baby smiles, her lips widens up and out, she laughs, and her eyes brighten. She may make some high-pitched sounds and gleeful noises. If your baby is smiling and [laughing](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/laughter), all is well.

**Transitional Feeling**
 *Surprise:* The baby's eyebrows are up, and the mouth forms an "O" shape.  Her head may turn, and she may make an effort to turn her body if the surprise came from the side or in back of her.

So these, then, are the earliest positive and transitional feelings. The next time we will talk about the negative feelings.

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**Suggested Readings**
Ekman P (2003). Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life. New York: Henry Holt.