

MOTHERING A HIGH NEEDS CHILD

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A friend of mine first had an angel daughter and then her high needs son. Before he came along she went all over the place with her easy-peasy baby and wondered what was wrong with other parents who had louder and harder kids. Only when her son arrived with a mind of his own did she eat her words (and thoughts).

When a new mother gets handed a spirited / high needs baby it can be intense. Before becoming a mother I hadn't really been near too many babies having a small family and not too many friends with kids. So apart from a few bawling infants on airplanes (whose parents must have done something wrong of course) I had mostly seen sleeping babies all over the place. Parents strolling down marine drive with the babe looking peacefully out of a pram were my close encounters. If babies were having a meltdown I'd scowl at the parent and mutter about why would you bring a child to a restaurant when he or she was clearly at wits end.

Then along came sonny.

Very early did I notice something was different. This didn't seem like how babies were meant to be.

Maybe it was his constant waking if he was put on a surface away from me (even as a newborn).

Maybe it was the loud crying and difficulty in calming down no matter what.

Maybe it was the constant moving of his arms and legs at breakneck speed ALL THE TIME if he was not swaddled.

Maybe it was his need to be swaddled to sleep for almost 6 months.

Maybe it was his need to constantly be pacified at the breast and nothing else would do.

Maybe it was his need for constantly being in arms and not being put down. EVER.

Maybe it was that nothing, no swing, no bouncer, no pram was ever good enough.

Maybe it was that he has never (till date) fallen asleep on or in anything except on another human.

Maybe it was that no rules or books applied to him or his high-strung nature. (Except maybe [Raising your Spirited child](#) by Mary Kurcinka).

Here's the thing. After he came along I have read hundreds of books and blogs about babies and their sleep and other things. And I have come to the conclusion that if you have a high needs baby, nothing works and nothing applies.

You have to dance and bounce and sing and talk and bounce (I know I already said that) and comfort at night and feed and pacify and do everything it takes for however long it takes.

Because these persistent creatures need you, and will continue needing you. Highly. Day or night!

At 16 months N is still a high needs toddler but since he can communicate much better, life is easier

by far!

A car drive means I have to constantly talk to him without a pause as he is cooped up and not getting physical stimulation.

He wakes about 5 times at night and is never (EVER) in a drowsy state. He is either asleep or up bolt upright. Of course he needs help falling back to sleep.

He is either very happy or very upset. There is no grey only black and white.

He knows what he wants and is not shy to ask for it.

He is loud when he is upset and louder when he is happy.

He screeches and laughs in delight one minute and crumples in dismay the next.

He doesn't get distracted easily and is persistent when he wants something.

He cannot sit in a stroller for more than 5 minutes. He cannot do anything for more than 5 minutes except sit in his high chair because he knows there's food about.

Here is the main characteristics of high needs children: (according to [Dr. Sears](#))

INTENSE (cry more, demand immediate responses, feed/nurse voraciously),

HYPERACTIVE (high energy level-not the disorder),

DRAINING (use up lots of parents' energy, exhausting to parent),

FEEDS FREQUENTLY (especially applicable to babies and nursing),

DEMANDING (of parents and their energy),

AWAKENS FREQUENTLY (needs less sleep, especially during the day),

UNSATISFIED (no matter what you do, it doesn't improve their fussiness),

UNPREDICTABLE (including extreme mood swings),

SUPERSENSITIVE (keenly aware of their environment, quickly overstimulated),

UNABLE TO PUT DOWN (especially when babies),

UNCUDDLY (touch is overstimulating, or hates to be confined, but is cuddly),

NOT A SELF-SOOTHER (bonds to people, not objects),

SEPARATION-SENSITIVE ("velcro baby", doesn't like new people/places).

[Source](#)

As a breastfeeding mother, raising a high needs child is even harder on me or easier whichever way

you look at it. This is because N wants my 100% attention all the time no matter who else is around.

His father or care takers come a distant 2nd. Which means yours truly has her hands full. However I am the only one that can sooth him and he visibly relaxes in my arms. There are whole minutes where he can cuddle in my arms and be still. In other arms he arches back and wriggles and frets.

The first few months of raising N were tough. Clearly I had no clue what I was in for. I had decided my baby was going to sleep in his crib, that he was going to sleep in his own room, that he was not going to be picked up all the time and was going to be allowed to cry until he realizes who was boss, he was going to sit in a car seat. I had all these notions that have been systematically dispelled.

I had to let go of a lot of 'Western' thoughts and ideas I had. I had to change my parenting style to one of [evolutionary parenting](#) where I fed baby on demand, co slept, wore baby, kept him close and attached. Therefore my parenting style that I write about on his blog stems from this, and I don't plan on ever going back to any other way even if baby #2 is calmer. Being as natural a parent as possible and soothing the high needs child by your presence is the only thing that works!

Over time the bond that has been built because of his nature is something I truly love and feel blessed for. I know he needs me to be calmed and I am glad I can be there for him and up for the challenge.

The beautiful bright sensitive boy is shining through all the craziness.

He has made me a better person, the best I can be, more patient and more giving. He has pushed me to be more than I ever thought I could be.

It took awhile for me to realize that I was not doing anything wrong as a parent. It's his in built temperament. All I can do is give him as much of my self and energy as I can. And then some!

As much as I enjoy my little ball of unpredictability to uplift my day and make life worth living, I say this, when my 2nd little one arrives, be is another boy or a girl, let him/ her be calm. Phew!

Other parents of high needs children, what did you do to keep your sanity?

Thanks for reading!

