During the spring and summer, we often get calls from people who’ve found a baby songbird outside of the nest. Unfortunately, well-intentioned attempts to “save” a baby bird can do more harm than good. When should you take action, and what action should you take? We’ve created a handy chart to help you figure out what to do.

Contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or wildlife care center. For more, visit massaudubon.org/babybirds.

START
Is the bird visibly injured, or has a cat attacked it?

NO
Are its eyes open?

YES
Are its feathers few and perhaps in tubelike sheaths?

NO
Can you see the nest?

YES
Return the bird to the nest. Most birds don’t have a well-developed sense of smell, so the parents won’t know that the baby bird has been touched by a person.

NO
Make a replacement nest using a shallow basket (2–5” high). Place dried grass in the bottom of the basket. Cut two 20” lengths of wire and push them through the bottom so there are four pieces of wire hanging down. Place the basket on the top of a branch in a nearby tree and use the wires to securely attach it. Put the birds inside.

YES
Fledglings rarely need human intervention. Parent birds will continue to feed their offspring on the ground and teach them to fly. If a bird is in immediate danger (for example, if it’s on a sidewalk or road), place it on top of a nearby shrub or bush and leave the area. Don’t attempt to feed the baby—its parents can do a much better job!

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Adapted, with permission, from Rosemary Mosco’s chart at birdandmoon.com.

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