

# SHAKING KILLS: INSTEAD PARENTS PLEASE EDUCATE AND REMEMBER

## **Shaking A Child Can Cause Severe Injury Or Death**

Doctors have become aware that babies and young children can be the victims of an injury frequently referred to as **shaken baby syndrome**. It doesn't happen just to babies. Shaking an infant, even up to **age 5**, can damage their brain and causes death or serious injuries. Shaking a baby is actually more likely to cause brain injury than hitting the baby with the same force.

Babies - and infants - are extremely vulnerable to injuries from shaking because their neck muscles aren't strong enough to control the motion of their head. When they are shaken, their heads wobble rapidly back and forth, and their brain hits the inside of the skull. The brain and blood vessels of a baby are very fragile and easily damaged by whiplash motions, such as shaking, jerking and jolting.

### *Consequences of Shaking*

- Death
- Brain damage
- Spinal injury / paralysis
- Blindness/impaired vision
- Seizures
- Retardation- mild to severe
- Impaired development of motor and sensory skills
- Learning disabilities
- Broken and dislocated bones

The results: **one** of every **four** shaken babies will die; **two** out of every **four** **who live** will suffer

from brain injuries that cause comas, paralysis, seizures, or blindness. For parents whose children survive, the financial burden of medical treatment can also be enormous: the average cost for five years of medical treatment of a shaken baby is \$1,000,000.

There are many reasons why babies are shaken. The most frequent reason is that an inexperienced caregiver can't cope with continual crying. But some babies just have to cry - sometimes for three or more hours - and there is nothing that will stop them.

It is usually anger or frustration that causes shaking, but not always. Many people don't realize that children as old as 5 years of age can be injured by shaking. People who would never dream of hitting their child think nothing of telling a toddler to "stop or I'll shake some sense into you".

### What You Can Do To Prevent SBS Injuries

- **NEVER, EVER** shake an infant or young child. **Never!**
- **Always** support a baby's head. Instruct **everyone** who holds a baby, especially caregivers, how to properly support the head when holding, playing with or carrying the baby.
- **Awareness.** Make sure **everyone** in contact with a young child is **fully aware** of the danger of shaking infants, even in play. "Everyone" includes the parents, grand-parents, other children, friends and relatives. Assume they know nothing.

### Symptoms of severe shaking may include

- difficulty in breathing
- choking
- seizures
- vomiting
- unusual inattentiveness
- loss of consciousness
- bleeding on the eyes
- pain when being picked up from broken ribs or arms
- bruises on the chest or arms

### Symptoms of mild shaking injury include:

- unexplained changes in behavior:
- poor feeding
- vomiting or flu-like symptoms without accompanying fever or diarrhea
- lethargy
- irritability

Be aware of unexplained changes in behavior

A simple coping plan. When alone

1. STOP: when you feel anger or frustration, immediately place the baby in a safe place, such as a playpen or a crib

2. TIME OUT and CALM DOWN:

▶ Sit down or walk out of the room - but not too far away that you can't hear the child.

▶ Listen to music for a short time or do something that relaxes you.

▶ Call a friend or relative for support and advice.

▶ Run a vacuum cleaner to drown out crying noise (this noise also calms some babies).

3. TRY AGAIN: when you've calmed down, try again to help the baby.

4. CHECK FOR A CAUSE: crying may indicate

▶ hunger

▶ a wet diaper

▶ need to be held

▶ teething discomfort

▶ ear ache

▶ pain or illness

Check each possibility in turn.

5. PLAY IT SAFE: if you can't calm the baby and the crying is either unusually intense or continues for an unusually long time, call the doctor.

- **Develop a Coping Plan.** Moments of anger and frustration are inevitable. Learn what to do if the baby won't stop crying - before it happens. Work out a coping plan to follow. Learn what you can do to reduce your frustration.

- **Be Observant.** Look for reasons for the crying, routines that comfort the baby, things that distract the baby from crying, patterns to the baby's crying. Recognize when you are - or are becoming- tense, frustrated or angry.

- **Share the Plan.** Let the parents know what your coping plan will be. Share that plan with **everyone** else who will be with the child. Ask the parents how they cope with crying. Ask them what makes the baby cry, what stops the baby from crying, how you can help the baby. Ask them to tell you about the **routines** that the baby is used to following.

- **Normalize the Plan.** Let them know that you have a coping plan every time you take care of a young child. Let them know that you are responsible and prepared to handle *feelings* of frustration and anger, and that you are making a commitment to them and the baby to follow that plan.

- **Be Proactive.** Ask yourself what you'll do when you're angry.

- **Be Organized and Be Available.** Leave time to talk with the parents before they leave so you can

make sure that you know where to find diapers, formula, pacifiers, blankets, and anything that is going to help the baby stop crying. Ask when the child was last fed and changed. Make sure you know when they'll be back, and how to reach them or some other responsible person in an emergency. Let them know that you know it's OK to err on the side of caution and call for help if the baby or young child is crying inconsolably or there is some reason that you are at all concerned about losing control. Let them know that you know it is never OK to lose control and shake a baby. **Never.** Not for any reason in the world.

If you know or think a baby has been shaken:

Get help. Even though you may feel embarrassed or guilty, call 911. Get the baby to the emergency room immediately. This can save the baby's life.

Tell the truth. Bleeding inside the brain can be treated in some cases, but only if the doctors know that the baby was shaken.

**Be Aware.** Before the parents leave, ask them to both look at the child with you. See if there are any bruises, scratches or unusual behavior.

**Look** to see if the baby is bruised, unusually sensitive to touch, flinches or shows other unexpected reactions to that person.

**Do the same thing when they come home.**

**Always tell** the parents what happened while they were away. Tell them if the baby cried, was sick, fell or had any unusual behavior while they were away.

## Prevent Injury - Be Safe, Not Sorry...Don't Shake! - Instead, Stop And...

- First and foremost, put the child down in a safe place. Then:
- Leave. Leave the room for a few minutes. It's OK to leave the room if the baby's crying!
- Breathe. Take 10 deep breaths. Look at the ceiling. Close your eyes, then take 10 more.
- Call. Call the parents. If you can't reach them, call your parents, a friend, neighbor, a relative or the operator. You can vent or ask them to come over. Just talk to someone else.
- Walk. Put a cup of water in the microwave, set it for three minutes and walk around the house or just outside until it's done.
- Indulge. Take a few minutes to do one thing for yourself that relaxes you. Play a favorite song, get a soda or a glass of water, do an exercise, wash your face or take a shower, read a newspaper story, the comics, an article in a magazine or a chapter in a book, listen for the weather on the radio.
- Do. Do something physical that's different: shake a rug, do dishes or laundry, scrub a floor, beat a pillow, throw away trash, clean a closet. Climb the stairs and come back down. Do ten knee bends, walk around and do ten more. Step outside and check for mail, or go to your car and slam the door shut.
- Sit. Sit down, close your eyes, think of a pleasant place in our memory, and count to sixty. Do not move until you finish.
- Think. Once you feel calmer, think about reasons that the baby may be crying.

Is the baby hungry, tired, or gassy?

Was the baby too hot or too cold?

Lonely, frightened or frustrated?

Does the baby need a change?

Then think about what you will have to do to find out if that is the problem. Are you ready?

- Write.

Write down why you are frustrated, what you can do about it.

Write down ten things you like best about yourself as a parent.

Write down ten things you love about your child.

Write a note about your feelings to read to your child tomorrow.