

YOUNG FAMILIES NEWSLETTER — SEPTEMBER 2008

Shaken Baby Syndrome



Dear Young Families:

Certain developmental phases can provoke anger and frustration in even the most well-meaning and conscientious caregivers and parents. A difficult phase and challenge for parents is crying. Crying is normal, but it can also trigger violence. A crying baby may be hungry or gassy, have a soiled diaper, be sick or in pain, be frustrated or bored, or can't stop crying no matter what you do.



This newsletter addresses Shaken Baby Syndrome and how parents and caregivers can realize that crying is a baby's only way to communicate needs and wants. Having a plan to cope with crying can help.

Sincerely,

Cyndy Jacoby
Family Living Agent

What is Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS)?

Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is a term used to describe a type of inflicted traumatic brain injury that happens when a baby is violently shaken.



SBS can occur from as little as five seconds of shaking.

When someone forcefully shakes a baby, the child's head rotates about uncontrollably because infants' neck muscles aren't well developed and provide little support for their heads. The violent movement pitches the infant's brain back and forth within the skull, rupturing blood vessels and nerves throughout the brain and tearing the brain tissue. The brain strikes the inside of the skull, causing bruising and bleeding to the brain.

The damage is even greater when the shaking ends with an impact (hitting a wall or a crib mattress, for example), because the forces of acceleration and deceleration associated with an impact are so strong. After the shaking, swelling in the brain can cause enormous pressure within the skull, compressing blood vessels and increasing overall injury to its delicate structure.

Normal interaction with a child, like bouncing the baby on a knee, will **not** cause SBS, although it's important to **never** shake a baby under **any** circumstances because gentle shaking can rapidly escalate.

Because the brain controls the entire body, damage to the brain may affect any function. Shaking a child can result in:

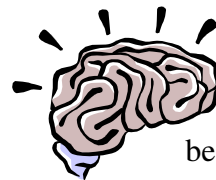
- Death
- Brain Damage
- Fractures to ribs and bones
- Seizures
- Blindness and/or Deafness
- Mental Retardation
- Severe Motor Dysfunction
- Learning and Developmental Disabilities

Shaken baby syndrome is the most common cause of mortality and accounts for the most long-term disability in infants and young children.

Be Aware of Shaking Symptoms

Some of the early symptoms of shaking are:

- Extreme irritability
- Lethargy
- Poor feeding
- Poor sucking or swallowing
- Breathing problems
- Convulsions
- Vomiting
- Pale or bluish skin
- No smiling or talking
- Seizures
- Inability to lift head
- Head or forehead appears larger than usual
- Soft-spot on head appears bulging
- Inability of eyes to focus or track movement
- Unequal size of pupils



Any of these symptoms can lead to severe disability or death. SBS injuries usually occur in children younger than 2 years old, but may be seen in children up to the age of 5.

Seek Medical Help Immediately

If you know or suspect that an infant or young child has been shaken, it is critical that you seek medical help immediately. As with any emergency, contact the parents as soon as you can, but the first call must be to 911.

If the child stops breathing before emergency help arrives, begin CPR.

If the child is vomiting and you don't suspect spinal injury, turn his head to the side to prevent choking and aspiration.

If you suspect a spinal injury, **carefully** roll the whole body to the side as one unit (logrolling) while protecting the neck to prevent choking and aspiration.

Do NOT pick up or shake the child!

To Soothe the Baby

Possible reasons a baby might cry and the corresponding solutions.



Painful Tummy Because of Gas

- Feed slowly and burp frequently.

Too Hot or Too Cold

- Feel skin, adjust clothing.

Wet or Dirty Diaper

- Change diaper, treat diaper rash.

Teething

- Offer teething ring or wet cloth.

Hungry or Thirsty

- Try feeding or offering a drink.

Bored

- Talk, sing, walk, play music, give toys, show books, make eye contact.
- Try watching cartoons on TV – the bright colors and quick action are sometimes entertaining.

Anxious

- Provide quiet or soothing noises such as humming or singing a lullaby, or the sound of the vacuum cleaner sometimes calms a baby.



- Wrap securely, hold still, or rock.
- Bathe.
- Provide a pacifier.

- Decrease stimulation – do not pass from person to person, reduce rocking and patting, turn down or turn off lights, have room cool and quiet.
- Nurse the baby if you are breastfeeding.

Uncomfortable in Some Way (Example: Tired)

- Snuggle baby close to your chest; your heartbeat may comfort the baby.
- Offer a favorite blanket or soft toy while cuddling your baby.
- Offer a soother or teething ring.
- Give baby a gentle back rub.



- Provide gentle motion by walking or rocking your baby; use a baby swing or take your baby for a walk in a stroller.
- Nurse your baby if you are breastfeeding.

Unwell

- Take baby to the doctor.
- Call your nurse helpline for health advice.

Source: Provided by Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund, 110 East Main Street, Suite 614, Madison, WI 53703, 608-266-6871, <http://wctf.state.wi.us>

To Calm Yourself

- Imagine you are somewhere relaxing and pleasant like a warm beach.
- Read.



- Listen to music.
- Take a shower or bath.
- Take a deep breath and slowly count to 10. Don't think about the problem – just concentrate on your breathing, count, and calm down.
- Close your eyes and take deep breaths.
- Write down the 5 best things about yourself.
- Write down the 5 best things about the baby.
- Write down your feelings.
- Count to 100.
- Ask a friend or relative to come and help.
- Talk to someone about your feelings.
- Concentrate on something – like a crossword puzzle.
- Use positive self-talk. (For example, "I can calm myself." and "The baby knows I am trying.")
- Ask a friend, relative, or caregiver to look after the baby so you can leave for a break.
- Join a parenting group for emotional support and to build parenting skills.
- Do something that makes you laugh or smile.



- Yell in a room away from others.
- Yell in your head silently.
- Yell into a pillow.
- Beat on pillows, cushions, or mattress.
- Hit a punching bag or weight bag.
- Scream with a towel in your mouth.
- Rip a telephone book or newspaper.
- Exercise.
- Do housework; shake a rug.
- **Remember, it is more important to stay calm than to stop the crying.**

Resources:

National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome
www.dontshake.org

Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund,
<http://wctf.state.wi.us>

Fact Sheet – University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Facts About Shaken Baby Syndrome (Fact Sheet-07-48)



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I can call anytime during the day . . .



Other ideas to soothe baby . . .

In an emergency, I can call . . .





Other ideas to calm myself . . .

