

You Can Prevent Shaken Baby Injuries

Shaken Baby Syndrome is the name given to injuries that result from shaking a baby or young child. Any shaking or quick motion that makes a baby's head roll or snap back and forth may cause serious injury.

A baby's head is heavy and large, compared to the rest of the body, and its neck muscles are not strong enough to support the weight of the head. Shaking can tear blood vessels inside the baby's head and cause brain damage. This kind of injury may not heal.

Shaken baby injuries often happen because a parent or someone else looking after a baby doesn't know about protecting the baby's fragile head.

Even playing with a baby can be dangerous, if the person isn't careful. Although it is unlikely that these kinds of injuries would happen while playing with an infant, parents and caregivers should always be aware of how easily an infant's brain could be hurt.

Always support an infant's head and neck. Even minor injuries to a baby's brain can cause lifelong problems.

Did you know?

Shaking a baby can cause:

- Seizures
- Blindness or deafness
- Paralysis
- Permanent brain damage
- Death

ABC – Always Be Careful

- Always support the baby's head.
- Don't toss a baby or young child into the air.

- Learn how to cope with your baby's crying. Many shaking injuries happen when parents or other caregivers are frustrated by a child's behaviour.
- Talk to others who care for your baby (like babysitters, relatives, and friends) about how to safely handle your baby. Make sure they understand that it is more important for the caregiver to be calm than to stop your baby from crying.

How does Shaken Baby Syndrome happen?

Nobody means to hurt their baby, but it still happens. In most cases of shaken baby syndrome, a frustrated parent or caregiver shakes a baby or young child to make the baby stop crying. Crying that just won't stop is usually what makes a person shake a baby.

Why do babies cry?

Sometimes it is easy to figure out why a baby is crying. Sometimes it is not so easy.

Crying is normal, and some babies just cry more than others. Most often, babies cry because they are hungry, they need a diaper change or they want to be comforted. Sometimes, babies cry just because they need to release some tension of their own.

Crying is an annoying sound. It is supposed to be. If it was a pleasant sound, crying would be easy to ignore and the baby's needs would not be met.

Crying may mean that your baby is not feeling well. If you are worried, take your baby to a doctor. Crying does not mean your baby is being bad or that your baby is mad at you.

What can you do when your baby won't stop crying?

It is easy to get frustrated and angry when you are caring for a baby that won't stop crying. You may be feeling tired, alone, or feel like your efforts are not good enough. Many people feel this way.

There is no magic answer that works all of the time with every baby. You may have to try several things before you find out what works best for you and your baby. Remember, it is more important to stay calm than to stop the crying.

Try some of these ideas:

Snuggle the baby close to your chest.

- Your heartbeat may comfort the baby.

Check the baby's diaper.

- Keep the baby clean and dry.

Feed the baby slowly and burp the baby often.

- Gas in the baby's tummy can be painful. If you are breastfeeding, don't eat gas-producing foods like beans, spicy foods and caffeine (coffee, tea, cola).

Wrap the baby in a soft blanket.

- Keep the baby warm and comfortable – but not *too* hot.

Provide some soft music or other relaxing sounds.

- Try humming or singing a lullaby.
- Sometimes, the sound of the vacuum cleaner, clothes dryer or dishwasher helps calm a baby.

Offer a soother or teething ring.

- Offer a favourite blanket or soft toy while cuddling the baby.

Provide gentle motion.

- Walk with or rock the baby.
- Use a baby swing if you have one.
- Take the baby for a walk in a stroller.
- Some babies like to go for a car ride (be sure the baby is safely secured in an infant care seat).

Let the baby "cry it out"

- Before your emotions get out of control, gently place the baby in a safe place and

leave the room. Take a 15-minute break to give yourself a chance to calm down. Letting the baby cry for a few minutes is not harmful.

Find someone to help you.

- Call a friend or relative you can trust. It is important to get away from the baby if you think you might lose control. It is just as important to be sure that the baby will be safe while you are gone. If the crying is constant or louder than usual, or the baby has a fever or is vomiting, go to the hospital or health clinic.

It's okay to ask for help. Who can you ask for help?

- Family
- Friends
- Your child's doctor
- Parent groups
- Your public health nurse, or
- Call your local hospital or health clinic for other contacts in your community.

Remember – Never shake a baby!

Babies have weak neck muscles and heavy heads, so even a few seconds of hard shaking can cause serious damage to babies and small children.

(Based on material developed by the Safe Start (BC Children's Hospital), the Ministry for Children and Families, the Capital Health Region, the Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children, and the Kiwanis Club, from original material provided by the Saskatchewan Institute on Prevention of Handicaps)

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