



Never Shake a Baby

**Patient & Family Information
Handbook**

*Leading, Learning,
Caring For You*

Adapted from Health Canada Information Sheet.

www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts

/never shake a baby

It's 4:00am. You're all alone with your infant who will not stop crying. You've tried changing him, feeding him, comforting him. Nothing seems to work. Your frustration is building. You want just two hours sleep before you have to get up. You would do anything to make the crying stop. Most parents at one time or another have felt this way. **However, no matter how frustrated you become, never shake a baby.**

SHAKING IS EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.

Why is Shaking Dangerous?

Shaken Baby Syndrome can occur when a young child's head is shaken or quickly jerked back and forth. A baby's head is large and heavy compared to the body. The neck is weak. When a baby is shaken, the head jerks back and forth very quickly, causing the brain to move back and forth inside the skull. This causes bruising and internal bleeding which can lead to brain damage. Babies can die as a result of the shaking.

How Does it Happen?

Shaken Baby Syndrome usually occurs in children who are under one year old. The majority of children are about 6 months old. Shaken Baby Syndrome usually occurs because the caregiver shakes the baby in anger or frustration. Inconsolable crying usually "triggers off" or is the main reason a person will start to shake a young child. Constant crying is very irritating and often the caregiver says that he or she didn't mean to hurt the baby, but just wanted to stop the crying!

To help protect your infant's head:

- Always support your baby's fragile head and neck when holding or moving the baby.
- Never toss a baby or young child in the air.
- Talk to everyone who helps care for your baby about the dangers of shaking an infant. It is important that everyone (parents, baby-sitters, child care workers, friends and relatives) is aware that **SHAKING CAN BE FATAL**.
- Learn ways to cope with a baby's crying.
- Get help – find someone who can talk to you about your baby's crying.
- Never leave your baby alone with someone known to have a violent temper or someone that you don't know.

How Do I Cope with the Crying?

As a parent it is important for you to understand that your baby is not crying to punish you. There are many reasons why a baby will cry. Crying is the only way the baby has to tell you that something isn't right. Most babies have a "fussy" time when they will be difficult to quiet and comfort. An average 6 week old infant may cry about 2 to 3 hours in a 24-hour period.

If your baby has been crying for what seems like forever and nothing seems to help, it may be hard for you to resist the urge to shake the baby. No matter how angry you feel, please don't shake your baby. To try to stop the crying:

- Change the baby's diaper.
- Check to make sure that clothing is not too tight.
- Feed the baby slowly; burp the baby often.
- Breast feed the baby more often.
- Walk or rock the baby snuggled up close to your chest (e.g. front or back carrier).

- Put the baby in a baby swing or take the baby for a ride in a stroller or car.
- Offer the baby a pacifier / soother.

What Do I Do If the Baby Continues to Cry?

- If you've tried everything you can think of, and the baby is still crying, wrap the baby in a soft blanket and put the baby on his or her back in a quiet, darkened room. If there is another adult in the home, take a break to give yourself a rest and chance to calm down. Try to relax by listening to some music or thinking about something you like to do.
- Letting the baby 'cry it out' is much safer than shaking or punishing the baby. It is better to leave your baby in the crib for a short time than to risk hurting him or her. There is nothing unusual about feeling angry and frustrated. What matters is how you show your anger. If the baby continues to cry and you are worried something is wrong, call your doctor.

Take Care of Yourself

- Stresses in your life may also make it more difficult for you to handle your crying infant. Remember to look after yourself by finding ways to reduce stress. You may want to consider taking a parenting course to help you learn more about child development and to give you support. Call someone to take over for a while so that you can take a break. You can contact your local public health office or community health center for more information on support groups in your area. Never be afraid to ask for help.

Always remember to never shake a baby.