

Who Would Shake a Baby?

Please understand that many parents who have children with Shaken Baby Syndrome or Abusive Head Trauma didn't want to hurt their babies. They just found themselves in extreme situations for which they were unprepared, and often tragedy followed. It is important to talk about what can be done to avoid hurting a child and about the dangers of Shaken Baby Syndrome and Abusive Head Trauma. Even parents who would never hurt their baby should take steps to avoid the possibility of their infant being harmed in this way.

SBS/AHT

Shaken Baby Syndrome is a common form of child abuse that occurs when an infant or small child is violently shaken. The weight in a child's head creates a whiplash-effect that leads to brain, neck, and eye trauma. While shaking a baby takes only a few seconds, over 80% of victims have life-long disabilities, and 25% of babies with SBS die as a complication of their injuries.³

Why Does it Happen?

Many SBS cases occur because the baby would not stop crying.⁵ Babies cry, most of the time, to communicate that they are hungry, uncomfortable or bored. But there are also times when they cry for no apparent reason. Studies have shown that in approximately 5 to 10 percent of crying bouts, babies are resistant to soothing, or are inconsolable.^{7,8} That means there is nothing that the caregiver can do to stop the crying. When crying continues and a parent feels helpless, there sometimes comes a point where natural love and concern turns to hate, anger, and then rage.⁹ This is the point that is most dangerous for your baby and where you need to have safeguards in place in order to protect them.

Protecting Your Baby

There are three things you will need to do to protect your baby.⁴

KNOW WHAT IS NORMAL

First, understand that a baby's crying is *normal*, and make sure any other care-givers understand it too. It is important to make sure that you check all the boxes to help your baby if they are crying for any reason you can solve. Most obviously, check their diaper, check to see if they are hungry, or check to see if they are uncomfortable. Look for rashes, bites, items in clothing, or even a thread or something wrapped around a finger or toe. Check their temperature and make sure their clothing isn't too tight. Also, make sure they aren't too hot or too cold.

If you have done all of these things, then try soothing your baby by going for a walk or a drive. Try a baby swing, a vibrating bouncy seat, or try swaddling if your baby isn't yet rolling over. Try burping your baby and even try a soothing bath or baby massage. Call your medical provider if the crying continues to see if they can find a medical reason for it. If none of these works, then remember that sometimes babies cry, and we just don't know why. It is NORMAL, and it won't hurt your baby. But it is stressful and hard on you.

KNOW WHEN YOU NEED HELP

Second, recognize when the situation becomes *bad* and get help. It is sometimes hard when you are in the middle of a struggle to even realize you are struggling—but this is an important step in protecting your child. It doesn't make you a bad parent when you need to distance yourself from your crying baby or if you need to ask for help. MANY parents of babies who cry inconsolably get to this point! Call a trusted friend or relative and have them come relieve you for just a few minutes or at least just be there with you. If you know that your child's care-giver is getting upset or frazzled by your baby's crying, then you will need to step in and relieve them for a while or make other arrangements for your baby.

If you are unable to get help, then put your baby in a safe place, such as a crib free of blankets or stuffed animals and close the door. Walk away to give yourself a chance to breathe and calm down. *Check back every five minutes* or so.²

Remember, some crying can't be fixed with *food* or comfort, so if you have done these things, then you are going to have to wait out the crying spell.

KNOW THE RISK

Third, know that shaking a baby or young child can be devastating to both the baby and you. A child with SBS has a 1 in 4 chance of dying and a 4 in 5 chance of becoming disabled and delayed.³ If a child survives SBS, then they will likely be physically and mentally disabled in ways that will haunt them and the offender, for the rest of their lives. If you have other caregivers in your house, then make SURE they know the consequences of shaking.

What Happens if it Goes to Far?

If your baby is violently shaken, then you MUST get them medical help right away. You may not see any immediate signs of injury, but that doesn't mean that the damage hasn't already happened.¹⁰ If someone else shook your baby, then call 911 immediately and ask the person to leave. If you shook your baby, do the right thing and get help right away. The symptoms of shaken baby syndrome are not easy to see, but the effects are lifelong. Get medical help quickly.

Resources include:

1. American Association of Neurological Surgeons. Shaken Baby Syndrome. Rolling Meadows, IL. Found at <https://www.aans.org/en/Patients/Neurosurgical-Conditions-and-Treatments/Shaken-Baby-Syndrome>, accessed 2/5/2019.
2. Centers for Disease Control. Shaken Baby Syndrome. Atlanta, GA. Found at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/toolstemplates/entertainmented/tips/ShakenBaby.html>, accessed 2/5/2019.
3. National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome. Learn More. Farmington, UT. Found at <https://dontshake.org/learn-more>, accessed 2/5/2019.
4. Barr, RG. Preventing Abusive Head Trauma Resulting From a Failure of Normal Interaction Between Infants and Their Caregivers. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2012;109 Suppl 2(Suppl 2):17294-301.
5. Lee, C, Barr, RG, Catherine, N, & Wicks, A. Age-Related Incidence of Publicly Reported Shaken Baby Syndrome Cases: Is Crying a Trigger for Shaking? *J Dev Behav Pediatr*. 2007;28:288–293.
6. Christian CW, Block R, & Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect. American Academy of Pediatrics. Abusive Head Trauma in Infants and Children. *Pediatrics*. 2009;123:1409–1411. Found at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/5/1409>, accessed 2/5/2009.
7. James-Roberts IS, Conroy S, & Wilsher K. Bases for Maternal Perceptions of Infant Crying and Colic Behaviour. *Arch Dis Child*. 1996;75:375–384.
8. Barr RG, Paterson JA, MacMartin LM, Lehtonen L, & Young SN. Prolonged and Unsoothable Crying Bouts in Infants With and Without Colic. *J Dev Behav Pediatr*. 2005;26(1):14–23.
9. Kempe CH. Paediatric Implications of the Battered Baby Syndrome. *Arch Dis Child*. 1971;46:28–37.
10. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER). Shaken Baby Syndrome. Found at <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/shaken-baby-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20366619>, accessed 2/5/2019.
11. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preventing Abusive Head Trauma in Children. Atlanta, GA. Found at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/Abusive-Head-Trauma.html>, accessed 2/5/2019.
12. Choudhary, AK, Servaes, S, Slovis, TL, Palusci, VJ, Hedlund, GL, et al. Consensus Statement on Abusive Head Trauma in Infants and Young Children. *Pediatric Radiology*. 2018. 48:1048-1065. Found at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00247-018-4149-1>, accessed 2/5/2019.