Shaken Baby Syndrome

- Babies or small children who suffer injury or death from severe shaking or jerking are victims of what is called Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS). Sometimes a young child’s crying or need for attention can be more than tired parents or caregivers can cope with. In frustration, without knowing the dangers, they may shake a baby or small child to get its attention or to make it stop crying.
- Children under two can easily be injured from shaking because their weak neck muscles aren’t yet strong enough to fully control their head movements. When a child is shaken, the head whips back and forth, slamming the fragile brain tissue against the hard skull, causing bruising, bleeding, and swelling inside the brain. When the shaking is combined with throwing the baby against the crib mattress or pillow, even more force is applied to the brain and more damage can occur.
- Half of the children who are victims of SBS die from their injuries. Depending on the age of the child and how severe the shaking, injuries can include:
  - Learning disabilities
  - Delays in development
  - Speech problems
  - Impaired use of arms and legs
  - Brain damage and seizures
  - Hearing loss
  - Partial or total blindness
  - Spinal injury
  - Paralysis
  - Mental retardation
  - Death

Preventing SBS

- Shaken Baby Syndrome Can Be Prevented! Although the effects of SBS are frightening and tragic, the reassuring news is that, unlike some diseases that disable or kill children, SBS can be avoided. Follow the important steps described in this piece. Remember Never Shake a Baby! Even a brief moment of vigorous shaking can cause serious and permanent damage.
- Make sure that everyone who cares for your child knows about the dangers of shaking. This includes friends, relatives, baby-sitters, childcare providers, brothers and sisters, and especially someone who has had little or no experience caring for babies or young children. Surveys indicate that two-thirds of offenders are males, often in their early 20’s, many with no previous history of abuse offenses or substance abuse problems. Half tend to be the child’s natural parent. The other half includes boyfriends of the mother, non-relative caregivers and stepparents.
- Support your baby’s head and neck when holding or transporting him or her. Be sure to tell others who care for your infant to do the same.
- Always play gently with your baby. Never throw or toss your baby in the air, swing your baby by the ankles or jog with a young infant on your back.

When Your Baby Cries

- Does your baby need to be fed or burped? Feed your baby when she’s hungry, not strictly by the clock. Check with your doctor if you think she is sensitive to formula milk or to cow’s milk in the mother’s diet.
- Does the baby need to be changed? Check his diaper to make sure it’s dry and not tight.
- Does the baby seem warm or cold? If the baby’s head is perspiring, loosen or remove some clothing. If her hands or feet are cold, add socks, clothing or a blanket.
- Does your baby seem to have a fever? Does he seem to be in pain from an earache, teething, a rash or insect bite? Call your doctor or health clinic for advice if you think your baby might be ill or in pain.
- Does your baby need to suck? Guide her fingers to her mouth or offer her a pacifier.
- Does your baby need to feel close to you? Hold your baby often and for extended periods. Babies need to be touched and cuddled in order to develop physically and mentally. Many parents enjoy “wearing” their young child in a cloth sling or baby holder. This calms the baby while you carry on with normal daily activities. Recognized studies show that baby wearing reduces crying and fussiness by half.
- Does your baby seem cranky? Maybe he is overtired or stimulated. Turn off extra noise like the television or radio. Lower the lights. Wrap baby with his arms and legs inside a blanket and lay him on his back or side in his crib.
- Does your baby just need to cry? Remember that all babies cry, sometimes a lot during the first year of life. If you’ve tried everything, your baby is still crying, and it’s getting to you, wrap the baby snugly in a blanket and place him on his back or side in a quiet, darkened room. Close the door and go to another room. It’s okay if your baby cries while you calm down. Letting your baby cry it out when you’ve had enough is safer than yelling, hitting, or shaking. Then try the following tips to take care of yourself. You’ve earned it!

**And For Yourself**

- Let your anger out in a safe way. Listen to soft music, take a hot shower or soothing bath, exercise, do housework, take several deep breaths, count to 100 and calm down.
- Stop and think about why you feel so angry. Remember that the baby doesn’t hate you or want to ruin your life. When your baby cries, he’s not telling you you’re a bad parent. He cannot talk, crying is the only way your baby has to let you know what he needs and feels.
- Sit down or lie down and close your eyes. Think of a pleasant place in your memory. Stay quiet for several minutes, call a friend or relative and talk about your frustration, or see if someone can take over for a while.
- Call your child’s doctor or health clinic if you feel frustrated and angry with your child because of crying, toilet training, feeding, sleep problems, constant interruptions, or other behavior. Ask for specific things to do to make the situation better. Keep talking to your doctor or nurse about the problems until they get better.
- Call 1-800-852-3388 – the 24 hour New Hampshire Helpline-Parentlink if you ever feel angry or out of control. Trained and caring staff are there any time of the day or night to listen to you and give you support and advice.

**Remember**

It’s normal to feel upset and angry. Taking care of a baby or child can be tiring and sometimes frustrating. But there are ways to comfort him and you, and people nearby to help. So remember:

**Never yell at, hit, or shake a baby!**

The New Hampshire Coalition to Prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome is a group of individuals dedicated to spreading these messages: We must never touch a child in anger and we must never shake a baby or young child. Funding has been made possible by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services

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