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Handle With Care

Shaking Your Child Can Result in Severe Injury or Death

As a new parent, you may not realize that shaking or tossing your baby can cause serious injuries. In one unthinking moment, you can accidentally injure your baby for life. Even gentle, playful tossing can cause major health problems later on.

Babies and young children have very weak neck muscles and only gradually develop the strength to control their heavy heads. If they are shaken, their heads wobble rapidly back and forth. The result—"shaken infant syndrome"—is similar to the whiplash an adult might suffer in a car accident.

For a long time, doctors were not able to recognize the cause of brain bleeding in infants and children. There are usually no outside marks to identify injuries caused by tossing or shaking. Doctors only saw the results, most commonly convulsions, severe brain damage, and even death. Now, "shaken infant syndrome" is suspected when infants show signs of brain bleeding without skull fractures.

Damage from shaking or tossing may not be noticeable for years. It can show up when children go to school and are not able to keep up with classmates. Some doctors think injuries caused by shaking or tossing are the leading cause of mental retardation.

Symptoms of "Shaken Infant Syndrome"

- Unable to lift or turn head
- Head is swollen or turned to one side
- Pupils are dilated, pinpointed, or do not react to light
- Eyes contain blood spots or pools of blood
- Seizures or spasms
- Nausea or vomiting
- Breathing problems
- Child is semi-conscious

It is very important to recognize these symptoms. Children with any of these symptoms should be taken to see a doctor as soon as possible.

Injuries Caused by Shaking or Tossing

- Brain damage or bruises
- Spinal cord injuries including paralysis
- Blindness or trauma to the eyes
- Seizures or convulsions
- Retardation—mild to severe
- Delay in normal development
- Learning problems
- Impaired motor and sensory skills
- Broken and dislocated bones
- Deafness
- Death

Shaking Your Child is Child Abuse!

Prevent Injuries... Be Safe, Not Sorry

No one likes to listen to a baby cry for a long time. It is irritating and frustrating. Babies may cry a lot when they are hungry, wet, tired, or just want company. They may cry at certain times of the day or night, usually when they want to sleep or eat. Crying may just be a way babies deal with tense feelings. Your baby may be "colicky" if he or she cries a lot, curls up, and then straightens out over and over. If your baby cries a lot, a doctor should examine your baby to rule out medical causes. Then, try the following to calm your baby's crying:

1. Feed your baby and burp often
2. Change your baby
3. Offer your baby a pacifier
4. Hold your baby against your chest while walking or rocking
5. Take your baby for a ride in a stroller or car
6. Put your baby in a baby swing
7. If you breast feed, avoid eating onions or beans or drinking coffee, tea, or cola.

Be patient. Your baby does not hate you or want to ruin your life. If you have had all you can take, try the following:

1. Put your child in a safe place and leave the room for a few minutes.
2. Call a friend or neighbor.
3. Ask someone else to take care of your baby for even a short time.
4. Take 10 deep breaths and then, 10 more.
5. Do something to calm yourself. Play your favorite music. Make a cup of tea or coffee. Exercise or take a shower. Read a magazine or book.
6. Change your activity. Shake a rug. Do dishes or laundry. Scrub a floor. Beat a pan or pillow. Throw away unwanted trash.
7. Sit down, close your eyes, and think of a pleasant memory. Relax without moving for several minutes.
8. If all else fails, wrap your baby in a soft blanket. Put your baby on his or her right side or stomach in a dark, quiet room. Leave your baby alone and take a break in another room.

We all experience hard-to-control anger and frustration. No matter how impatient you feel, **DO NOT SHAKE YOUR BABY**. Your baby will outgrow the constant crying. For now, **HOLDING AND CUDDLING TELLS YOUR BABY YOU LOVE HIM OR HER AND WANT HIM OR HER TO FEEL BETTER.**

What to Do If You Shake Your Baby

Even though you may be embarrassed or guilty, it is imperative you take your baby to a hospital emergency room immediately. Bleeding inside the brain can be treated. You may not see any symptoms but immediate medical attention will prevent many future problems...and possibly save your baby's life!

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