

Protecting Your Baby From Abuse

Important Information About Preventing Brain Injuries in Infants



One of the skills parents and caregivers need to learn is how to deal with stress. This is especially important when there seems to be no end to a baby's crying. Too often, when a parent or caregiver loses control the results can be harmful or deadly.

The following is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics to help parents and caregivers cope with crying babies. Also included is information about injuries that could happen when parents and caregivers lose control of their tempers. (See "What is abusive head trauma?" at the end of this publication.)

When your baby cries, take a break!

If you have tried to calm your crying baby but nothing seems to work, it is important to stay in control of your temper. Remember, it is never OK to shake, throw, hit, slam, or jerk any child—and it never solves the problem! If you feel like you are getting angry and might lose control, try the following:

- Take a deep breath and count to 10.
- Place your baby in a safe place, leave the room, and let your baby cry alone for about 10 to 15 minutes.
- Call someone close to you for emotional support.
- Call your child's doctor. There may be a medical reason why your baby is crying.

Be patient. Colicky and fussy babies eventually grow out of their crying phase. Keeping your baby safe is the most important thing you can do. Even if you feel frustrated, stay in control and handle your baby with care.

An important reminder for all caregivers

Anyone who cares for your children should know about the dangers of shaking or striking a baby's head. This includes anyone who cares for your children: child care providers, boyfriends, girlfriends, older siblings, grandparents, and neighbors. Make sure they know it is *never* OK to shake, throw, hit, slam, or jerk any child.

If your children are being cared for by others, take some time to observe the caregiver-child interaction. Do they enjoy talking or playing with your children? How would they calm a crying baby? Other important things to keep in mind when choosing a caregiver are the caregiver's personality and habits. For example, people who are patient, responsible, and trustworthy are ideal caregivers while people who are easily angered or heavily drink alcohol or use other drugs are not ideal caregivers. Before selecting a child care provider, make certain the program is licensed or certified.

What to do when a baby cries

It is not always easy to figure out why babies cry. They may be hungry or overtired. They may be cold or need their diapers changed. Crying is their only way of expressing their needs, and it's not because they dislike their parents. Sometimes it seems like they cry for no reason.

The following are some ways to help calm a crying baby:

- Check to see if your baby's diaper needs changing.
- Swaddle your baby in a large, thin blanket (ask your nurse or child's doctor to show you how to do it correctly) to help her feel secure.
- Feed your baby slowly, stopping to burp often.
- Offer your baby a pacifier.
- Hold your baby against bare skin, like on your chest, or cheek-to-cheek.
- Rock your baby using slow, rhythmic movements.
- Sing to your baby or play soft, soothing music.
- Take your baby for a walk in a stroller.
- Go for a ride with your baby in the car (remember to always use a car safety seat).

If you have tried all of these and your baby continues to cry, go back and try them again. Most babies get tired after crying for a long time and eventually will fall asleep. If all else fails, call your child's doctor and share your concerns and your stress.

What is abusive head trauma?

Abusive head trauma, including shaken baby syndrome, is a serious type of head injury. It is caused by shaking, throwing, hitting, slamming, or jerking.

Too often, abusive head trauma leads to the death of a baby. It also can lead to

- Bleeding around the brain
- Blindness
- Hearing loss
- Speech or learning disabilities
- Seizures
- Brain damage
- Mental retardation
- Cerebral palsy
- Intellectual disability (mental retardation)

Babies are not able to fully support their heavy heads. As a result, violent and forceful shaking or impact causes a baby's brain to be injured. Victims of abusive head trauma may show one or all of the following signs and symptoms: irritability, lethargy (trouble staying awake), trouble breathing, vomiting, and coma (unable to be awakened).

Abusive head trauma often occurs when a parent or other caregiver reacts impulsively in anger or frustration, often because the baby will not stop crying. Abusive head trauma is a serious form of child abuse.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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