

Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS)

What is Shaken Baby Syndrome?

Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is the name given to the assortment of signs and symptoms of brain injury resulting from violently shaking an infant, with or without impact to the head. SBS is also known as Abusive Head Trauma. It is a form of child abuse most common in babies younger than 1 year old due to their vulnerability.

It is never okay to shake a baby or child. Approximately 25 per cent of babies who have been shaken die and as many as 80 per cent have permanent brain damage. Even babies who don't have any immediate obvious sign of injury can develop problems. Sometimes it is not until the child begins school and has learning difficulties that the problem is discovered.

Babies have fragile, undeveloped brains, their heads are heavy and large compared to the rest of the body and their neck muscles are not strong enough to support the weight of the head. During shaking, an infant's head moves back and forth in a figure eight motion, this rapid acceleration-deceleration of the brain causes the brain and skull to move at different speeds in different locations. This causes veins to begin to break causing bleeding in and around the eyes and brain, damaging the brain cells leading to permanent brain damage. Even minor injuries to a baby's brain can cause lifelong problems.

The most common trigger for shaking a baby is feeling frustrated with being unable to console the baby. Shaken baby injuries often happen because a parent, or caregiver, gets frustrated with the baby's crying and temporarily loses control and violently shakes the baby.

Shaken injuries do not occur in regular interactions when playing gently with a baby. For example, gently bouncing an infant on your knee, sudden stops in a car, or going over bumps in stroller does not cause SBS.

What damage can shaking a baby cause?

Shaking a baby can cause:

- Seizures
- Permanent brain damage
- Speech and learning difficulties
- Blindness and deafness

- Paralysis
- Behavior problems
- Death

How can I protect my baby from SBS?

If your baby's crying is frustrating or making you angry, take a break. Gently place your baby in a safe place, such as the crib, and leave the room. Take 10 to 15 minutes to give yourself a chance to calm down. It is more important to calm yourself before you try to calm your baby. If you feel unable to cope, call someone for help once you have put your baby in a safe place. Never pick up a baby when you are angry about the crying.

Talk to others who care for your baby such as babysitters, relatives, and friends about how to safely care for your baby. Make sure they understand that it is more important for the caregiver to be calm than to stop your baby from crying. Let them know that you will be happy to come and get the baby if the crying is too much for them. Do not leave your baby in the care of someone who has problems controlling their anger.

Why do babies cry?

All babies cry - sometimes it is easy to figure out why a baby is crying; sometimes it is not so easy. Developmentally, it is normal for babies to cry more and for longer periods of time starting at about 2 weeks of age and continuing until about 3 to 4 months. This period of crying is referred to as The Period of PURPLE Crying®. Some babies are resistant to soothing and can cry for hours but are still healthy. For more information visit www.purplecrying.info/.

Crying does not mean your baby is being bad or that your baby is mad at you. It does not mean that you are a bad parent. Crying is an annoying sound; it is supposed to be. If it was a pleasant sound, crying would be easy to ignore and the baby's needs would not be met. Listening to your baby cry can be heart-wrenching. Remember that a period of more intense crying in the early months is a normal developmental stage that most babies go through.

If your baby's crying is constant or louder than usual, or your baby is feeding poorly, has difficulty breathing, a fever or is vomiting, or if you have concerns that something is wrong, take your baby to the hospital or health clinic.

The most important thing to remember is that you and your baby will get through this crying stage, and smiles and laughter will replace the crying.

What can you do when your baby won't stop crying?

There is no magic answer that works all of the time with every baby. You may find that what works today may not work tomorrow. Sometimes nothing you do will stop the crying, and that doesn't mean you're doing something wrong as a parent.

Here are some suggestions that may help comfort your baby:

- Snuggle your baby close to your chest; your heartbeat may comfort your baby
- Follow your baby's cues for hunger such as bringing his hands to his mouth, rooting or moving his head, opening his mouth, licking his lips, and sucking his hand. For the first few months of life, babies usually feed every 2 to 3 hours or at least 8 times in 24 hours. Your baby may want to feed more frequently during growth spurts. Burp your baby after feeding.
- Check your baby's diaper. Keep your baby clean and dry
- Wrap your baby in a soft blanket
 - Keep your baby warm and comfortable – but not too hot
 - Do not put your baby in a crib or bassinet wrapped in a blanket
- Provide some soft music or other relaxing sounds
 - Try humming or singing a lullaby
 - Sometimes, the sound of the vacuum cleaner, clothes dryer, fish tank filter or dishwasher helps calm a baby
- Offer a soother or teething ring
- Offer a favourite blanket or soft toy while cuddling the baby
- Provide gentle motion or change your baby's position
 - Walk with or rock your baby. You may want to put your baby in an infant carrier if you have one, and walk around the house
 - Try a baby swing if you have one
 - Take your baby for a walk in an infant carrier or stroller

- Some babies like to go for a car ride. Be sure your baby is safely secured in an infant car seat

Sometimes these things work and sometimes they will not work at all. It is worth trying these suggestions but try not to blame yourself or get frustrated with your baby if they do not work. Remember that The Period of PURPLE Crying® is a normal stage that will come to an end.

What else can you do if comforting your baby doesn't stop them from crying?

If it's too frustrating, it is ok to walk away. Put your baby in a safe place, and take a few minutes to calm yourself. Relax by doing self-comforting activities such as reading, having a cup of tea, or taking a shower, then go back and check on your baby.

Find someone to help you. Call a friend or relative you can trust. It is important to get away from your baby if you think you might lose control but it is just as important to be sure that your baby will be safe while you are gone. Remember that it's okay to ask for help. Remind caregivers that crying is normal. The following people may be able to help:

- Family and friends
- Parent groups
- Your child's health care provider
- Your public health nurse

You can also call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered nurse 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or you can call your local hospital or health clinic for other contacts in your community.

Remember – NEVER shake a baby!

Put your baby in a safe place and take a break.

For More Information

For more information on ways to comfort your baby, review The Period of PURPLE Crying® program materials that you received at the hospital. For mothers that did not give birth at a hospital in British Columbia, you can receive the mobile app/booklet package from your public health centre or nurse.

For more tips and resources on line, visit <https://dontshake.ca/> or The Period of PURPLE Crying® at www.purplecrying.info.