

# How to Prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome and Other Forms of Abusive Head Trauma

How do you calm a crying baby? That depends. Each baby is different and there are many reasons why babies cry. Though there is no magic button to turn off crying, there are some things parents and caregivers can try.

Here are tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics on ways to help calm a crying baby. Because it is not always easy to cope with a crying baby, the second half of this publication has important information for all parents and caregivers to help make sure babies are safe.

## Ways to Help Calm a Crying Baby

Crying is the only way babies know how to express their needs. Parents and caregivers need to know that crying does not mean babies dislike them.

Babies usually cry when they need something. They may be hungry or tired. They may be cold or hot or need their diapers changed. However, sometimes babies cry for no clear reason. Healthy babies, even those who are well cared for and loved, may cry for as long as 1 to 2 hours.

If your baby cries, try the following things:

- Check your baby's diaper and change it if it is wet or soiled.
- Check your baby's socks and clothing. Tight socks, bunched-up clothing, or a loose thread caught on a finger or toe may cause discomfort.
- Check for a runny nose, congestion, diaper rash, fever, or other signs your baby might be sick.
- Swaddle your baby's body in a light blanket. Swaddling helps babies feel secure. Ask your nurse or child's doctor to show you how to swaddle your baby. Also, if you swaddle your baby before placing him on his back to sleep, stop swaddling him as soon as he starts trying to roll.
- Feed your baby slowly and burp your baby often to help prevent gas in the stomach.
- Offer your baby a pacifier. Sucking for some babies can be soothing.
- Gently rub or pat your baby's back while holding your baby close.
- 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.
- Place your baby near a source of white noise, such as a running vacuum cleaner or static from a radio, or play a white noise app.
- Take your baby for a walk in your arms, an infant carrier or a sling, or a stroller.
- Put your baby in a car safety seat and go for a ride.

If you have tried all of these suggestions and your baby continues to cry, remember that 1 in 10 attempts to stop a crying spell will not work. Most babies get tired after crying for a long time and will fall asleep on their own.

## Parents and Caregivers Need Breaks From Crying Babies

If you have tried to calm your crying baby but nothing seems to work, you may need to take a moment for yourself. Crying can be tough to handle, especially if you're physically tired and mentally exhausted.

- Take a deep breath and count to 10.
- Place your baby in a safe place, such as crib or playpen without blankets and stuffed animals; leave the room; and let your baby cry alone for about 10 to 15 minutes.
- While your baby is in a safe place, consider some actions that may help calm you down.
  - Listen to music for a few minutes.
  - Call a friend or family member for emotional support.
  - Do simple household chores, such as vacuuming or washing the dishes.
- If you have not calmed after 10 to 15 minutes, check on your baby but do not pick up your baby until you feel you have calmed down.
- When you have calmed down, go back and pick up your baby. If your baby is still crying, retry soothing measures.
- Call your child's doctor. There may be a medical reason why your baby is crying.

Try to be patient. Keeping your baby safe is the most important thing you can do. It is normal to feel upset, frustrated, or even angry, but it is important to keep your behavior under control. Remember, it is never safe to shake, throw, hit, slam, or jerk any child—and it never solves the problem!

## Important Information About Preventing Brain Injuries

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. This is called abusive head trauma. Abusive head trauma, including shaken baby syndrome, is a serious type of head injury. It is a form of child abuse. Abusive head trauma occurs when a parent or caregiver reacts impulsively in anger or frustration, often because a baby will not stop crying.

Babies who have been shaken, thrown, hit, slammed, or jerked may show one or all of the following signs and symptoms: irritability, lethargy (trouble staying awake), difficulty breathing, vomiting, seizures, decreased alertness, and coma (unable to be awakened).

Abusive head trauma can lead to death, brain damage, bleeding around the brain, blindness, hearing loss, speech or learning disabilities, seizures, intellectual disabilities (formerly known as mental retardation), and cerebral palsy.

## What Parents Need to Know When Choosing a Caregiver

If your children are being cared for by others, take some time to observe how these caregivers interact with your children. Do they enjoy talking or playing with your children? How do they calm a crying baby? Other important things to keep in mind when choosing a caregiver are the caregiver's personality and habits. Is the caregiver trustworthy and responsible? Consider a day care center. An ideal day care center is one that is licensed or certified and has multiple child caregivers present at all times. Also, remember that young infants who are not yet able to pull to a stand rarely bruise. Even a small bruise could be the first sign of abuse. If a bruise is seen in a young infant, the infant should be checked by a doctor.

## Remember

Hurting a crying baby is never OK! Anyone who cares for a child, including parents, child caregivers, boyfriends, girlfriends, older siblings, grandparents, and neighbors, should know about the dangers of shaking or striking a baby's head. Make sure all of your baby's caregivers know it is never safe to shake, throw, hit, slam, or jerk any child.

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