



# A Educator's Guide To The Prevention of **Shaken Baby Syndrome**



Missouri's Foundation For Child Abuse Prevention



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## Education & Awareness

# SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME

### SUMMARY

The most common mechanism of child abuse fatalities in the United States is abusive head trauma or Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS), which involves the violent shaking of an infant or young child, usually under the age of 4 years. Babies' heads are larger and heavy in proportion to their total body weight and their neck muscles are too weak to support such a disproportionately large head. Because a baby's brain is immature, it is more easily injured. When an infant or young child is violently shaken, the head rotates wildly on the axis of the neck, resulting in rotation of the brain within the skull. The thrashing around of the brain within the skull causes the tissue to become bruised or destroyed.

Shaken Baby Syndrome involves an extremely violent act. Age-appropriate play, gentle shaking to awaken an unconscious child and CPR do not cause the massive destruction seen in SBS. Short falls from sofas, beds and changing tables, and falls associated with the caretaker falling while carrying the child, do not produce the severe brain injuries of SBS.

Immediate consequences to the baby or young child suffering from SBS include a decreased level of consciousness; seizures; breathing may stop; the heart may stop; and death. SBS is so lethal that 20-25% of SBS victims die of their injuries. Long-term consequences for survivors may include physical disabilities, blindness, speech disabilities, seizures, learning disabilities and death. For survivors, research has established that a significant number of SBS cases are unrecognized and underreported.



## **WHAT IS SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME (SBS)?**

- SBS refers to a group of injuries that result from being violently shaken.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) states that the shaking "is so violent competent individuals observing the shaking would recognize it as dangerous."
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and retinal hemorrhage are the most common injuries seen with SBS.
- SBS injuries may result in brain damage, blindness, paralysis, seizures and death.

## **WHY DOES THE SHAKING OCCUR?**

- The number one reason for shaking a baby is inconsolable crying.
- Other triggering events are toilet training difficulties and feeding problems.
- Shaking usually occurs because caregivers become frustrated and lose control.

## **HOW SERIOUS IS THE PROBLEM IN MISSOURI?\***

- In 2003, of the 22 child abuse fatalities in Missouri, 11 (50%) were victims of SBS.
- Of the 11 victims of SBS in 2003, 7 were infants less than one year of age, 1 was a toddler between the ages of 1 and 2, and 3 were older than 2.
- During the 6 year period 1997-2003, 70 children died of SBS.
- Of the SBS victims during the period of 1997-2003, 32 were females and 38 were males.

## **WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?**

- Perpetrators of SBS can be anyone of adult size and strength.
- Research has established that fathers and other male caretakers are the most frequent perpetrators of SBS.

**Never Ever Shake a Baby.**

*\*Statistics taken from "The Missouri Child Fatality Review Program" annual report*



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## **Shaken Baby Syndrome Signs & Symptoms Indicating That A Baby May Have Been Shaken Include:**

- Extreme irritability
- Decreased appetite
- Feeding problems
- Poor sucking/swallowing
- Constipation
- Vomiting
- Lethargy
- Poor muscle tone
- Rigidity
- Seizures
- Dilated pupils
- Difficulty breathing
- Blood spots in eyes
- Semi-consciousness
- Comatose

### **If you know or suspect that your child has been shaken:**

Even if you feel guilty or embarrassed, you must take the baby to the emergency room right away. Immediate medical attention may save your child from future problems, and may even save his or her life.

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## Shaken Baby Syndrome Tips For Calming A Crying Baby

- Check to see if the baby needs changing.
- Check to see if the baby is hungry.
- Feed slowly and burp often.
- Check to see if the baby is too hot or too cold.
- Rock the baby.
- Run a vacuum cleaner within hearing range of the baby.
- Give the baby a pacifier or let the baby nurse.
- Play soft music, sing or hum.
- Take the baby for a ride in a stroller.
- Put the baby in a baby swing or vibrating bouncing seat.
- Strap the baby into a child safety seat and take the baby for a ride in the car.
- While sitting, lay the baby face down across your knees and gently pat or rub his back.
- Place the baby in its crib for a few minutes. The baby may calm down on her own.
- Hold the baby against your chest, in your arms, or in a soft infant carrier, and walk, rock or swing the baby gently from side to side.

### **If nothing seems to work**

- Place the baby on its back in a safe place like a crib or playpen and let your baby cry alone for a few minutes while you take a time out.
- Take a deep breath and count to ten.
- Call a friend for emotional support.
- Call your family doctor or pediatrician; there may be a medical reason why your child is crying.

**Take A Break...Don't Shake**



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## **Shaken Baby Syndrome Fact Sheet For Health Professionals: Identifying Risk Factors**

Although everyone can become frustrated with a crying baby, some people may be more likely to shake a child. These include parents, babysitters, and others who:

- Expect too much from an infant
- Are unable to deal with the stress of everyday life and family
- Have behavior problems (i.e. abusive and aggressive behaviors)
- Lack knowledge about normal child development
- Have little parenting experience
- Are in unstable family situations
- Are caring for a child born too early or with a disability
- Abuse alcohol or other substances
- Are caring for a baby born addicted to drugs  
(these babies tend to be crankier and harder to calm)

Everyone who cares for a child should learn what to do when a baby cries.

Suggestions for calming a crying child are given on the "Tips for Calming a Crying Baby" sheet.

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## Shaken Baby Syndrome Support & Resources

### **Children's Trust Fund**

PO Box 1641  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
573-751-5147  
[www.ctf4kids.org](http://www.ctf4kids.org)

### **National Information, Support, and Referral Service on SBS**

2955 Harrison Blvd., Suite 102  
Ogden, UT 84403  
888-273-0071 or 801-393-3366  
[capcente@ix.netcom.com](mailto:capcente@ix.netcom.com)

### **The National Exchange Club, Foundation for the Prevention of Child Abuse**

3050 Central Avenue  
Toledo, OH 43606  
800-760-3413  
FAX 419-535-1989  
[Info@preventchildabuse.com](mailto:Info@preventchildabuse.com)  
[www.preventchildabuse.com](http://www.preventchildabuse.com)

### **The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (NCCAN)**

800-FYI-3366

### **National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse** 800-CHILDREN

### **The Shaken Baby Alliance**

PO Box 150734  
Ft. Worth, TX 76108  
817-279-1166  
[info@shakenbaby.com](mailto:info@shakenbaby.com)  
[www.shakenbaby.com](http://www.shakenbaby.com)

### **Parent Anonymous**

800-882-1250

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## Teacher's Guide

### Ideas for SBS Presentation

- Please use the attached list of discussion questions in the Shaken Baby study guide to introduce the topic of child abuse and Shaken Baby Syndrome to your class.
- Let the students know that SBS presentation in their classroom is a part of a large effort to prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome in Missouri. Hospitals, childcare providers, Parents as Teachers and other family-serving organizations are using the same information to educate parents and caregivers.
- The only way SBS can be prevented is to inform everyone who cares for babies and young children about the dangers associated with violently shaking a baby. It is important to help parents and caregivers prepare for and deal with the primary cause of SBS... inconsolable crying.
- It is very important that the students understand two messages:
  1. NEVER SHAKE A BABY
  2. Babies cry. Have a plan!
- If you would like additional information about Shaken Baby Syndrome please visit the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome at [www.dontshake.com](http://www.dontshake.com) or visit the Children's Trust Fund at [www.ctf4kids.org](http://www.ctf4kids.org).





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## "Never Shake" Video Quiz

01. **The purpose of this video is to make you aware of one point:** (1 point)  
Never ever shake a \_\_\_\_\_!
02. **The neck muscles in a baby or young child are underdeveloped and weak and are unable to support his or her large and unproportionate head. When a child is violently shaken, the brain bounces back and forth inside the skull tearing blood vessels and causing damage to the brain.** (1 point)  
True                      False
03. **Violently shaking a baby or young child can cause which of the following?** (2 points)  
a. Brain damage                      c. Seizures                      e. All are correct  
b. Blindness                      d. Death
04. **Which of the following common activities or movements will not cause Shaken Baby Syndrome:** (3 points)  
a. Bouncing a baby on your knee      c. Short falls off furniture or a swing      e. All are correct  
b. Age-appropriate play              d. Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
05. **Sadly, Shaken Baby Syndrome occurs in all families regardless of race, income and educational levels. Circle one.** (1 point)  
True                      False
06. **Inconsolable crying is the primary cause of Shaken Baby Syndrome. Circle one.** (1 point)  
True                      False
07. **What steps should be taken to help you keep in control when a baby won't stop crying and you become extremely frustrated:** (3 points)  
a. Stop and take a break. Count to ten.  
b. Place the baby in his or her crib or other safe place and leave the room for awhile.  
c. Contact someone that will help you calm down.  
d. Watch television, listen to music, read anything to help you calm down and control your emotions.  
e. All of the above
08. **Shaking a baby or young child is never appropriate. Circle one.** (1 point)  
True                      False
09. **When you become frustrated with crying, it is okay to gently put the baby in her crib or other safe place and let her cry awhile. Circle one.** (1 point)  
True                      False
10. **According to the video, no baby has ever been harmed from crying. Circle one.** (1 point)  
True                      False
11. **Crying is normal for a baby and one way a baby communicates. Circle one.** (1 point)  
True                      False
12. **Do you think all middle or high school students should have the opportunity to see the Never Shake video to learn how Shaken Baby Syndrome can be prevented?**  
Yes                      No
13. **After hearing about SBS and watching the video, has your knowledge about Shaken Baby Syndrome:**  
\_\_\_\_\_ stayed about the same.  
\_\_\_\_\_ increased.





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## Study Guide

### Discussion Questions

**1. What is Shaken Baby Syndrome? Has anyone ever heard of this syndrome and would anyone like to share what they know?**

**Answer:** Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is a form of child abuse that occurs when an infant or young child is violently shaken. The shaking may only last a few seconds, but it can cause severe brain damage and even death.

The neck muscles in a baby or young child are underdeveloped and weak and are unable to support the baby's large and unproportionate head. When a child is violently shaken, the brain bounces back and forth inside the skull tearing blood vessels and causing damage to the brain.

The American Academy of Pediatrics Technical Report on shaken baby syndrome states:

*The act of shaking leading to shaken baby syndrome is so violent that individuals observing it would recognize it as dangerous and likely to kill the child. Shaken baby syndrome injuries are the result of violent trauma. The constellation of these injuries does not occur with short falls, seizures, or a consequence of vaccination. Shaking by itself may cause serious or fatal injuries. In many instances, there may be other forms of head trauma, including impact injuries. Thus, the term shaken/slam syndrome (or shaker impact syndrome) may more accurately reflect the age range of the victims (who are not always babies) and the mechanisms of injury seen. Such shaking often results from tension and frustration generated by a baby's crying or irritability, yet crying is not a legal justification for such violence...*

*...Shaken baby syndrome awareness programs that erroneously state that shaken baby syndrome may be caused by bouncing a child on a knee, by tossing him in the air, or even by rough play are to be discouraged, because they are inaccurate and may cause parents who have not abused their child to feel guilty. (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2001)*

## 2. What injuries are caused by shaking?

**Answer:** About 60% of all victims will either die from their injuries or suffer lifetime disabilities. Since shaking causes part of the brain to die, many essential brain functions may be lost, leaving survivors with severe debilitating injuries.

Potential long term consequences of shaking include:

- Impaired motor and cognitive skills
- Blindness
- Paralysis
- Death
- Severe brain damage
- Hearing loss
- Seizures

## 3. Can casual or accidental handling of an infant cause shaking injuries?

**Answer:** Shaken Baby Syndrome is NOT caused by:

- Gently bouncing a baby on your knee
- Running or jogging with a baby
- Age-appropriate play
- Short falls off furniture or a swing

## 4. Who shakes babies?

**Answer:** An estimated 70% of the perpetrators in shaken baby cases are men. Often they are the biological father of the victim or the boyfriend of the mother. However, anybody who is extremely frustrated and loses control with a child is capable of shaking.

There are no common connections found in perpetrators. Neither socioeconomic or employment status or even a history of drug abuse or abusive background are factors that help predict if a person may injure a child by shaking.

## 5. What is the trigger that causes shaking to occur?

**Answer:** Inconsolable crying is the number one factor that triggers a frustrated adult or caregiver to shake a child. Some perpetrators have little knowledge or experience with caring for an infant. They get frustrated and overwhelmed with the crying and lose self-control.

This type of child abuse is completely preventable. A potential caregiver needs to have accurate information about crying, responsible expectations of an infant and a plan to deal with stressful situations.

### **BABIES CRY. SO HAVE A PLAN!**

- Stop
- Take a break. Lay your baby down on his back in a safe place.
- Sit down or leave the room.
- Call your doctor.
- Talk to another adult. Call a friend.
- Parents should give their caregiver permission to call them when the caregiver feels overwhelmed or frustrated to the point of losing control.
- Count to ten...or more.
- Do anything to calm down.

## 6. What are the physical signs and symptoms of Shaken Baby Syndrome?

**Answer:** Since violent shaking causes immediate damage to the victim's brain, symptoms will usually appear at once. These symptoms vary greatly and may appear to be caused by minor childhood ailments. Some of these minor signs and symptoms include:

- Trouble sucking or swallowing
- Trouble sleeping
- Vomiting
- Decreased appetite
- Increased fussing or irritability

In the most severe shaking cases, the victim will immediately show more obvious signs of serious injury. Some of these severe symptoms include:

- Difficulty breathing or turning blue
- Convulsions or seizures
- Unresponsive or lethargic
- Loss of consciousness

Victims with these symptoms must be taken to the hospital immediately. They may die in a matter of hours.

## 7. How can we deal with inconsolable crying which is the primary cause of Shaken Baby Syndrome?

**Answer:** There are many reasons why babies cry, but what really matters is how a parent or caregiver deals with it.

We all need to keep in mind that crying is the only way babies can verbally express themselves. **Crying gets our attention!** Parents and caregivers must understand and remember that crying will be very frustrating. Remember, it's important to not take crying personally. It is not about you. The baby is communicating and exercising her lungs.

When dealing with a crying infant always check the basics:

- Is the baby hungry? *Try a bottle or pacifier.*
- Does he/she need a diaper change?
- Is the baby too hot or cold or is the clothing twisted or pinching him/her?
- Is he/she sleepy? *Try a recorded lullaby or other music.*
- Is he/she frustrated? *Try to pat or massage him...your contact lets him know he is safe.*
- Is he/she bored? *Try rocking or walking the baby...or go for a ride.*

### Reduce Your Stress!

- Take a break.
- Make friends with other parents.
- Talk to someone you trust about your feelings when you feel tired or overwhelmed.
- Do something for yourself...everyday.
- Take a parenting class.
- Remember...it's okay for your baby to cry.

**Never Ever Shake a Baby.**



The Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) billboard will be displayed during a three month period in December, January and February. For location information: [SBS bb listing.pdf](#)

The Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) thirty-second radio advertisement will also be aired during a three month period in December, January and February. For a complete listing of radio stations: [SBS radio listing.pdf](#)



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