



Abusive Head Trauma / Shaken Baby Syndrome

Prepared by the Health & Safety Specialists at Child Care Aware® of North Dakota

Abusive Head Trauma is an injury to the head due to someone violently shaking a baby or hitting the baby against something hard.

If a baby is shaken with force, it can lead to a lifetime of problems:

- Shaking can *damage* a child's brain
- Shaking can cause *permanent disabilities* like blindness or paralysis.
- Shaking can even cause *death*.

Never, never shake a baby! Shaking can damage a baby's brain and may cause death. No child of any age should be shaken.

When a baby cries, you may want to cry too. This is normal!

Being a parent or caregiver may not be easy. A baby's constant crying can be stressful and can be a dangerous trigger for you. Sometimes there is no reason for the baby crying, and there is nothing you can do.

A baby crying is normal

Here's what you should know about crying babies:

- Most babies cry often: 80-90% of babies have crying spells that last 20-60 minutes or longer. This does not mean that your baby has colic.
- Most babies cry more at night, sometimes for an hour or longer.
- Most babies have at least one fussy period each day, often in the evening.
- Most babies cry more at 6-8 weeks than at birth.
- Most parents or caregivers will feel angry, frustrated, and will cry themselves.
- In the first 5-6 months, it is normal for a baby's crying to increase in intensity, and the baby may not be consolable.

What to do if you can't stop the crying. If you have tried everything you can, place the baby on his/her back in a crib/playpen for a short time. Close the door and go in another room for a break. Visually check the infant every 10-15 minutes. Try to relax by taking deep breaths, listening to music, etc. before returning to the baby. If you still feel frustrated and overwhelmed, get another staff member to cover for you, or call the infant's parents or your emergency designee/backup.

Why do babies cry?

Crying is an important way that a baby communicates before he/she can speak. Figuring out crying can be difficult – here are some suggestions:

Possible Reason	What To Do
Hunger	Feed baby. Baby may be hungrier on some days. Offer feedings often if that helps soothe baby.
Need to be close to people, touched, picked up, held rocked.	Hold, rock, massage, dance with baby in your arms, sit together on bouncing ball or rocking chair, talk and sing to baby. Go for a walk with baby in your arms or in stroller. Sit down beside baby, massage, gently touch or talk to baby. Let another caregiver hold baby.
Pain or discomfort	Pick up baby, comfort, change diaper, burp, or rub baby's back. Check clothing to see if it is too tight or pinching. Make sure there isn't hair wrapped around the baby's finger, toe, or penis. Changing baby's position may help.
Too hot / too cold	Babies should be dressed as warmly as you are – take off or put on more clothing as needed.
Tired or over stimulated	Snuggle baby in a comfortable position, turn lights off, keep surroundings quiet. Rocking baby gently can be soothing for both of you.
Needs a change	Read, play, talk, sing, hold baby every day. Change rooms so baby can look at different things.
“Just unknown”	Hold, rock, talk, walk, sing, massage, read a book, offer feedings, or try soothing music. Try to comfort the baby, giving time for baby to respond to each thing you do.
Illness	If the baby's cry sounds different to you or baby cannot be soothed after trying everything, call the baby's parents.

Keep safety in mind

If you swaddle	Use only one thin blanket. Blanket should only be shoulder high and should be loose enough for a hand to fit between the blanket and baby's chest to allow the baby to breathe comfortably; blanket should be loose around the baby's hips. Follow safe sleep practices. If the baby falls asleep, place the baby in a crib/playpen completely flat on his/her back. Swaddling for sleep should be discontinued once the baby shows signs of attempting to roll.
If you place the baby in a swing	Use the safety strap. Never leave the baby unsupervised. If the baby falls asleep, follow safe sleep practices by removing the baby and placing in a crib/playpen completely flat on his/her back.
If you place the baby in a bouncy seat	Use the safety strap. Do not place the seat on an elevated surface or leave unsupervised. Follow safe sleep practices. If the baby falls asleep, remove the baby and place in a crib/playpen completely flat on his/her back.

Sources:

Fact Sheets for Families, *Never Shake a Baby*, California Childcare Health Program, 04/05

Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome, *A Guide for Health Departments and Community-Based Organizations*, CDC

What is Shaken Baby Syndrome? *Toronto Public Health*, 3/14

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