
FACT SHEET

Shaken Baby Syndrome

Shaken Baby Syndrome is the medical term to describe the violent shaking and restraint injuries sustained from shaking. Injuries can include:

- **B**rain swelling & damage
- **S**ubdural hemorrhage
- **M**ental retardation
- **B**lindness
- **D**eath

The term was first discussed in medical literature in 1972, but knowledge about the syndrome continues to develop. Shaken Baby Syndrome can occur when children are violently shaken as part of a pattern of abuse or simply because an adult has momentarily succumbed to the pressure of responding to a crying baby.

Violent shaking is especially dangerous to infants and young children because their neck muscles are underdeveloped and their brain tissue is exceptionally fragile. Their small size further adds to the risk of injury. Vigorous shaking repeatedly pitches the brain in different directions.

Those sudden motions can cause some parts of the brain to pull away, tearing brain cells in the process. When a child is shaken in anger, the force is multiplied 5 or 10 times more than it would be if the child had simply fallen. That force is repeated many times in succession while the child is being shaken causing major damage.

Shaken Baby Syndrome can have disastrous consequences for the family, the victim, and for society. If the child survives, medical bills can be enormous. The victim may require lifelong medical care for brain damage injuries such as mental retardation or cerebral palsy. The child may even require institutionalization or other types of long term care.

According to the California Medical Association, for many years doctors failed to recognize the cause of brain bleeding in small children who were actually victims of Shaken Baby Syndrome because the children did not exhibit any external signs of injury. Doctors saw only the results, most frequently convulsions & brain damage and sometimes death. Oftentimes, the injuries were attributed to other causes.

Most of the time shaken baby syndrome occurs because a parent or caretaker is frustrated or angry with a child. Other times, children become victims when a parent or caretaker, not realizing how serious this behavior can harm, throws a small child into the air vigorously, plays too roughly, or hits an infant too hard on the back.

There are some non-violent ways to stop a child from crying. These might include:

1. *Running a vacuum cleaner within hearing range of the child.*
2. *Giving the baby a pacifier after checking to make sure that he/she is not hungry or wet.*
3. *Putting the baby in a safe carrier on top of a clothes dryer while it is operating (not leaving the baby unattended).*
4. *Simply hugging the child gently.*

Information about Shaken Baby Syndrome is not intended to make parents afraid to touch their children. It is intended to remind parents that special care must be taken when handling children under 2 years of age and that children must never be shaken for any reason.

Specific questions on the subject of Shaken Baby Syndrome should be directed to your physician.



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