

Abusive Head Trauma is the technical term for what is commonly known as **shaken baby syndrome**. It describes the serious damages that can occur when an infant or toddler has been severely or violently shaken or had a significant impact event (like being thrown onto a couch).



Babies and young children have large heads compared to the size of their bodies. Their brains do not have the nooks and crannies adult brains have. Their brains also have more water - kind of like under-set jello. Their shoulder and neck muscles are too weak to help hold the head in place, making the brain more vulnerable to injury. When a baby or young child is shaken, the head whips back and forth slamming the brain against the hard skull, causing bruising, bleeding and swelling inside the brain.



@PCA KY



@PCA KY



@preventchildabuseky



pcaky@pcaky.org

1.800.CHILDREN

*A free, confidential information
and support helpline*

www.pcaky.org

Funding provided by:



© 2021 Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky. All rights reserved.
Please contact us at pcaky@pcaky.org to request
permission to reproduce this information.

*This project is funded in part or in whole with state or
federal funds through a contract (#PON2 736 19000018008)
with the KY Cabinet for Health and Family Services.*

Understanding Abusive Head Trauma & Safe Sleep



**Prevent Child Abuse
Kentucky™**



Why do babies cry?



Taking care of a baby can be difficult and frustrating. Often, the biggest challenge is trying to figure out why the baby is crying. Crying does not mean your baby is being bad, angry or doesn't love you. Sometimes babies just cry.

The following questions can help you think about ways to help your child. Ensure everyone who cares for your baby knows this information.

- ❁ Does the baby need to be fed or burped?
- ❁ Does the baby need to be changed?
- ❁ Is the baby's clothing too small or are clothing tags irritating the baby?

- ❁ For little boys, check their penises, to look to see if hair has gotten wrapped around them.
- ❁ Is the baby too hot or too cold?
- ❁ Does the baby have a fever?
- ❁ Does the baby seem to be in pain from an earache or teething? Call your doctor or health clinic for advice.
- ❁ Does the baby need to feel close to you? Babies need to be held often. Touching and cuddling help a baby develop both physically and mentally.
- ❁ Is the baby overtired or over stimulated? Turn off extra noise like the television. Lower the lights. Gently lay the baby in a crib on his/her back, free from blankets or toys.

What to do next:

If you have done all of these things and the baby is still crying here are some next steps:

- ❁ Hold the baby against your chest and walk or rock gently.
- ❁ Take slow, deep breaths and count to 10, 20 or more.
- ❁ Place the baby on his/her back in a safe sleeping environment (crib without padding, toys, stuffed animals or pillows), close the door, play soft music or white noise, and check on baby every 10-15 minutes. Crying will not hurt the baby.
- ❁ Do something for yourself like meditate, play your favorite music, or exercise.
- ❁ Write down the ten best things about yourself. Write down the ten best things about your baby.
- ❁ Call a friend, a family member, your doctor, or **1.800.CHILDREN** for support.
- ❁ Be kind to yourself. Being frustrated and/or angry are normal feelings for all caregivers.



Why all the concern?

We don't want to scare you, but you need to know shaking a baby, or young child, can have consequences. It can cause:

- Brain damage
- Spinal injury/paralysis
- Blindness
- Seizures
- Developmental delays
- Broken bones
- And even death

How much force does it take to cause these injuries to an infant?

All shaking is unsafe. If you find yourself wondering if a behavior is unsafe, it is not worth the risk!



If an infant or small child has been shaken, the child may show any one or all of these signs/symptoms:

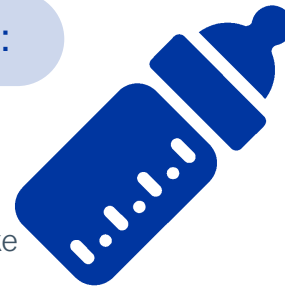
Physical Indicators:

- Bruising ANYWHERE on a non-mobile baby
- Bruising on the torso, ears or neck (for children ages 4 and younger)
- Seizures
- Tremors
- Vomiting

There may be no physical indicators.

Behavioral Indicators:

- Difficulty breathing
- Extreme irritability
- Difficulty staying awake



What should I do if I think my baby or child has been shaken?

- Call 911** or immediately go to the closest hospital emergency room.
- Tell the doctor or nurse if you know or suspect your child was shaken.
- Don't let embarrassment, guilt, fear or relationships get in the way of your child's life or health.



Prevent Abusive Head Trauma by Educating Others Who May Care for Your Baby

- Educate everyone who cares for your baby; this includes babysitters, childcare personnel, love interests, and family members.
- Develop a plan with your child's caregiver to provide support during stressful times. Let caregivers know you will pick your child up immediately if the caregiver is over stressed.
- Crying peaks between 3-6 weeks after birth. Babies who cry a lot, or are awake and fussy at night, can be overwhelming. Develop a self-care plan for when this happens.
- Tell everyone who cares for your baby no one should ever shake your baby!



Use your camera phone to scan the QR and watch our award-winning video about preventing abusive head trauma:



Remember safe sleep practices to help reduce Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID)

ABCD's of Safe Sleep



Alone

Stay close, sleep apart.

Every baby needs his/her own Safe Sleep Space. Sleeping in the parent's bedroom is safest for infants the first year of life, but in a separate crib or bassinet.

Back

On Your Back for Nights and Naps

To reduce the risk of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Syndrome (SUID), a baby should always sleep on his/her back at every sleeptime, both at night as well as nap time.

Crib

Clean, Clear Crib

A baby should sleep in his/her crib for every sleep. The crib should only contain your baby sleeping on a firm mattress with a fitted sheet. No pillows, blankets, toys, etc.

Danger

Be Aware, Not Impaired

Drinking and drug use, even prescribed medications, can impair your ability to care for a baby. This makes bed sharing and other unsafe sleep even more dangerous for the baby.



Things to Remember with SUID

- Smoke exposure during and after pregnancy doubles the risk of an infant dying from SUID.
- Unsafe Sleep Practices:
94% of SUID cases in Kentucky have at least one unsafe sleep factor.
- A baby should never sleep in a car seat, swing, infant seat, adult bed, couch, chair, or any other item not designated for infant sleep.



Recommendations associated with SUID

- Breastfeeding** reduces the risk of SUID by at least 35%.
- Babies should always sleep on their **backs for every sleep period**, both at night and during naps.
- Offer a **pacifier** during sleep but do not attach it to any object (toy, clothing, etc.).
- Schedule and go to all **well-child visits**.

