

# Don't shake the baby

*"I thought I couldn't manage. She cried all the time, I was exhausted and nothing worked. I felt such a failure. I got so angry with her I felt like shaking her to stop her noise. I had no idea how much that could hurt her."*

- Shaking is often a response to extreme frustration
- Shaking can cause damage that you cannot see
- Shaking can cause damage that is long lasting
- Never shake a child for any reason
- There are different ways to cope with a crying baby
- Do not suffer alone, seek support from others

## different ways to cope

### Why do people shake babies?

Often, although not always, babies and young children are shaken when a parent or carer becomes very frustrated when they will not stop crying due to colic, illness or feeding difficulties. On average a baby will cry for at least two hours every day. If a baby has additional difficulties, they will cry more and this can be very stressful. One in ten babies cry much more than this average and many parents experience a great deal of difficulty managing this.

Many parents may not realise the extent of the damage that a shake can do to a young child. Parents/carers who have a low tolerance level may become angry and more likely to give in and shake the child. However there are many alternatives to try and people to talk to.

Some very rough play with a young child can also cause some similar injuries so never shake a young child.

### What damage can shaking cause?

Shaking a baby can cause death or serious and long-lasting brain damage. Shaken Baby Syndrome is an injury that results when a baby is shaken so that his or her head wobbles rapidly back and forth. The force of this can tear the blood vessels that connect the brain and skull. This happens because a young child's neck muscles are not strong enough to hold their head firmly. The action of shaking can cause serious damage, even though the parent does not perceive it as fierce. Never ever shake a baby for any reason.

### Ways to cope with a crying baby

Crying is the way all babies make sure that their basic needs are met - they may be hungry, thirsty, need a change of nappy or even some company. Crying is neither your fault nor the fault of your baby.

### Some of the ways to cope include:

- Count to ten before doing anything and allow yourself to calm down.
- Consider using a dummy/soother.
- Hug and cuddle your child - perhaps with the use of a baby-carrier so that they are close to your body in order to help soothe them.
- Go for a walk or a drive to help them sleep.
- Make use of a helpline in times of crisis.
- If necessary walk out of the room for a short time, ensuring that you are nearby.
- Ask someone else you trust to take over for a while.

## WARNING SIGNS

*A range of signs can indicate if a child may have been shaken, including feeding difficulties, lethargy, eye injuries, vomiting, irritability, speech and learning difficulties, developmental delay, seizures and paralysis.*

## ACTION

*If you are worried about your child, take him or her to see your Doctor, Health Visitor or to the Casualty department. Seek support, including the helplines listed under Contacts*

## WHAT TO SAY

*Develop communication with your child using eye contact, smiling, cuddling and talking. This will develop your understanding and responsiveness to your baby's needs when he/she is having difficulties.*

## PREVENTION

*It is never safe to shake a child, not even in play. It is important for siblings playing together or for the babysitter or any other carer to be made aware of the dangers.*

## CONTACTS

- Your Health Visitor or GP
- CRY-SIS  
08451 228 669
- Parentline Plus  
0808 800 2222
- NHS Direct (24 hours)  
0845 4647
- Local SureStart:  
Chippenham  
01249 463907  
Melksham  
01225 709594  
Services Cotswold Centre  
01225 810537  
The Avenue, Warminster  
01985 213383
- Ask Wiltshire  
08457 585 072

*Check the Wiltshire ACPC website for the latest phone numbers:  
[www.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk)*