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Prevent Needless Deaths Facts about infants and head trauma

Across Tampa Bay, 11 babies and young children died in the past six years (2013-2018) after they were shaken violently or suffered other kinds of abusive head trauma at the hands of a caregiver. These tragedies teach a crucial lesson: never shake a baby.

The facts on head trauma and young children:

- Shaking an infant or young child – even once – can cause serious or fatal injuries.
- Abusive head trauma, such as shaken baby syndrome, most often occurs in children under five.
- Crying is the top trigger for shaking a baby. Crying can quickly stress an unprepared caregiver, which can lead to devastating consequences.
- Parents most often cause the injury or death from head trauma. In most cases, the parent did not mean to harm the child, but they lack the knowledge or skills to cope with a stressful situation.

Head trauma prevention tips for parents and caregivers:

- *Understand that crying is normal.* Crying is the way infants communicate. A baby may cry because they are hungry, need their diaper changed, are teething, are too hot or too cold, or simply because they are over-tired. Prepare for and prevent situations where your child might cry.
- *Attempt to soothe the child.* If the obvious solutions do not seem to be working, the next step may be a soothing action such as swaddling in a blanket, slowly rocking in chair, humming or going for a walk. Parents should provide the child's caregiver with a recommendation of what typically works.
- *Remember it's okay to take a time out.* If a child is crying and the situation becomes frustrating, it's okay to leave the child safely on their back in the crib and step out of the room to regroup. Stepping away reduces the chance of stress leading to a dangerous situation. If a break is necessary, check on the child every five minutes to ensure the child is still safe.
- *Check the background of every caregiver.* A key to preventing more deaths from abusive head trauma is to check out the background and childcare skills of any caregiver.
- *Talk about it.* Have frank conversations with caregivers, including spouses and immediate family members, about the dangers of head trauma. Watch for signs that show a caregiver may not be prepared to care for a child, such as if they are easily angered or stressed, or seem inattentive. Don't assume that a caregiver who loves the parent will feel the same way toward the child.

Prevent Needless Deaths is an awareness campaign made possible by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County, Eckerd Kids and the Florida Department of Children and Families.