



What all parents and caregivers should know about children and abusive head trauma



Talk with family members and caregivers about safe ways to handle stressful situations when caring for children

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Shaking an infant or young child – even once – can be fatal. Each year, several children in the Tampa Bay area die from being shaken violently, or suffer another type of abusive head trauma at the hands of a parent or caregiver.

While most parents think this tragedy would never happen to their families, parents are most often responsible for causing injury or death from shaking a baby. Babysitters, grandparents and other caregivers can also be responsible, especially if they are not properly prepared to handle stressful situations, such as when a baby is crying and cannot be soothed by feeding or a diaper change.

Head trauma, also known as shaken baby syndrome, most often occurs in children under five years old. In most cases, the parent or caregiver does not mean to harm the child but lacks the knowledge or skills to cope with a stressful situation.

Education is key to preventing head trauma-related child deaths. Before leaving your infant or toddler in the care of a family member, friend or babysitter, talk to them about the risks of shaken baby syndrome and help them understand how to handle stressful situations when your baby is crying.

- **Help your caregiver understand that crying is normal.**

Crying is how babies communicate with us. Babies may cry because they are hungry, need a diaper change, are teething, are too hot or too cold, or are simply over-tired. You know your child's habits, so let your caregiver know what to check first. Help caregivers prepare for and prevent situations where your child might cry.

- **Recommend steps to soothe the child.** Sometimes a baby will continue to cry even after he or she has been fed, is wearing a clean diaper or recently woke up. If the first steps to calm the child do not seem to be working, a soothing action such as swaddling in a blanket, slowly rocking in a chair, humming or going for a walk might be needed. Provide your child's caregiver with recommendations of soothing actions that typically work for you.

- **Let them know it's okay to take a time out.** Let the caregiver know that if a situation becomes frustrating, it's okay to leave the child safely on their back in the crib – even if they are still crying – and step out of the room to regroup. Stepping away from the situation reduces the chance of stress leading to a dangerous situation. If a break is necessary, have the caregiver check on the child every five minutes to ensure the child is still safe.

To learn more about the dangers of head trauma and how to prevent needless child deaths, visit PreventNeedlessDeaths.com.