

# IT'S NOT OK TO SHAKE BABIES

Having a baby and becoming a parent is one of the most wonderful and rewarding experiences in anyone's life. It can also be overwhelming and exhausting. It's a huge responsibility caring for such a tiny, helpless person.

All of us as new parents go through times when we feel frustrated and as if we can't cope. In times when our baby is crying, can't be soothed and sounds very angry, it is **NEVER OK** to shake babies!

It is important to know that even rough play and angry handling, as well as shaking by an adult, can hurt a baby - actions like tossing in the air and dumping on a bed.

Almost no adults who shake babies mean to hurt them. They are overcome by frustration and often want the baby to be quiet. Other worries and frustrations in life can make matters worse and contribute to the frustration, but this should never be taken out on babies.

Never shake a baby who seems to have stopped breathing - **ring 000 for help**. New parents and anyone caring for babies should learn first aid for emergencies. A quick response can save lives!

## WHY IS IT SO DANGEROUS TO SHAKE A BABY?

Babies have big heads and small bodies with weak necks, so their heads flop around when moved suddenly. Shaking can tear the small blood vessels between their brain and skull and cause bleeding. The soft brain can also bleed and get bruised by bumping onto the skull.

Shaking can lead to brain damage, which can show itself as:

- Unconsciousness
- Fits and epilepsy
- Blindness
- Cerebral palsy
- Speech and learning problems
- Damage to bones and other organs such as liver, heart, kidneys, lungs
- Death

The younger the baby, the greater the risk, but even small children can be seriously injured by shaking.

It is also important to remember these problems can have many other causes.



## HOW ABOUT MAKING A 'SAFETY PLAN'?

Being prepared is always helpful. If you have made a plan of what to do when it is all going wrong, it can help when you are in danger of 'losing it'. Maybe put the plan on the fridge - or on your phone? Things like:

- Ways you have settled your baby previously.
- People to ring for help and support.
- Things that help you calm down - a cup of tea (not alcohol!), breathing exercises (take a deep breath for four seconds, hold for four seconds, breathe out for six seconds and keep going until you calm down), other things you know calm you - your pet, music, your favourite picture etc.

**If you are worried that your baby is ill, go to the nearest hospital.** Get a friend or neighbour to drive you or call an ambulance. Don't drive when you are distressed. It is too dangerous.

## IF YOU THINK YOU ARE IN DANGER OF 'LOSING IT'... TAKE A BREAK

Give yourself a chance to calm down.

- It is better for you to let your baby cry safely in the cot (on their back) whilst you calm down rather than risk shaking him/her in your frustration. Check your baby regularly till you are calm.
- Check your 'safety plan' for suggestions.
- Call a friend, relative or professional for help. Tell them how you feel.
- Call a helpline - the numbers are on the back of this brochure.

It is being a good parent to know your limits and seek help. It is not a sign of failure.

## WHAT IF A BABY HAS BEEN SHAKEN?

**If you think a baby might have been shaken, call triple zero (000) for an ambulance or take the baby to the nearest emergency department as soon as possible.** The injury can be life threatening and the baby is at risk of permanent brain damage. Danger signs can include:

- Drowsiness
- Floppiness (decreased muscle tone)
- Shaking (tremors)
- Different breathing or feeding
- Vomiting
- Unequal size or dilated pupils in the eyes
- Skin pale, blue or blotchy (poor circulation)

It's important to have conversations about the dangers of shaking babies and support options with anyone who cares for your child. Give them this brochure - and make sure they read it!

## WHY DOES MY BABY CRY SO MUCH?

All babies cry and some cry more than others. Crying is normal and a baby's main way of getting our attention to show that they are uncomfortable. There are many reasons why babies cry, they may be:

- Hungry, tired or needing a nappy change
- Too hot or too cold
- Uncomfortable or in constricting clothes
- Overstimulated (too many visitors?)
- Upset, lonely or frightened
- Unwell or colicky

## TIPS TO CALM YOUR BABY

If your baby won't settle after being fed, changed and cuddled you could try:

- Gently rubbing or patting your baby.
- Walking around with your baby snuggled up to your chest to feel your heartbeat. A baby sling or carrier might help.
- Singing, humming, talking and whispering - this might help you as well!
- Taking your baby for a walk in the pram - being outdoors might help you both feel better.

**Note:** If your baby is crying more than usual he/she might be unwell - get it checked out with your doctor, health nurse or hospital straight away.



## DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK - HELP IS THERE FOR YOU

For more parenting information and support contact your local

**Maternal and Child Health Nurse.**

Your local MCH Centre can be found at:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/)

**MCH Line 13 22 29**

**Parentline VIC 13 22 89**

These telephone services provide age appropriate information, advice and support to parents. They can also link you into local community, health and support services.

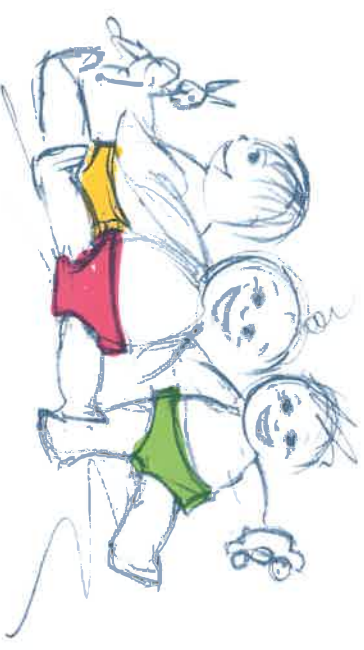
Additional online resource:

**Raising Children's Network**

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)



[www.napcan.org.au](http://www.napcan.org.au)



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