

# **SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME:**

**A SAFETY MANUAL FOR  
HAND IN HAND CHILD CARE**

## **SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME**

### **BACKGROUND:**

The dangers of shaking a baby are becoming more and more apparent, often with disastrous results. The sudden shaking motion causes the baby's fragile brain to slam against the skull wall often resulting in cerebral hemorrhage, contusion and edema, bleeding within the brain or tears in brain tissue. The potential outcome is generally severe brain damage or death. Severe damage of this type is most common in very young infants, but it can happen even to three (3) year olds.

### **WHAT IS SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME (SBS)?**

- ✓ SBS is the medical term used to describe the violent shaking and result sustained from shaking.
- ✓ Shaking must be of such a force that an independent lay observer would recognize the act as dangerous.
- ✓ SBS most often occurs when a child receives numerous rapid shakes; head impact is not necessary, but does frequently occur.

### **STATISTICAL FACTS:**

- ✓ Shaking a baby or child can cause severe consequences such as blindness, brain damage, seizures, broken bones, paralysis and even death.
- ✓ The number one reason a baby is shaken is because of inconsolable crying.
- ✓ Almost 70% of the perpetrators of Shaken Baby Syndrome are male.
- ✓ More than 50% of the victims of Shaken Baby Syndrome are male.
- ✓ 50% of offenders are natural parents, 17% are non-relative caregivers, 17% are boyfriends of the mother, and 6% are stepparents.
- ✓ The average age of the offender is 22 years old with a range of 14 – 46 years old.
- ✓ 80% of the offenders have no previous history of child abuse.
- ✓ Tossing in the air or bouncing on the knee has the potential to cause injury but is not severe enough to cause Shaken Baby Syndrome but should be avoided in children under age two.
- ✓ Shaken Baby Syndrome accounts for an estimated 10 – 12% of all deaths due to abuse and neglect in the U.S.
- ✓ A baby's neck is too weak to support his heavy head. Consequently, when shaken, the head flops back and forth, causing serious brain damage.

- ✓ A baby's brain and the blood vessels connecting the skull to the brain are fragile and immature. Therefore, when a baby is shaken, the brain ricochets about the skull, causing the blood vessels to tear away and blood to pool inside the skull.

## **WHY BABY'S ARE SHAKEN**

- ✓ A caregiver momentarily succumbs to the frustration of responding to a crying baby by shaking.
- ✓ Shaken Baby Syndrome usually happens when the caregiver is angry and loses control.
- ✓ Caregivers may be inadequately prepared for parenting.
- ✓ They may be under stress and cannot deal with the frustrations of parenting.
- ✓ The caregiver personalizes the infant's crying as inadequate caregiving.

## **WHAT TO DO WHEN A BABY CRIES**

- ✓ Check for the baby's basic needs and make him comfortable.
- ✓ Try feeding or burping the baby.
- ✓ Check for signs of illness, such as a fever or swollen gums. If signs are present, call the parents or administer proper care based on the symptoms.
- ✓ Soothe the baby by lightly rubbing his back.
- ✓ Rock or walk with the baby gently.
- ✓ Offer a pacifier.
- ✓ Lower any surrounding noise and lights.
- ✓ Offer the baby a noisy toy; shake or rattle it.
- ✓ Lay the baby, tummy down, across your lap and gently rub or pat his back.
- ✓ Massage the baby's body and limbs gently or make tickly soft circles on his face.
- ✓ Rock, walk or dance with the baby.
- ✓ Sing or talk to the baby using soft soothing tones.
- ✓ Take the baby for a walk in a stroller.
- ✓ Record the sound of a vacuum cleaner or hair dryer and play it for the baby.
- ✓ If you get frustrated, have someone else take the baby from you. If you start to feel angry and frustrated put the baby in a crib or playpen, close the door and go to another room.
- ✓ Count to ten to calm down; if that does not work, count again.
- ✓ Remember YOU are the adult.

## **WHAT DAMAGE CAN SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME CAUSE**

Shaken Baby Syndrome, first described as a syndrome in 1974, can be lethal: approximately one shaken baby in for dies from the injuries. Those who survive may suffer blindness caused by bleeding around the brain and eyes, or disabling brain damage, including mental retardation (mild to severe), paralysis, seizure disorder, speech and learning disabilities, neck and back damage, and dislocated bones.

## **WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME**

- ✓ Head turned to one side.
- ✓ Unable to lift or turn head.
- ✓ Pinpointed, dilated or unequal size pupils
- ✓ Blood pooling in eyes and detached retinal damage. (This in not visible to the naked eye but is a medical diagnostic tool.)
- ✓ Pupils unresponsive to light.
- ✓ Bulging or spongy forehead.
- ✓ No smiling or vocalization.
- ✓ Poor sucking or swallowing.
- ✓ Rigidity.
- ✓ Semi-consciousness.
- ✓ Decreased muscle tone.
- ✓ Difficulty in breathing.
- ✓ Seizures or spasms.
- ✓ Swollen head, which may appear later.
- ✓ Poor feeding/eating.
- ✓ Irritability.
- ✓ Cardiopulmonary arrest.
- ✓ Vomiting.
- ✓ Lethargy.
- ✓ Failure to thrive.
- ✓ Coma.
- ✓ Pale or bluish skin.

Diagnosis of Shaken Baby Syndrome may often be confirmed through a MRI or CT scan; however, retinal scans are also one of the better diagnostic tools.

Many incidents of Shaken Baby Syndrome are not reported out of fear. It is important to seek immediate and early medical attention. Serious complications and even death COULD be avoided.

## **CONCLUSION**

Remember shaking a baby in a moment of frustration changes your life and the life of the baby forever. Remember Shaken Baby Syndrome is prosecutable as a felony conviction and perpetrators may serve 20 years life in prison for this crime.

This information is intended not to scare you, but to remind you that special care must be taken when handling children in the infant to five year-old range.

Information taken from several sources. Especially from "Shaken Baby Syndrom" Awareness and Prevention from the Epilepsy Association of Central Florida.

## POST TEST FOR SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME

1. T F Shaken Baby Syndrome is the medical term used to describe violent shaking and the results from sustained shaking.
2. T F Violent or severe shaking and brief shaking can cause brain damage to a baby.
3. T F To cause Shaken Baby Syndrome shaking must be of such force that an independent lay observer would recognize the act as dangerous.
4. T F Even if you are scared when a baby is shaken you should seek medical attention immediately and not wait.
4. T F 80% of offenders of Shaken Baby Syndrome have no previous history of child abuse.
6. T F Shaken Baby Syndrome often occurs when a baby receives numerous rapid shakes; head impact is not necessary, but does frequently occur.
7. T F Only a person with a history of child abuse would shake a baby.
8. T F If a baby will not stop crying: check their basic needs, offer them a pacifier, rock the baby gently, play soft music, or give the baby to someone else.
9. T F After you have tried the above, and you are losing control it is okay to place the baby in their crib, walk away and take a break to calm yourself down.
10. T F You should never shake a baby or child at any time for any reason.