



Shaken Baby Syndrome

One shaken baby in three dies as a result of this abuse¹

Shaken Baby Syndrome Definition

Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is caused by vigorous shaking of an infant or young child by the arms, legs, chest or shoulders. Long-term consequences can include learning disabilities, physical disabilities, partial or total blindness, hearing impairment, speech disabilities, cognitive disabilities, cerebral palsy, seizures, behavioral disorders and death.



Scope of Problem

- More than one million children are severely abused annually. Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in infants.¹
- In the United States, the annual incidence rate of Shaken Baby Syndrome is between 750 and 3,750. One third of the victims of SBS survive with few or no consequences, one-third suffer permanent injury and one-third die.¹
- Parental behaviors, environmental factors and child characteristics all may contribute to a shaking event.¹

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Physical Consequences of Shaking An Infant or Toddler

What Happens

- The brain bounces back and forth within the skull cavity, injuring or destroying the brain tissue
- When shaking occurs, blood vessels feeding the brain can be torn, leading to bleeding around the brain
- Retinal (back of eye) bleeding can occur. This can cause blindness

Why

- Babies' heads are large and heavy, making up about 25% of their total body weight. Their neck muscles are too weak to support such a disproportionately large head
- Babies' brains are immature and more easily injured
- Babies' blood vessels around the brain are more susceptible to tearing than older children and adults

When

- Deliberately shaking an infant or child out of frustration or anger. This most often occurs when the baby won't stop crying. Other triggering events include toilet training difficulties and feeding problems

Immediate Consequences

- Breathing may stop, extreme irritability, seizures, limp arms and legs, decreased level of consciousness, vomiting, heart may stop, death.

Long-Term Consequences

- Learning disabilities, physical disabilities, partial or total blindness, hearing impairment, speech disabilities, cognitive disabilities, cerebral palsy, seizures, behavior disorders, death.

Sources:

1. Clinical Excellence for Nurse Practitioners, September 1999, "Shaken Baby Syndrome: Identification, Intervention and Prevention," by Wyszynski, M.E.
2. The Arc, Q&A on Shaken Baby Syndrome #101-55, October 1997
3. KidsHealth for Parents, "Can SBS Be Prevented?" http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/brain/shaken_p8.html. January 31, 2001.
4. KidsHealth for Parents, "What is SBS?" http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/brain/shaken_p2.html. January 31, 2001.

Prevention of SBS

- If you are afraid you might hurt your child or a child in your care, follow these three simple steps:
 - **Stop:** Put the child in a safe place and leave the room for a few minutes.
 - **Calm Down:** Call a friend or a neighbor, take 10 deep breaths, take 10 more, do something for yourself, change your activity, or sit down, close your eyes and think of a pleasant place in your memory.
 - **Try Again:** Go back to the child and try again to deal with the problems at hand.²

Who, What, When & Why

- The perpetrators in SBS cases are almost always parents or caregivers, who shake the baby out of frustration when he or she is crying inconsolably.³
- Caregivers who shake babies usually do so out of stress or dealing with a fussy baby.³
- It is estimated that males, often in their early 20s, usually the baby's father or mother's boyfriend, are the perpetrators in 65 to 90 percent of the cases.³
- The average age of the victim is between three and eight months. Approximately 60 percent of shaken babies are male."⁴