

PREVENTING SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME

A Guide for Health Departments and
Community-Based Organizations

A part of CDC's "Heads Up" Series



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Focusing on Positive Parenting

Focus on promoting protective factors in your SBS prevention messages. Messages that encourage positive and protective factors through parenting skills can create a positive norm of good parenting. Because young children experience the world through their relationships with parents and other caregivers,²³ protective factors at both the family and community levels provide a buffer for children at risk for abuse or neglect. Scientific evidence shows that a supportive family environment is a key protective factor against abuse or neglect. Specifically, *safe, stable, and nurturing relationships* between children and adults protect against maltreatment and other adverse exposures occurring during childhood that compromise health over the lifespan.

Example Messages for Bystanders

- 1) Crying is normal for babies.
 - a) Excessive crying is a normal phase in infant development.
 - b) Sometimes babies cry for no apparent reason.
 - c) It is not always possible to console a crying infant.

- 2) Support parents and other caregivers of babies.
 - a) As appropriate, offer to provide child care so that parents get needed breaks.
 - b) Be sensitive and supportive in situations in which parents or caregivers are trying to calm a crying baby.
 - c) Communicate to the parent or caregiver that you understand that it is difficult to care for a crying baby and offer to help (this may include giving the parent a helping hand or a break, sharing a parent support helpline number, or just acknowledging that parenting can be difficult and exhausting at times).



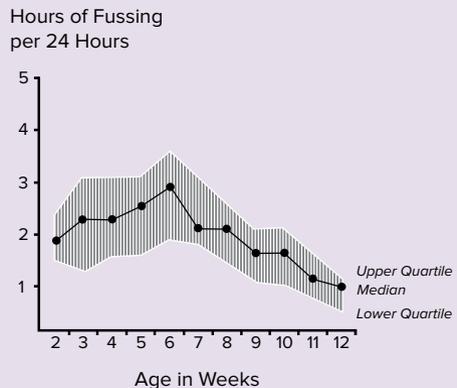
Bystanders Are Important

Many parents feel pressured on some level, by others, to make their baby stop crying (CDC 2007 *Healthstyles Survey*). Bystanders are people who are not caring for an infant, but who may be affected by an infant's crying or other behaviors.

²³Miehl NJ. Shaken baby syndrome. *J Forensic Nurs* 2005;1(3):11–7.

“Crying Curve”

Infant crying begins to increase around 2 to 3 weeks of age, and peaks around 6 to 8 weeks of age. As illustrated below, it then tapers off when the baby is 3 to 4 months old.



Source: *Crying in Infancy*, T. Berry Brazelton. Reproduced with permission from *Pediatrics*, Vol. 29, Pages 579-588, Copyright © April 1962 by the AAP

Example Messages for Health Care Providers

- 1) Remind parents and caregivers that crying is normal for babies.
 - a) Explain to parents that excessive crying is a normal phase of infant development.
 - b) Share the Crying Curve with parents.

- 2) Support parents and other caregivers of babies.
 - a) During routine pediatric visits, be sure to ask parents how they are coping with parenthood and their feelings of stress.
 - b) Assure them that it is normal to feel frustrated at long bouts of crying and a sudden decrease in sleep, but that things will get better.
 - c) Give parents the number to a local helpline or other resource for help.
 - d) Talk with them about the steps they can take when feeling frustrated with a crying baby, such as putting the baby safely in a crib on his or her back, making sure that he or she is safe, walking away and calling for help or a friend, while checking on the baby every 5 to 10 minutes.
 - e) Let parents know what to check for when their baby is crying: signs of illness, fever or other behavior that is unusual, or discomfort like a dirty diaper, diaper rash, teething, or tight clothing, or whether he or she is hungry or needs to be burped.