



A Journalist's Guide to **Shaken Baby Syndrome:**

A Preventable Tragedy

A part of CDC's "Heads Up" Series



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

The Why: Triggers & Risk Factors

The crying...the late-night feedings...the constant changing of diapers...the resulting exhaustion...

The fact is that many new parents and caregivers find themselves unprepared for the realities of caring for a baby and the stress and aggravation that can accompany those realities.

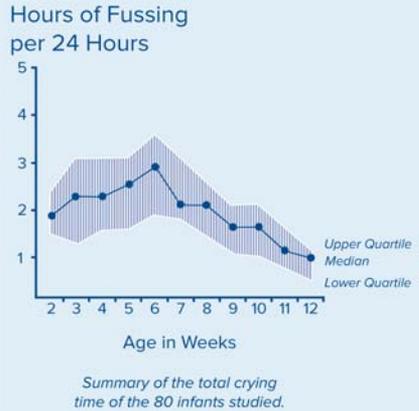
Add to these stresses at home, the outside stressors created by work, social, and/or financial challenges, and you have a potentially combustible combination. It's a mix that in some situations leads to violent behavior by the caregiver and can result in fatal or debilitating injuries for a baby.

Following is a brief discussion of inconsolable crying, the primary trigger for SBS and risk factors for SBS perpetrators and victims.

Inconsolable Crying

If you've ever been around a baby who won't stop crying, you likely know that there is potential to get frustrated.

The fact is that crying—including prolonged bouts of inconsolable crying—is normal developmental behavior in babies. It helps to think of crying as one of the ways babies communicate. Research also shows that most babies who cry a great deal are healthy and stop crying for prolonged periods of time after 4 months of age.²⁰



What most people don't realize is that there is a normal crying curve for babies. Recent studies show that crying begins to increase around 2 to 3 weeks of age, and peaks around 6 to 8 weeks of age, as illustrated above. It then tapers off, and usually ends, when the baby is 3 to 4 months old.²¹

The key here is that crying is *normal* and is not the problem.

The problem is how caregivers respond to a baby's cry.

Picking up a baby and shaking, throwing, hitting, or hurting him/her is never an appropriate response. It is important for parents and caregivers to know how they can cope if they find themselves becoming frustrated (see tips on page 6).

²⁰St. James-Roberts, I. Effective services for managing infant crying disorders and their impact on the social and emotional development of young Children. In: Tremblay RE, Barr RG, Peters RDeV, eds. Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development [online]. 2004:1-6. Available at: <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/documents/StJames-RobertANGxp.pdf>.

²¹Lee C, Barr RG, Catherine NM, Wicks A. Age-related incidence of publicly-reported shaken baby syndrome cases: Is crying a trigger for shaking? *J Dev Behav Pediatr* 2007;28(4):288-93.

²²Hoffman JM. A case of shaken baby syndrome after discharge from the newborn intensive care unit. *Adv Neonatal Care* 2005;5(3):135-46.

²³Black DA, Heyman RE, Smith Slep AM. Risk factors for child physical abuse. *Aggress Violent Behav* 2001;6(2-3):121-88.

²⁴Keenan HT, Runyan DK, Marshall SW, Nocera MA, Merten DF, Sinal SH. A population-based study of inflicted traumatic brain injury in young children. *JAMA* 2003;290(5):621-6.

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