

"I thought I couldn't manage. She cried all the time, I was exhausted and nothing worked. I felt such a failure. I got so angry with her I felt like shaking her to stop the noise. I had no idea how much that could hurt her.

Why do people shake babies?

Often, although not always, babies and young children are shaken when a parent or carer becomes very frustrated that they won't stop crying, for reasons such as colic, illness or feeding difficulties.

On average, a baby will cry for at least two hours every day. If a child has additional difficulties, they will cry more, and this can be very stressful. One-in-ten babies cry more than this average and many parents experience a great deal of difficulty in managing it.

Many parents may not realise the extent of the damage that a shake can do to a young child.

Parents / carers who have a low tolerance level may become angry and more likely to give in and shake their child. However, there are many alternatives to try, and people to talk to.

Some very rough play with a young child can also cause some similar injuries so never shake a young child.



What damage can shaking cause?

Shaking a baby can cause death or serious and long-lasting brain damage. Shaken Baby Syndrome is an injury that results when a baby is shaken so that their head wobbles rapidly back and forth. The force of this can tear the blood vessels that connect the brain and skull. This happens because a young child's neck muscles are not strong enough to hold their head firmly. The action of shaking can cause serious damage, even though the parent does not perceive it as fierce. Never shake a baby for any reason.

Ways to cope with a crying baby

Crying is the way all babies make sure that their basic needs are met - they may be hungry, thirsty, need a change of nappy or even some company. Crying is neither your fault nor the fault of your baby.

Ways to cope include:

- Count to ten before doing anything and allow yourself time to calm down.
- Consider a dummy.
- Hug and cuddle your child - perhaps with the use of a baby carrier so that they are held close to your body
- Go for a walk or drive to help them sleep.
- Make use of a helpline in times of crisis. If necessary, leave the room for a few minutes, remaining nearby.
- Ask someone you trust to take over or to care for your child for a while.



Warning Signs:

Signs a child may have been shaken include feeding difficulties, lethargy, eye injury, vomiting, irritability, speech and learning difficulties, developmental delay, seizures and paralysis.



Action:

If you are worried about your child, take them to see your GP, Health Visitor or A&E.

Seek support, including the helplines listed below.



What to say:

Communicate with your child using eye contact, smiling, cuddling and talking. This will develop your understanding and responsiveness to your baby's needs when they are having difficulties.



Prevention:

It is never safe to shake a child, not even in play. It is important for siblings playing together or for the babysitter, or any other carer, to be made aware of the dangers.

Contacts:

CRY-SIS: 0845 1228 669 www.cry-sis.org.uk

Family Lives: 0808 800 2222 www.familylives.org.uk