

## Information Leaflet for Parents:

### DON'T Shake Your Baby!

#### Congratulations on becoming new parents!

Everyone wants to be a good parent or caregiver with happy children, however, sometimes, caring for a child is not easy. This information is meant to offer helpful tips on safe, positive ways to care for your baby. It also explains why rough handling, in particular, shaking a baby is dangerous, damaging and can be fatal. At least 25% of shaken babies will die with many more being injured for life.

#### The dangers of shaking your baby

Babies have weak neck muscles and often struggle to support the heavy head. When a baby is shaken, the head is thrown back and forth quickly and with great force. This causes the baby's brain to move back and forth inside the skull, rupturing tiny blood vessels in the brain and eyes which bleed resulting in one or more of the following injuries: (Kidshealth 2017)

- Blindness
- Deafness
- Fitting
- Brain damage
- Learning difficulties and developmental delay
- Death

It is important to understand that these injuries do not happen through normal handling and play so you do not need to stop cuddling, playing and doing all the things your baby really enjoys.

#### Why would anyone shake a baby?

The main reason why people shake babies is out of frustration or anger with a crying baby. It is helpful therefore to understand the reasons why babies cry. Babies tell us how they feel or what they want through crying, it is a baby's only way of communicating. Reasons may include:

- Hunger
- Discomfort – too hot or too cold or a wet or dirty nappy. Too tight clothing.
- Upset or scared
- Feeling unwell – temperature, teething or wind
- Feeling lonely – sometimes your baby will just want comfort and want to be held, rocked, cuddled, soothed or simply to be closer to you

## Coping strategies

Keep calm and stay relaxed! After checking all the obvious reasons for your baby to be crying, here are some helpful actions you can take:

- Check for signs of illness, like fever or swollen gums
- Offer your baby another feed. Your baby may still be hungry or may want the comfort of breastfeeding – talk to your health professional about responsive feeding
- Sing or talk to your baby
- Hold your baby close to your chest and gently rock so that your baby can hear your heartbeat – holding your baby in skin-to-skin may also help
- Gently rub or massage your baby. Try removing your baby's nappy and allowing him/her to kick freely – sometimes a warm bath can soothe your baby
- Wrap your baby in a soft sheet so your baby feels secure. Take your baby for a walk in the fresh air or put your baby in the car seat and go for a ride in the car

If your baby is still crying and you feel overwhelmed and stressed.....

- Place your baby on his/her back in the cot and leave the room. Crying is normal behaviour for babies but you need to take a break from the sound. Do not be tempted to start co-sleeping with your baby. Check on your baby after 5-10 minutes.
- Call a friend or relative you trust to let them know how you feel or ask them to come round to give you a break for a short while. Talking about the situation will help to defuse your frustration and stress.

Remember, babies cry more between the ages of 1-3 months and periods of inconsolable crying are normal phases in infant development. Crying peaks around 6-8 weeks. (NCT 2017)

If you are still worried about your baby's crying or general health, speak to your midwife, GP or health visitor.

Contact your local children's/neighbourhood centre.

## Helplines

NHS Helpline 111

Cry-sis 08451 228 669 [www.cry-sis.org.uk](http://www.cry-sis.org.uk)

Family Lives 0808 800 2222 [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

NSPCC Helpline 0808 800 5000 [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

Samaritans 08457 909 090 [www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

## References

Abusive Head Trauma. Kidshealth 2017

First 1000 days. New Parent Support. NCT 2017

This leaflet was originally created by East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust