

# Family Violence News For Health Care Professionals

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## Shaking can be deadly

Babies can go through a period, usually when they are two to three months old, when they cry for no apparent reason. This may last 30 minutes or more, no matter what a caretaker might do to try to console them. This can often lead to shaking the baby out of frustration.

Shaken baby syndrome is a severe, but under-recognized, under-diagnosed and under-reported form of child abuse. Head trauma is the most frequent cause of permanent damage or death among abused infants and children, and shaking accounts for a significant number of those cases.

When a baby is shaken, the brain bounces within the skull, causing bruising, bleeding, and swelling inside the baby's brain. Since babies' neck muscles, brains and connective tissues are fragile and underdeveloped, life-long injuries can result.

The problem often begins when a parent or caretaker cannot get an infant to stop crying, leading to shaking out of frustration. Seventy percent of perpetrators, who often claim ignorance that shaking an infant can be damaging, are male, 62% are parents. As many as one in four babies who are shaken dies from the trauma.

Other life-long injuries can include:

- brain damage leading to mental retardation
- speech and learning disabilities
- spinal injury and paralysis

- cerebral palsy
- seizures
- hearing loss
- partial or total blindness
- broken bones and dislocations

## Cost of shaken baby syndrome

Jacy Showers, one of the earliest advocates for the prevention of shaken baby syndrome, estimates that, in the long term, the total costs of comprehensive medical care for a single shaken infant could potentially exceed \$1 million. This does not even begin to capture the total costs, after taking into account the victim's loss of productivity, the cost of prosecution of perpetrators, and on-going costs of physical and educational therapy.

Financial costs aside, the devastating effects on personal lives and the emotional health and well being of victims make it abundantly clear how crucial implementing a shaken baby syndrome prevention program really is.

The health care community can be at the forefront of preventing shaken baby syndrome. One key to that is through educating parents, who educate others.

This newsletter is a service of the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Family Violence Prevention Council. For more information on the Council, call the Council office at (815) 431-0630 or visit our website at [www.familyviolence13.org](http://www.familyviolence13.org). Any opinions in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Council as a whole, nor the judiciary.

## Education is prevention

Pediatric neurosurgeon Dr. Mark S. Dias did a study at the Children's Hospital of Buffalo in Western New York which provided years of reliable data on shaken baby syndrome. This study found:

- Shaken baby syndrome differs from other forms of child abuse in that it seems to result from impulsive, spontaneous acts of adult rage due to infant crying that may be modifiable with timely parental education.
- Education efforts must be targeted at parents, particularly males, and paramours, who comprise the majority of perpetrators.
- Parents should be reminded about the syndrome during a mother's post-natal hospital stay, soon after which both parents will be immersed in the challenges and associated frustrations of caring for an infant.
- Educated parents are the most effective advocates for disseminating information about shaken baby syndrome to caregivers of their child.

The Shaken Baby Syndrome Education Program, which was implemented following this study, resulted in a 57% drop in the incidence of shaken baby in Western New York, while no congruent decline was observed in neighboring regions of New York State.

The purpose of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Family Violence Prevention Council is to provide a forum for the development of a coordinated response to interpersonal violence in our community.

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To assist local health care providers in efforts to prevent shaken baby syndrome, the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Family Violence Prevention Council is in the process of developing a tool kit for health care providers. The tool kit will include a Shaken Baby Syndrome Fact Sheet and other materials that you can distribute to your patients free of charge.

In addition, the Council already has developed or purchased the following material which currently can be provided free of charge:

- Tips on Coping with Crying brochure
- Picture frame magnet with information on coping with crying
- Crying card from the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome
- Tips on Positive Discipline brochure
- Enjoy Your Baby from the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome (English and Spanish available)
- Warning: Shaking a baby can be deadly from Prevention Child Abuse Illinois (English and Spanish available)

If you are interested in obtaining any of these materials, or would like to receive the tool kit when it is released, please contact the Council office at (815) 431-0630 or by e-mail at [13fvpc@mchsi.com](mailto:13fvpc@mchsi.com).

In addition, the Council has purchased eight copies of DVD "Portrait of Promise: Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome" and six portable DVD players. The DVD runs 8 to 11 minutes (depending upon the version) and is in several languages, including English and Spanish. The DVD and players are available to be loaned to local hospitals to show new parents.

Remember:  
Crying doesn't hurt a baby — shaking does!