



**HANDLE WITH  
CARE**

WHAT IF YOUR BABY CRIES?

never  
shake  
a baby



NSW Department of  
Community Services



## NEVER SHAKE A BABY

We all want to be good parents (or caregivers) with happy, healthy, well-behaved children. However, bringing up children is never easy and sometimes adults find it hard to cope, especially when caring for a baby.

From time to time when babies are hard to settle, parents or carers may lose control and hit or shake the baby. This can cause the child great harm. Many people do not realise that babies can die or suffer permanent brain injury if they are severely shaken. Children under one year of age are most at risk. Older children can also be hurt if they are shaken hard. This brochure explains why you should never shake a baby and outlines safe ways to care for crying babies.

Babies can die or suffer permanent brain injury if they are shaken. Never shake a baby.



# SHAKING A BABY VERY HARD CAN CAUSE IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE

Severely shaking a baby can cause immediate harmful effects such as loss of consciousness or fits.

Permanent effects of shaking a baby very hard can include:

- death
- brain damage and bleeding inside the head and eyes
- spasticity in muscles affecting movement
- blindness
- epilepsy.

Many childhood injuries heal, but a head injury could leave your child with a disability for life. By talking to your babysitters, childcare workers, and friends or relatives who care for your child, you can make sure they are aware of the dangers of severely shaking a baby.





## BABIES CAN DIE IF THEY ARE SHAKEN

Babies can be damaged by shaking because, compared to an adult, their heads are large compared with their bodies, and their necks are weak. They do not have the strength to stop their head jerking backwards and forwards when shaken and this can tear the blood vessels inside the head causing bleeding and brain damage.

A baby's brain is very fragile. It is softer and moves around inside the skull more than an older child or adult's brain. So when a baby is shaken the brain is easily bruised and damaged.

Dropping babies can also cause injury.

Very young babies should never be tossed in the air or swung around. Older babies and children, who may enjoy being tossed and caught in a playful way, are at risk of serious injury if they are dropped. Anything that causes rapid, uncontrolled movement of a baby's head should be avoided.



## SHAKING IS NOT THE RIGHT WAY TO REVIVE A BABY

If you think your baby has stopped breathing, shaking is not the right way to revive your child.

If your baby has stopped breathing, put the baby on one side, clear their mouth and nose and commence resuscitation.

Call emergency services by dialling 000 immediately and ask for an ambulance. Do not waste time – every second counts.





## ALL BABIES CRY

Crying is the way babies communicate their needs and feelings to the world. It is their way of talking to you.

If you can find out what the baby needs and provide it, the crying will usually stop. But finding out what the baby needs is not always easy.

Babies cry when they are:

- hungry
- tired
- wet
- uncomfortable
- upset or scared
- unwell or in pain
- lonely
- wanting attention.

Normal, healthy babies may cry for up to a total of two or three hours a day. Sometimes a baby just wants to be picked up and held.

If your baby has been crying for what seems like forever, and you've tried feeding and changing the baby and nothing seems to help, remember no matter how tired, angry or frustrated you feel, never shake a baby.





# THE BABY WON'T STOP CRYING

If your baby has been fed and changed but still will not settle, here are some other ideas.

You might not be able to stop your baby crying but you can provide comfort and reassurance:

- give the baby a bottle of cooled boiled water
- gently rub the baby's tummy
- if your baby uses a dummy, offer a dummy – sucking is a comfort for babies
- walk or rock the baby snuggled up close to your chest so the baby can feel your heartbeat
- take the baby for a walk in the fresh air
- sing or talk to the baby
- wrap the baby in a soft blanket
- gently stroke the baby in a relaxing and rhythmical way,
- call Parent Line (24 hours) 132 055.





## WHAT IF THE BABY IS STILL CRYING

If you've tried everything you can think of and the baby is still crying, wrap the baby in a soft blanket and put them in their cot.

Leave the room. If you're feeling stressed, give yourself a chance to calm down. Leaving your baby alone for a short time, even though they are crying, will give you an opportunity to telephone a supportive friend or relative.

It is very important to let someone know how you are feeling.

Do not leave your baby unchecked for longer than 10 minutes if they are crying.

Remember, babies always need love and attention.





Help is available if you are still worried about your baby's crying or general health. Talk to your doctor or local Early Childhood Health Centre or call the

**Parent Line**

**(24 hours)**

**132 055.**





## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For immediate support and advice contact:

**Parent Line (24 Hours)** 132 055

---

**Tresillian Parenting Information and Counselling** 02 9787 0855  
1800 637 357  
(outside Sydney)

---

**Karitane Parenting Information and Counselling** 02 9794 2350  
1300 CARING  
(free call outside Sydney)

---

**DoCS Helpline 24 Hour Child Protection Service** 132 111

---

**Your local doctor or paediatrician**

---

**Your local Early Childhood Health Centre**

---

**Sydney Children's Hospital Randwick** 02 9382 1111

---

**The Children's Hospital Westmead** 02 9845 0000

---

**Kidsnet** 02 9845 2432

---

**Kids Careline Newcastle area** 02 4921 2800

---



## Your local Community Services Centre

(look in the White Pages under  
'COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT OF')

---

<b>Lifeline</b> Statewide	13 11 14
---------------------------	----------

---

<b>Dial-a-Mum</b> Statewide	02 9477 6777
-----------------------------	--------------

---

For tips and advice on a range of parenting issues, visit [www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)



NSW Department of  
Community Services



**NSW HEALTH**  
Working as a Team

Additional information supplied by NAPCAN  
(National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect)



Your baby could  
be injured in a couple  
of shakes.

NEVER SHAKE A BABY

**Help is available!**  
**Call the Parent Line**  
**(24 hours)**  
**132 055**

*\* Models only*