Handle with care

Babies are fragile and precious. Never shake a baby
Why would anyone shake a baby?

Some parents or carers may lose control and shake their baby in a moment of anger or frustration, especially if the baby cries a lot or has problems feeding. Many don’t realise the damage that shaking can do, and some may even think that it’s better than smacking. But remember, it’s never OK to shake or smack a baby.

Important advice

Even if a baby seems to have stopped breathing, don’t shake. Doctors advise flicking the soles of the feet, rocking the cot or picking up the baby, with the neck supported.

Coping with crying

Crying is the only way babies can tell us how they feel or what they need. If you’ve done all the obvious checks (hunger, thirst etc), and the crying doesn’t stop, try:

- cuddling (remember, picking up and cuddling a crying baby isn’t ‘spoiling’)
- gently rocking the baby in a cradle or pram
- singing
- walking up and down with the baby in your arms or in a sling
- playing music.

If the crying seems abnormal for your baby or you think he may be unwell, consult your health visitor.

If the crying ever feels too much to bear:

- Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Put the baby down in a safe place, like a cot or pram. Go into another room and sit down for a few minutes, perhaps with a cup of tea and the TV or radio to help take your mind off the crying. Once you feel calmer, go back to your baby.
- Ask a friend or relative to take over for a while.
- Try not to get angry with your baby as this will only make the crying worse.
- Never let things get so bad that you feel desperate. There are lots of ways you can get help. Talk to your health visitor or ring one of the contacts listed under Who can help? below.

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Who can help?

Local services
For advice about any aspect of caring for your baby, talk to your health visitor or GP. In an emergency ring 999, or go to the nearest hospital which has an Accident & Emergency department, if you know exactly where it is and can get there quickly. Social services can provide support to families under stress (look in the phone book under the name of your local authority).

Serené (including the CRY-SIS Helpline)
London WC1N 3XX
CRY-SIS Helpline: 0171-404 5011; 8.00am - 11.00pm
Support for parents dealing with excessive crying, demanding behaviour and sleep problems.

Home-Start UK
2 Salisbury Road, Leicester LE1 7QR
Tel: 0116-233 9955
Offers support, friendship and practical help at home to families with pre-school children who are experiencing difficulties.

Parentline UK
Endway House, The Endway, Hadleigh, Benfleet, Essex SS7 2AN
Helpline: 01702-559900. Textphone: 0800 783 6783
Runs a network of telephone helplines for parents under stress.

NSPCC
National Centre, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH.
Tel: 0171-825 2500
The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline is a free, 24-hour service which provides counselling, information and advice to anyone concerned about a child at risk of abuse. Please call us on 0800 800 500. Textphone 0800 056 0566.

NSPCC
Registered Charity Number: 216401

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Unlike most precious goods, babies don’t come with a set of handling instructions. In some ways they’re surprisingly tough, yet they’re also quite fragile. Many people feel nervous about holding babies at first. This leaflet offers some helpful tips on safe, positive ways of holding and caring for your baby. It also explains why rough handling, especially shaking, is dangerous and can cause serious injuries.

Remember that injuries caused by shaking don’t happen accidentally during normal play. So this advice shouldn’t stop you cuddling, playing and doing all the things your baby really enjoys. Once you’ve read this leaflet, why not put it up on a wall at home so that friends, babysitters or anyone who’s looking after your child can read it too?

### How babies like to be held

- Cuddled up close to you
- Lying on top of your chest
- With your arm around his tummy, and his back against your body
- Upright looking over your shoulder, with her head supported
- Cradled lengthways in your arms - a perfect position for smiling and talking to each other
- In a sling - a useful way of keeping close to your baby, with your arms free to do other things

Babies also like stroking and gentle massage.

### What babies don’t like

- Being held with their heads or backs unsupported
- Being held at arms length – this makes babies feel insecure
- Any rough handling, such as being gripped too tightly or having a bottle or dummy pushed into their mouth
- Being picked up very suddenly
- Very rough play
- Shaking - this can cause serious, permanent injuries or even death.

### Why is it so dangerous to shake a baby?

A baby’s head is big and heavy compared to the rest of its body. Unless supported, the head flops around because the neck muscles aren’t yet strong enough to hold it still. Shaking makes the head move back and forth very quickly and with great force. When this happens, tiny blood vessels can tear and bleed inside the baby’s brain, causing one or more of the following: blindness, deafness, fits, learning difficulties, brain damage, or even death.

### Can shaking harm older children?

The danger is greatest for babies under 12 months, but shaking can cause the same serious injuries in older babies and toddlers.

### Can other kinds of rough handling cause injuries?

Yes, particularly hitting a baby on the head. Throwing babies in the air may seem like fun, but it can be dangerous. Keep to gentle games until children are much older.

### Remember...

- Babies are fragile and precious. Never shake a baby.
- Even if your baby seems ill or stops breathing for any reason, don’t shake him as this can cause more damage. (See over for advice.)
- If you do ever lose control and shake a baby, get medical help immediately, preferably at your local hospital. A delay could be fatal.