

# Don't Shake the Baby!

## A Lesson on Shaken Baby Syndrome

### Playgroup # 15

#### Materials Needed

- Pens and pencils for each mother in your playgroup.

#### Handouts

- Have a Plan worksheet
- One Shake Can Last a Lifetime

### Introduction

Start your playgroup by having a discussion. Ask the mothers in your group what they do when they are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or frustrated with their baby and children. Make a list of the various techniques the mothers use. Encourage the mothers to use this as practical advice for dealing with their own infants and children when they are feeling overwhelmed.

### Lesson Plan

#### Lesson Objectives

- Know what Shaken Baby Syndrome is
- Know common injuries and symptoms related to Shaken Baby Syndrome
- Understand how to prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome

### **What is Shaken Baby Syndrome?**

Shaken Baby Syndrome is a type of inflicted traumatic brain injury in babies. Injury occurs when the baby is violently shaken. Because babies have weak neck muscles and large heads, babies cannot steady their head when shaken. The baby's brain bounces back and forth inside the skull which causes bruising, swelling, and bleeding. This can result in permanent brain injury or death.

Almost 25% of babies with Shaken Baby Syndrome die. Between 25% and 50% of parents and caretakers aren't aware of the serious consequences of shaking a baby. Shaken Baby Syndrome is more likely to occur when there is a live-in boyfriend in the home, when the baby is between 0-6 months of age, or if the baby has a history of colic or inconsolable crying. Shaken Baby Syndrome is usually seen in children under the age of 2 but may be seen in children up to the age of 5.

### **What Injuries Occur When a Baby is Violently Shaken?**

- Subdural hemorrhage (bleeding in the brain) which creates pressure in the brain
- Retinal hemorrhage (bleeding of the retina behind the eye) which can lead to blindness

- Veins feeding the brain are torn away leading to brain damage. This can result in learning disabilities, physical disabilities, visual disabilities, speech disabilities, and seizures.
- Damage to the spinal cord and neck
- Fractures of ribs and bones

### **What are Symptoms of Shaken Baby Syndrome?**

- Extreme irritability
- Lethargy
- Poor feeding
- Breathing problems
- Convulsions
- Vomiting
- Pale or bluish skin

### **How can Shaken Baby Syndrome be Prevented?**

Most often, babies are shaken because parents become angry, frustrated, and lose their tempers. Crying is the number one reason a baby is shaken. Remember crying does not harm the baby and is the only way that your baby can communicate his needs. When a baby is crying, parents can try to:

- Feed the baby slowly and burp the baby often.
- Offer a pacifier.
- Hold the baby against your chest and walk or rock the baby.
- Change the baby's diaper.
- Hug and cuddle the baby gently.
- Run a vacuum cleaner within hearing range of the infant.
- Take the baby for a ride in a stroller or car.
- Place the baby in a baby swing.
- Count to 10 when angry or frustrated. Take slow, deep breaths.
- Ask someone else to care for the baby and take a break.
- Be patient.
- Call for help when you are upset.
- Play soft music or go outside if weather permits.
- Call health care provider. If the baby continues to cry for a long period of time, he may need medical attention.

### **Activity**

It is important to have a plan in place for when you get frustrated with your children. Have the mothers think of ways that they can plan on handling their frustration. Next, give each mother a copy of the "Have a Plan" worksheet and have them write down their plan.

## **Suggested Reading**

**What Happened to Christopher: An American Family's Story of Shaken Baby Syndrome**  
by Ann-Janine Morey

## **References**

Foundations for the Prevention of Child Abuse (n.d.). *Fact sheet: Shaken baby syndrome*.

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (2007). *NINDS shaken baby syndrome information page*. Retrieved on March 27, 2008, from <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/shakenbaby/shakenbaby.htm>