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Background:

Abusive Head Trauma (AHT), previously known as Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS), is a severe form of physical child abuse that causes catastrophic head trauma that is inflicted by shaking an infant by the shoulders, arms, or legs. Injury may result from shaking alone or also from impact. The [triad of injuries](#) most commonly found, and known to be consistent with shaking, are bleeding around the surface of the brain, brain swelling & retinal bleeding.

These injuries are quite different from those acquired from a short fall and point strongly towards non-accidental causes.

Research has also shown that there is a demonstrable relationship between the normal peak of crying, sometimes referred to as the [Period of Purple Crying](#), and babies subject to AHT.

Why it matters:

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Inflicted trauma (especially AHT) is a leading cause of infant mortality. AHT often causes irreversible damage and at least one of every four babies who are violently shaken dies from this form of child maltreatment. After the shaking, swelling in the brain can cause enormous pressure within the skull, compressing blood vessels and increasing overall injury to the brain's delicate structure. Children who survive may have:

- Partial or total blindness
- Hearing loss
- Seizures
- Developmental delays
- Speech and learning difficulties
- Problems with memory/ retention

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What to do?

If you feel a child is in immediate danger please call for an ambulance and contact the police on 999

You can call 01670 536400 to speak to someone in Northumberland Children's Social Care about your concerns

Questions

Can AHT be prevented?

Fears that parents will become angry and feel upset should not deter practitioners from talking to them about the risks of AHT. Evidence indicates that most parents welcome education and that understanding the facts helps build awareness and reduce the risks.

Key messages for families:

- Crying is normal, please make sure the family see Coping with Crying
- Inconsolable crying generally lessens when babies are around 5 months
- If you can't cope, make sure your baby is safe and walk away, take a breath and ask for help if you need it.

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Information:

The most common trigger for shaking a baby is inconsolable or excessive crying - a normal phase of infant development.

The problem is that frustration & exhaustion can lead some individuals to breaking point. **Other risk factors include:** Young &/or single parents

Lower educational background

Unstable family dynamics Financial/food/housing concerns

Domestic violence

Drug/alcohol abuse

Parental mental illness/postpartum depression

Limited support systems

Unrelated males in the home

Infant risk factors include:

- Premature/disabled babies
- Being one of a multiple birth
- Male children
- Colicky babies
- In period of purple crying
- Unwanted pregnancy



Abusive Head Trauma (AHT) or Shaken Baby Syndrome

Information:

70% of babies shaken are shaken by men. Many studies have demonstrated that 20%-50% of children who sustain shaken baby syndrome have evidence of other inflicted trauma, such as intentional burns, broken bones and/or bruising not consistent with routine and age-appropriate injury. There are a very broad range of AHT signs and symptoms depending on the nature of the inflicted trauma. Behavioural signs may include lethargy, poor feeding, extreme irritability, high pitched crying. Physical symptoms may include bruising, breathing difficulty, seizures, bleeding or drainage of fluid from the nose or ears.

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