

**Northumberland**

Northumberland County Council



The Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB), is an independent partnership responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The NSCB website provides accessible and up-to-date advice and information for children and young people, parents and carers and professionals.

For more information about the NSCB, please call 01670 623980, email [SafeguardingChildren@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:SafeguardingChildren@northumberland.gov.uk) or access the NSCB Website: [www.northumberland.gov.uk/SafeguardingChildren](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/SafeguardingChildren)



## An NSCB Guide to keeping your baby safe



# Babies are fragile – Never Shake a Baby

The NSCB has a statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people, and has developed this guide to provide safeguarding information to parents and carers, around the dangers of shaking a baby.

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As a parent, holding your baby close is something you'll want to do from the day your baby is born. It is a natural feeling that you may feel nervous about holding your baby, and worried that you may not hold your baby the right way to begin with.

Rough handling, particularly shaking, is dangerous and can cause serious injuries to your baby. Injuries caused by shaking don't happen accidentally when you are playing with your baby. This guide provides advice about holding and caring for your baby and shouldn't stop you from cuddling, playing and doing all of the things that your baby enjoys.

### **Never Shake a Baby!**

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

A baby's head is big and heavy compared to the rest of its body and should be supported, as 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; however, shaking can cause the same serious injuries in older babies and toddlers.

### **Never Shake a Baby!**

### **More advice from Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB)**

#### **What to do if you are worried about a child:**

All children have the right to grow up safe from harm or abuse. If you think a child or young person is being abused or mistreated or you have concerns about the safety or welfare of a child, you must speak to someone immediately. You can ring the Safeguarding Team on 01670 623978 (office hours) who will connect you to your local Children's Social Care Team or ring 0845 600 5252 ((out of hours). **In an emergency, phone the police 999.**

All concerns about children are treated seriously and in confidence. Most people feel anxious about making a referral about a child to social workers. Talking through your concerns can help clarify whether there is something to be worried about or not – **don't think 'what if I am wrong?' – think 'what if I am right?'**



## Who can help?

### Local Services

For advice about any aspect of caring for your baby, talk to your Health Visitor or G.P.

### Family Lives

Provides advice services UK-wide, face-to-face Services England only:

0808 800 2222

[parentingsupport@familylives.org.uk](mailto:parentingsupport@familylives.org.uk)

[www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

### Gingerbread (England and Wales)

Provides advice and practical support for lone parents and their children in England and Wales.

0808 802 0925

[www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)

### Children's Centres in Northumberland

Provides advice and support groups for mums.

[Northumberland Children's Centres](http://Northumberland Children's Centres)

### Sure Start (England)

Sure Start Children's Centres provide a range of Services:

[www.direct.gov.uk/surestart](http://www.direct.gov.uk/surestart)

### Cry-sis (UK wide)

Helpline providing help with excessively crying, sleeplessness or demanding babies.

08451 228669

[www.cry-sis.org.uk](http://www.cry-sis.org.uk)

### Net Mums

Provides advice and information for Mums who may be suffering from post-natal depression:

[www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com)



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

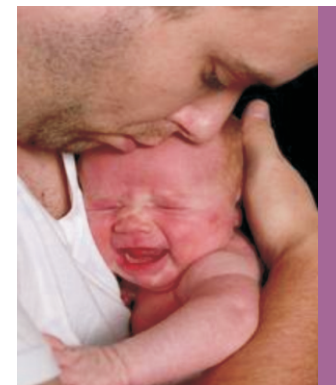
Yes, particularly hitting a baby on the head. Although babies may appear to enjoy being gently thrown in the air during play, this is also considered as dangerous, and may result in an injury. Parents are advised to keep to gentle games until children become much older.

### 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 parents don't realise the damage that shaking can do, and some parents may believe that shaking is better than smacking.

### Important advice:

When a baby is crying and they might appear to have stopped breathing, do not shake your baby. Doctor's advise flicking the soles of the feet, rocking the cot or pick up your baby, whilst supporting the neck.



### Remember:

- It is never OK to shake or smack a baby.
- If you do ever lose control and shake a baby, get medical help immediately, preferably at your local hospital.
- A delay could be fatal.



### Coping with Crying:

Crying is the only way that your baby can tell you how they feel or what they need. If you've done all of the obvious checks (hunger, thirst, nappy, etc), and the crying doesn't stop, try:

- Cuddling (remember, picking up and cuddling a crying baby isn't 'spoiling' them)
- Gently rocking your baby in a cradle or pram
- Singing
- Walking up and down with them in your arms or in a sling
- Playing music.

However, if the crying seems abnormal for your baby or you think they may be unwell, consult your Health Visitor.

***'The sound of soft music has distracted and calmed my baby'***  
**Andrea, Mother of Michael, aged 8 months.**

If the crying ever feels too much to bear:

It is important that parents and carers calm down, and are advised to take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Put down your baby in a safe place like their cot or pram, and go into another room, but go back to check your baby if they become quiet. To calm yourself down, sit 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. Alternatively you could:

- Ask a friend or relative to take over for a while, particularly if you have had no sleep.
- Babies do sense when their parent or carer is distressed, so try not to get angry with your baby as this will only make the crying worse.
- Never let things become so bad that you feel desperate. There is always someone who can help you: as well as family

and friends, you can also talk to your Health Visitor or ring one of the contacts listed in the 'who can help' section of this leaflet.

### How Babies like to be held:

- Cuddled up close to you
- Lying on top of your chest (but avoid this if you have been taking or using any substances that may affect your consciousness, for example, alcohol, drugs, prescription drugs or smoking)
- Cradled lengthways in your arms – a perfect position for smiling and talking to each other
- With your arm around their tummy (their back against your body)
- Upright, looking over your shoulder with the head supported
- In a sling – a useful way of keeping close to your baby, with your arms free to do other things.

**Leaving babies to cry can affect their brain development, and is stressful for everyone. It is a myth that you spoil your baby with too much attention/cuddles.**

Babies cry because something is wrong. All you have to do is find out what's wrong, and put it right. Then the baby will stop crying. OK, it's not always that simple but, surprisingly often, it is.

