

# Agape Schools Awareness & Prevention Newsletter

*Awareness and prevention information for the health and wellbeing of Agape families.*

## MAY IS SHAKEN BABY AWARENESS MONTH

Shaken Baby Awareness Month serves as a reminder to everyone—parents, teachers, and anyone who interacts with babies- about the importance of protecting our babies. We want every Agape parent and staff member to be aware of this devastating but preventable condition.

Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS), also called Abusive Head Trauma (AHT), happens when a baby is violently shaken, resulting in brain damage, blindness, seizures, developmental delays, physical disabilities, or even death. Keep in mind that a “violet” shake doesn’t have to be extreme.

Crying is the most common trigger for shaken baby injuries. It is important to remember that all babies cry—it is normal and natural. Babies can cry two to three hours a day, for an hour at a time. Crying is the only way they can communicate their needs, whether they are hungry, need a diaper changed, feel too hot or cold, or for many other reasons.

### Why is Shaking a Baby Dangerous?

Violent shaking for just a few seconds has the potential to cause severe injuries. Factors that contribute to a baby’s vulnerability include:

- Babies’ heads are heavy and large in proportion to their body size.
- Babies have weak neck muscles.
- Babies have fragile, undeveloped brains.
- There is a large size and strength difference between the victim and the perpetrator.

### **Possible Signs and Symptoms of SBS/AHT**

- Lethargy / decreased muscle tone
- Extreme irritability
- Decreased appetite, poor feeding or vomiting for no apparent reason
- Grab-type bruises on arms or chest
- No smiling or vocalization
- Poor sucking or swallowing
- Rigidity or posturing
- Difficulty breathing
- Decreased level of consciousness
- Seizures
- Head or forehead appears larger than usual
- Soft spot on the head appears to be bulging
- Inability to lift head
- Inability of eyes to focus or track movement
- Unequal size of pupils

### **Can Tossing My Baby in the Air or Rough Play Cause SBS?**

SBS is a form of child abuse that happens when an infant or small child is violently shaken. Shaken injuries are not caused by:

- Bouncing a baby on your knee.
- Tossing a baby in the air.
- Jogging or bicycling with your baby.
- Falls off a couch or other furniture.
- Sudden stops in a car or driving over bumps.

Although the activities listed above can be dangerous and are not recommended, they will likely not cause SBS injuries.

### **Consequences of SBS/AHT**

- Learning disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- Visual disabilities or blindness
- Hearing impairment
- Speech disabilities
- Cerebral Palsy
- Seizures
- Behavior disorders
- Cognitive impairment
- Death

## Here are a few important reminders for preventing SBS:

- **Understand the dangers:** Babies have weak neck muscles and relatively large heads. Shaking them, even briefly, can cause severe brain injury.
- **Know the signs of distress:** Babies cry, and while it can be frustrating, it's vital for caregivers to recognize that crying is normal and a way for babies to communicate. If you feel overwhelmed, it is okay to step away for a moment to calm down.
- **Seek help when needed:** It is crucial to ask for support from family, friends, or professional caregivers if you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Parenting does not have to be done alone.
- **Prevent the behavior:** Educate parents, teachers, and caregivers to stay calm and find healthy ways to manage frustration can prevent these tragic accidents.

Ohio is committed to preventing SBS, and on February 28, 2009, the state passed Claire's Law (ORC 5180.14) named after Claire Fishpaw, who was injured by an in-home childcare provider on February 28, 2000.

Claire survived her injuries; but now lives with lifelong consequences, including brain injury. The information provided in this newsletter is from the State of Ohio and the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome.

***Information in this newsletter is not intended to replace advice by a health care professional. If you suspect a child has been shaken, seek immediate medical attention.***



**Whether you are a new parent or one who has “been there & done that,” the following helpful tips will keep you fresh and ready to support your little one.**

**For this issue, we are focusing on communicating with Infants. All information is provided through a reliable source and subject matter experts. The following comes from our friends at the Centers for Disease (CDC).**

**Remember to take care of yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally. Parenting can be hard work! It is easier to enjoy your new baby and be a positive, loving parent when you are feeling good yourself.**



## **LOOK WHO'S TALKING!!**

### **Communication Tips: Infants**

- **Talk to your baby. They will find your voice calming and stimulating.**
- **Answer when your baby makes sounds by repeating the sounds and adding words. This will help them learn to use language.**
- **Read to your baby. This will help them develop and understand language and sounds.**
- **Sing to your baby and play music. This will help your baby develop a love for music and will help their brain development.**
- **Praise your baby and give them lots of loving attention.**
- **Spend time cuddling and holding your baby. This will help them feel cared for and secure.**
- **Play with your baby when they're alert and relaxed. Watch your baby closely for signs of being tired or fussy so that they can take a break from playing.**
- **Distract your baby with toys and move them to safe areas when they start moving and touching things that they shouldn't touch.**