

**ANTICIPATORY GUIDANCE ON SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME**  
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Pediatricians and Family Physicians have to be skillfully adept with their time when doing Well Child Checks (WCCs). This is especially true in the initial office visits dealing with first time parents. A myriad of issues regarding anticipatory guidance needs to be reviewed with parents in a limited amount of time. Given the mortality and devastating morbidity of **Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS)**, it is worthwhile spending a few minutes, especially at the **2 week and 2 month WCCs**, talking to parents about infant crying and the prevention of SBS. Infants and children under the age of 1 year are at greatest risk for SBS and its effects.

Infant crying is a loud, potentially aggravating sound. ***But it is the only method available to the infant to communicate with the caregiver.*** All normal babies cry for about 2-3 hours daily, peaking at about 5 weeks, and becoming less intense and frequent after 3 months. Infants' temperaments vary widely. Fussy or colicky babies cry more than their non-colicky peers do. A baby is not willfully "misbehaving" when crying.

Dr. Ronald Barr, a Canadian physician, has described the **"Period of Purple Crying"**:

**P: Peak of Crying** (crying more each day till about 8 weeks old)  
**U: Unexpected** (crying that comes and goes for no apparent reason)  
**R: Resists soothing** (crying that won't stop no matter what you do to calm the baby)  
**P: Pain-like face** (babies appears to be in pain when crying, even if they are not)  
**L: Long lasting** (crying can last 30-40 minutes or longer)  
**E: Evening** (crying is worse in the late afternoon and evening)

**How can this "Period of Purple Crying" affect parents and caregivers?**

Crying is the **most powerful trigger** that causes an adult to violently shake an infant in an effort to calm the baby. Infants have relatively large heads, not well supported by weak neck muscles. The infant brain is suspended inside the skull by delicate blood vessels, and has room to move inside the skull. A violent shaking causes the brain to slam against the bony skull, tearing the blood vessels, resulting in profound neurological consequences or death.

**☹! All it takes is 20 seconds of rage. Yet SBS happens almost 25 times a week in the US.**

What if your baby keeps crying ?



### Physicians can counsel parents on ways to cope with infant crying:

- ☺ Swaddle the baby snugly in a soft warm blanket.
- ☺ Put the baby “tummy down” on your lap and gently rub her back.
- ☺ Sing or talk to her quietly, run the vacuum, or play soothing music.
- ☺ Put the baby in a stroller or a car seat and go for a ride.
- ☺ Call a relative or friend who can help when you are feeling frustrated. It is the most responsible thing a frustrated caregiver can do.
- ☺ Put the baby alone in a crib or playpen and leave the room if you are scared of hurting the baby. Check the baby every few minutes to make sure he is all right.
- ☺ Remember that it is normal for babies to cry and the crying WILL come to an end.
- ☺ Call your Pediatrician for advice.
- ☺ **No matter how mad you get, take a break. Don't shake!!**

### USEFUL WEBSITES

[www.dontshake.com](http://www.dontshake.com) (National Ctr. on SBS)  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) (Am. Academy of Pediatrics)  
[www.shakenbaby.com](http://www.shakenbaby.com) (Shaken Baby Alliance)  
[www.robynsnest.com](http://www.robynsnest.com) (Parenting advice)  
[www.newdads.com](http://www.newdads.com) (Parenting advice)

### KEY TEACHING POINTS

Normal infant crying  
“Period of Purple Crying”  
What is SBS and its consequences  
Coping strategies for parents  
Take a break. Don't Shake!

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