

PRENATAL CLASS TEACHING
ANTICIPATORY GUIDANCE ON SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME
BY
SUDHA CHANDRASEKHAR MD FAAP

I'm sure you have heard a lot in these classes about what to expect with a new baby. What I'm going to talk about for a few minutes is how to cope when your baby cries and what you should know about the **shaken baby syndrome**.

All babies cry. Crying is the way your baby communicates with you, just as adults talk to each other to communicate. And just like adults, some babies will cry more, some will cry less, depending on their personalities.

The “normal” things about your baby’s crying are described by the period of PURPLE crying. This was described by a Canadian physician named Dr Ronald Barr and is based on years of research on newborn babies and the way they first develop.

The letters in **PURPLE** stands for:

- P: Peak** of crying (crying more each day till about 8 weeks old)
- U: Unexpected** (comes and goes, and you don’t know why)
- R: Resists** soothing (wont stop crying, no matter what you try)
- P: Pain**-like face (look like they are in pain, even when they are not)
- L: Long** lasting (can last 30-40 minutes or longer)
- E: Evening** (cries more in the late afternoon and evening)

As parents, you can find this a very trying period, especially when it’s your first baby. All you ever dreamed of was a cooing soft bundle of joy. Its unlikely you were prepared for this screaming colicky infant who refuses to calm down despite your best efforts. You are probably exhausted, you may feel like the world’s worst parents, and you may be scared the world thinks you have a “bad” baby. This can sometimes translate into feelings of anger and frustration towards the baby.

An infant’s persistent crying is actually the number one trigger that can cause a parent or caregiver to violently shake and harm a baby. The frustrated adult thinks it’s a way to get the baby to console and stop crying. But the force of the shaking can cause various injuries to the baby, including bruises on the skin, fractured ribs, and severe damage to the baby’s delicate brain. Depending on the amount of force used, the baby can show symptoms immediately or symptoms can appear over the course of time. The consequences can range from death to permanent brain damage.

That’s why it’s so very important to understand what is normal about a baby’s crying, and what you can do to cope with it.

- ☺ 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.
- ☺ 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, NEVER EVER shake your baby.

For more information check out www.dontshake.com.

