

# Handle with care

A guide to keeping  
your baby safe



Babies are fragile and  
precious – never shake a baby

NSPCC 

# 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. Unless supported, 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, but shaking can cause the same serious injuries in older babies and toddlers.

## Can other kinds of rough handling cause injuries?

Yes, particularly hitting a baby on the head. Throwing babies in the air may seem like fun, but it can be dangerous. Keep to gentle games until children are 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 don't realise the damage that shaking can do, and some may even think that it is better than smacking.

## Important advice

Even if your baby seems to have stopped breathing, don't shake them. Doctors advise flicking the soles of the feet, rocking the cot or picking up the baby, with the neck supported.

### 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.



As a mum or dad, holding your baby close is something you'll probably naturally want to do right from the earliest days. But you may feel nervous about holding your baby and feel all fingers and thumbs to start with.

Rough handling, **especially shaking**, is dangerous and can cause serious injuries. But remember, injuries caused by shaking **don't happen accidentally** during normal play. So this advice shouldn't stop you cuddling, playing and doing all the things your baby really enjoys.

We've collected the best advice from professionals, as well as some top tips from parents, to provide you with safe, positive ways of holding and caring for your baby.

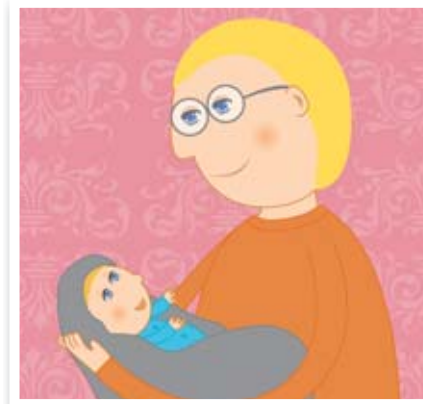
# How babies like to be held



Cuddled up close to you



Lying on top of your chest (but avoid this if you have been drinking or smoking)



Cradled lengthways in your arms – a perfect position for smiling and talking to each other



With your arm around their tummy, and their back against your body



Upright looking over your shoulder, with their head supported



In a sling – a useful way of keeping close to your baby, with your arms free to do other things

Babies also like stroking and gentle massage.

Most of all, babies need to have their heads and necks carefully supported.

## What babies don't like

- being held with their heads or backs unsupported
- being held at arm's length – this makes babies feel insecure
- any rough handling, such as being gripped too tightly or having a bottle or dummy pushed into their mouth
- being picked up very suddenly
- very rough play
- shaking – this can cause **serious, permanent injuries or even death.**

“When our daughter was born she looked so pale and fragile, like a doll. We thought, ‘we can never hurt her’ – and we never did.”

**Jo and Chris,**  
parents of Bella, 6



# 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 the obvious checks (hunger, thirst, etc), and the crying doesn't stop, try:

- cuddling (remember, picking up and cuddling a crying baby isn't "spoiling")
- 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.

*"To soothe your crying baby, try hanging a wind chime in every room. The tinkling sound will distract and calm them."*

**Kelly, mum of Mae, 6 months**

## If the crying ever feels too much to bear:

- Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Put your baby down in a safe place like a 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.

- Ask a friend or relative to take over for a while.
- Try not to get angry with your baby as this will only make the crying worse.
- Never let things get so bad that you feel desperate. There are lots of ways you can get help. Talk to your health visitor or ring one of the contacts listed in the Who can help? section of this leaflet.

*"Leaving babies to cry for long periods can affect their brain development and is also stressful for everyone. It's a myth that you can spoil a baby with too much attention."*

**NSPCC adviser**

# Who can help?

## Local services

For advice about any aspect of caring for your baby talk to your health visitor or GP.

## Sure Start (England)

Sure Start children's centres provide a range of services.  
[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

## Family Lives

Provides advice services UK-wide, face-to-face services England only.  
**0808 800 2222**  
[parentsupport@familylives.org.uk](mailto:parentsupport@familylives.org.uk)  
[www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

## Cry-sis (UK-wide)

Helpline providing help with excessively crying, sleepless or demanding babies.  
**08451 228669**  
[www.cry-sis.org.uk](http://www.cry-sis.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)

## Gingerbread NI

Provides advice and practical support for lone parents and their children in Northern Ireland.  
**0808 808 8090**

[advice@gingerbreadni.org](mailto:advice@gingerbreadni.org)  
[www.gingerbreadni.org](http://www.gingerbreadni.org)

## Lone parent helpline (Scotland)

A free and confidential helpline for lone parents and agencies working with lone parents in Scotland.  
**0808 801 0323**  
[www.opfs.org.uk](http://www.opfs.org.uk)

## Parenting NI

Support and advice on parenting and family life in Northern Ireland.  
**0808 8010 722**  
[www.parentingni.org](http://www.parentingni.org)

## ParentLine Scotland

Free telephone advice to any adult caring for a child in Scotland. (Provided by Children 1st.)  
**0800 028 2233**  
[parentlinescotland@children1st.org.uk](mailto:parentlinescotland@children1st.org.uk)  
[www.children1st.org.uk](http://www.children1st.org.uk)

## Bluebell at ParentLine Scotland

Scotland's first postnatal depression telephone helpline  
**0800 345 7457**



# Worried about a child?

Don't wait until you're certain, contact the NSPCC. Trained helpline counsellors are ready to offer expert help, advice and support 24/7. It's free, and you don't have to say who you are.

Call 0808 800 5000,  
email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)  
or visit [nspcc.org.uk/helpline](http://nspcc.org.uk/helpline)

If you are hard of hearing,  
contact us via  
[www.nspcc.org.uk/helpline](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/helpline)

## More advice from the NSPCC

### Our parenting pack

If you've found this leaflet useful, you might like to try some of the other titles in our parenting pack. They include plenty of advice on practical, positive parenting, and cover subjects like managing stress, listening to children and when's the right time to leave your child home alone.

To request a pack, please email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) or call **0808 800 5000**, mentioning the parenting pack or download copies from [www.nspcc.org.uk/parenting](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/parenting)



"Don't just keep worries to yourself. Talk to us"

In consultation with

