Responding to shaking is no different than dealing with other illnesses or accidents. It’s important to have a clear plan in place before the emergency occurs and to take action as soon as you notice that something is wrong. It is much better to seek treatment too early than to wait too long.

Be aware of shaking symptoms

Some of the early symptoms of shaking are irritability, lethargy or sleepiness, feeding problems, vomiting, dilated pupils, poor muscle tone, pale or bluish skin, seizures, not breathing, or loss of consciousness.

When an infant is shaken, the most serious effect is on the brain, but there are other physical signs that might accompany shaking. The most common ones are fractures to the ribs, fractures to the long bones of the arms or legs, and external wounds or bruises to the head. External head wounds will not be evident with most incidence of shaking. It is critical that you watch for and act on the less obvious signs of internal trauma to the brain.

Seek medical help immediately

If you know or suspect that an infant or young child has been shaken, it’s critical that you seek medical help immediately. As with any emergency, contact the parents as soon as you can, but the first call must be to 911.

If the child stops breathing before emergency help arrives, begin CPR.

If the child is vomiting and you don’t suspect spinal injury, turn his head to the side to prevent choking and aspiration.

If you suspect a spinal injury, carefully roll the whole body to the side as one unit (logrolling) while protecting the neck to prevent choking and aspiration.

Do NOT pick up or shake the child!

For more information about Shaken Baby Syndrome and materials on how to cope with infant crying, visit http://wctf.state.wi.us

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