

Period of PURPLE Crying: Keeping Babies Safe in North Carolina

We are all familiar with the sound of an inconsolable crying baby. But what we may not realize is that long-lasting bouts of infant crying in the first few months of life are a completely normal part of infant development.

Fortunately, knowing that this crying is normal may save lives. Crying is the number one trigger of shaken baby syndrome, a type of early child abuse that occurs when a person shakes an infant.

Shaken baby syndrome can cause blindness, brain damage, or even death. It is one of the leading causes of child abuse deaths in the United States, claiming an estimated 1,400 lives each year.

Most parents and caregivers do not know that inconsolable crying is normal and healthy, or that it will come to an end. Caregivers may feel frustrated or stressed when an infant won't stop crying. Although these are normal feelings, overwhelmed caregivers may shake a baby out of frustration.

But shaken baby syndrome is also preventable. And North Carolina is leading the way with a new shaken baby prevention program called the **Period of PURPLE Crying®: Keeping Babies Safe in North Carolina**.

The **Period of PURPLE Crying®** is a unique statewide program that aims to reach every new mother, father, caregiver, friend and relative in the state of North Carolina. By sharing knowledge that infant crying is a normal stage of child development, The **Period of PURPLE Crying®** hopes to save lives and reduce cases of shaking in North Carolina by 50 percent over five years.

PURPLE teaches that crying is normal

The **Period of PURPLE Crying®** is a product of the **National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome**, designed by Ronald Barr, a developmental pediatrician and leading infant crying researcher, and Marilyn Barr, the founder and director of the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome. Through education and media outreach, the center hopes to correct common misunderstandings of infant crying, emphasize its normalcy, and provide coping strategies.

Research has shown that most people do not understand infant crying. In 2007, for example, four-fifths of people interviewed in North Carolina strongly believed that “good” parents should be able to soothe their crying babies. Only one-third knew that

babies could cry for up to five hours a day and still be perfectly healthy. Often, people equated crying with sickness.

In actuality, increased infant crying is a scientifically substantiated, normal part of infant development. The letters in the acronym “PURPLE” explain the reality of infant crying.

- **Peaks:** Crying peaks at two to three months of age and ends at four to five months.
- **Unexpected:** Crying is often unexpected.
- **Resists soothing:** Infants may be resistant to soothing.
- **Pain-like Face:** Infants may appear to be in pain.
- **Long-lasting:** The crying is usually long-lasting.
- **Evening:** Crying occurs most frequently in the evening.

The program uses a variety of materials to share the **PURPLE** message. Parents and caregivers learn techniques to cope with their normal feelings of frustration, guilt, and potential anger. They learn ways that sometimes soothe a crying baby, from comforting and carrying to walking and talking. And they are advised to put the baby down in a safe place for a short time and walk away to calm down if they become too frustrated.

At the same time, caregivers are reminded to visit a doctor or nurse to learn if there are other medical issues that could be contributing to the crying.

And perhaps most importantly, parents and caregivers learn that they are not alone in their feelings. Prolonged crying occurs regardless of gender, race, culture, or parenting style. Some infants will cry more than others; some will be soothed easier than others. But eventually, the crying will end, and the infants will grow into healthy children.

North Carolina leads the way nation-wide

The **Period of PURPLE Crying®** in North Carolina is the largest and most comprehensive shaken baby prevention program in the country. It is educating North Carolinians in three ways:

- **Hospital education of parents of newborns.** Nurses and doctors at 86 hospitals in North Carolina are showing the DVD to all new parents and discussing possible ways to soothe a crying baby. Parents are given a DVD and booklet to take home and share with others who will care for their infant. By the end of 2012, the parents of more than half a million newborns will have heard the **PURPLE** message.

- **Message reinforcement.** **PURPLE** will be reinforced to parents during pre-natal visits and well-child visits at physicians' offices and community health centers.
- **A media campaign.** **PURPLE** will be shared through a mix of radio advertising, print advertising, social media, and a Web site (www.PURPLEcryingnc.info).

Parents and caregivers are not the only people who should hear about **PURPLE**. The advertising materials are designed to reach people who influence caregivers, such as relatives and friends. At the hospital, parents of newborns will receive a copy of the brochure and DVD to take home to babysitters, friends, and relatives.

By raising awareness of infant crying, the **Period of PURPLE Crying®** can help parents and caregivers in North Carolina have more realistic expectations of infant crying. This may reduce the frustration that can lead them to shake or hurt their babies—and ultimately, save lives.