

Tripler Army Medical Center

Media Release

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Commentary

Investing in your child's future

Making the best choices

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New Parent Support Program

Community Health Nursing

Tripler Army Medical Center

HONOLULU—The good folks at your neighborhood parenting advice place will tell you that babies are “wired” at birth to cry. They are right. The well-meaning but harried parents of the neighborhood two-year old will tell you that toddlers can yell, “NO”, “MINE” in at least three dialects of toddler-ese. They are completely accurate.

Your own mother might tell you that when you were five, she was afraid that your lips would be forever wrinkled because you pursed them so often to exclaim “WHY...?”. And, at 13 you pushed the limits of her ability to be charming with your frequent sorties into the land of ‘I am my own boss’. It seems that from birth until adolescence we push the limits of caregiver’s sanity. The good news is that many of us and our children are thriving, healthy humans with strong wills to survive, grow and give.

The sad news is that not all infants, toddlers, school-age kids or teens in Hawaii this year will fare as well.

It is estimated that some 13,000 cases of child abuse or neglect will be reported to the state this year. Children will die. Many will suffer the effects of an inappropriate coping technique called SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME (SBS). A child or infant who was been unable to stop crying (yes, babies have difficulty sometimes just getting the crying sound to stop), will be shaken by a frustrated caregiver.

SBS will cause severe brain damage, blindness, or death. A life is lost. In other cases of abuse, a toddler or older child will become victim to a larger person (sometimes even a sibling or playmate) who doesn't know that "why?" or "I want to do it myself, or "NO!" are normal childhood behavior. Moreover, some children will suffer from lack of medical care, adequate nutrition and shelter or educational resources.

There is hope to stop this cycle of Shaken Baby Syndrome and abuse. First of all we must understand why babies and children cry and act the way they do. Why do babies cry (and cry, and cry and cry)? Crying is one of their more effective means of communicating. It is a response that usually means some type of discomfort (physical or emotional).

Try closing your eyes for a moment and imagine that you are seven pounds of mostly soft material, on a new planet, on your back in a crib, your neck is stiff, your nose itches, your pants are wet and your belly is growling from hunger. You would cry too. Maybe you are bored with the dancing, bubbly fish mobile that goes around over your head ... maybe you are afraid. You just want to be safe. A baby recognizes safe as wherever there are loving arms and a beating heart that soothes and nurtures.

Experts testify that it is impossible to spoil an infant less than one year of age. Hold, touch, rock, walk, feed, burp, play, scratch itches, sing, dance and entertain that little one until its heart is content. This is the best investment you can give any child. In the end, we are, all of us, whether one day old or 90, members of the same human family.

What we do now, affects our family (the big one and the small one) forever. Be good to yourself and your children. Life is precious.

Here are more suggestions that will help:

1. **BECOME INFORMED.** Get some basic information about how babies or children act and why (normal childhood development). If you know that a baby can give you cues to what is wrong, you can usually decrease hours spent in crying (for both of you).

2. **FIND A BABY-MATE:** Connect with at least one other parent with a child the same age as yours. There is definitely comfort and perspective in numbers.

3. **LEARN TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF:** You are the center of your child's world. If you are not OK it is much harder to cope. It takes planning to care for you and your baby. Get some help.

4. **KNOW EMERGENCY RESOURCES:** Know local emergency numbers where those "experts" sit, just hoping you will CALL INSTEAD OF HURTING.

5. **BECOME A RESOURCE:** Reach out with your good information to those around you and those coming behind you. There is no substitute for experience, and the willingness to share it.

Resources:**For Parenting Classes and Information:**

New Parent Support Program (Army): 433-4864

AIR FORCE New Parent Support Program: 449-0175

MARINE CORPS New Parent Support Program: 257-8803

NAVY AND COAST GUARD New Parent Support Program: 473-4222

ARMED SERVICE YMCA Welcome Baby Program: 833-1185

ARMY COMMUNITY SERVICES: 655-2400

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY Schofield Barracks: 433-8550

PARENT HOT-LINE: 526-1222

SOCIAL WORK SERVICES – 433-6606

For Support from Other Parents:

INFANT PLAY AND LEARN: 655-2400

ARMED SERVICES YMCA PLAYMORNING: 833-1185

BABY HUI: 735-2484

LA LECHE LEAGUE: 735-2484

Help for Yourself:

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY Schofield Barracks: 433-8550

Emergency Numbers:

JOINT MILITARY ABUSE AND CRISIS LINE: 533-7125

PARENT HOTLINE: 526-1222

POISON CENTER –Oahu: 941- 4411

SUICIDE AND CRISIS CENTERS (24hour): 521-4555/1800-784-2433

Places to volunteer:

ARMED SERVICES YMCA: 833-1185, 624-5645, 473-3398

ARMY COMMUNITY SERVICES: 655-2400

LEILEHUA COMPLEX PUBLIC SCHOOLS: 622-6500 X 298

AMERICAN RED CROSS: 734-2101