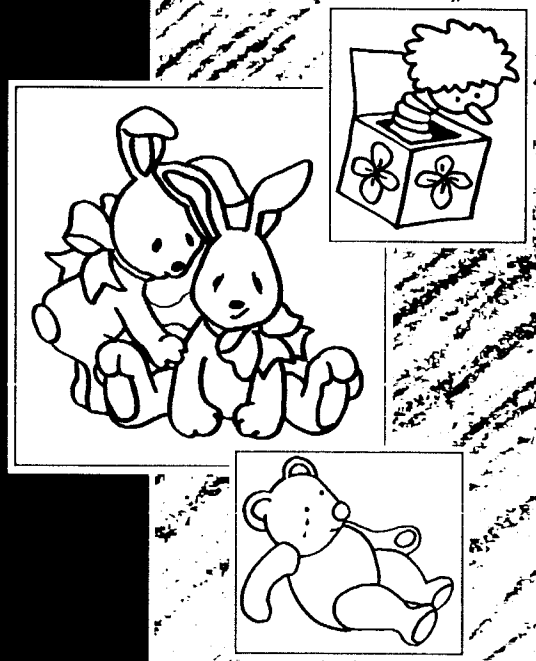

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

CALIFORNIA
SIDS
PROGRAM
SUDDEN INFANT
DEATH SYNDROME

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

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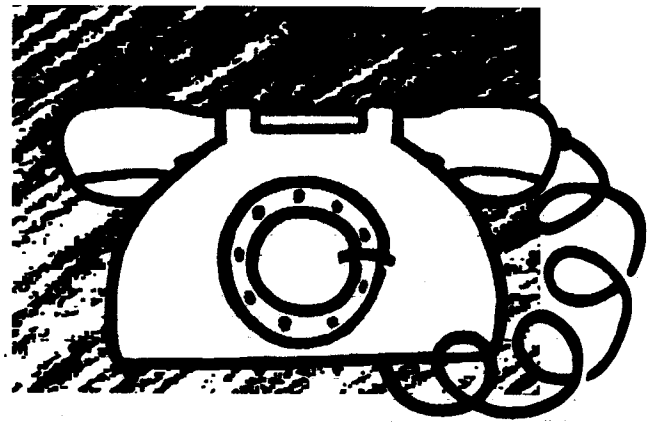

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Paramedic/Response Unit 911

Emergency Backup Person .....

Other People Who Can Help
(Your local Public Health Nurse will help you find these numbers. Write them in the spaces provided below.)

Public Health Nursing Department ....

Child Care Advocate .....
(Local State Community Care Licensing District Office)

Local SIDS Parents' Organization .....

Your Licensing Agency .....

Produced by the California SIDS Program under funding
by the California Department of Health Services,
Maternal and Child Health Branch

California SIDS Program
5330 Primrose Drive, Suite 231
Fair Oaks, CA 95628-3542
1-800-369-SIDS–Within California • (916) 536-0146
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Copies may be obtained, free of charge within California, by calling the California SIDS Program.

WHAT Childcare Providers AND OTHER Caregivers SHOULD KNOW

As the number of working mothers grows, more young infants are being placed in childcare settings and with other caregivers. Those who provide care for infants need to know about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and what to do should a SIDS incident occur. It is also important to be informed about the infant care practices recommended to reduce a baby's chance of dying of SIDS.

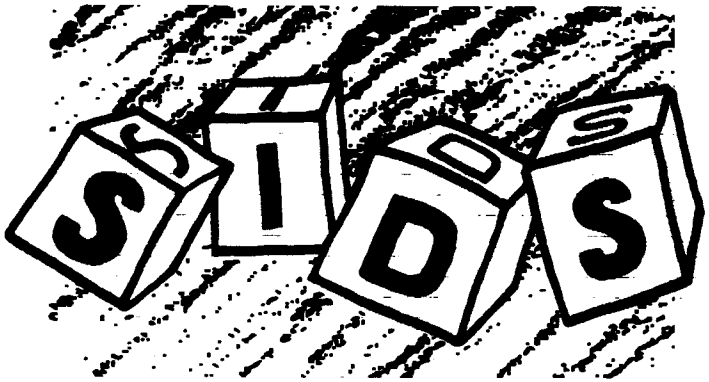
This booklet is written to help you:

- Understand what SIDS is.
- Identify ways to reduce the risk of SIDS for infants in your care.
- Know what to do if an emergency occurs.
- Learn how to help yourself and others if a baby dies of SIDS while in your care.

WHAT IS SIDS?

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden and unexplained death of an infant under one year of age. There is no test to identify which babies will die from SIDS. The cause of death can only be determined after the completion of an autopsy, a death scene investigation and a review of the case history to eliminate all other possible causes of death.

SIDS, sometimes known as crib death, is the major cause of death in babies from one month to one year of age. In the United States, SIDS takes the life of one baby every three hours of the night and day, accounting for the death of thousands of babies every year. Hundreds of babies die each year of SIDS in California.



ENJOY THE CHILDREN IN YOUR CARE

Remember, most babies are born healthy
and most stay that way. Don't let the fear of SIDS
spoil your enjoyment of caring for infants.

For more information about SIDS and/or to learn more about SIDS risk reduction recommendations, contact your local public health nurse or the California Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Program.

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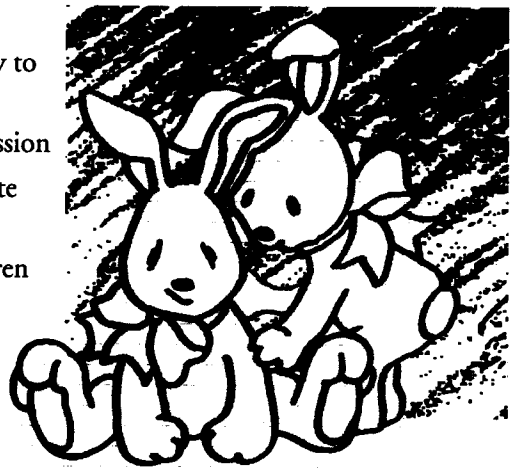
YOUR FEELINGS... WHAT TO EXPECT

It is extremely important to remember that no one is to blame for a SIDS death. SIDS is not related to anything you did or didn't do.

You may be surprised at the depth of your feelings and grief after a SIDS death. It is natural to have these feelings of loss. Your grief may show up in some of the following ways:

- Guilt
- Distrust of your ability to care for children
- Crying spells or depression
- Loss of sleep or appetite
- Over protectiveness or impatience with children
- Anger—even with the baby who died
- Fear that it will happen again



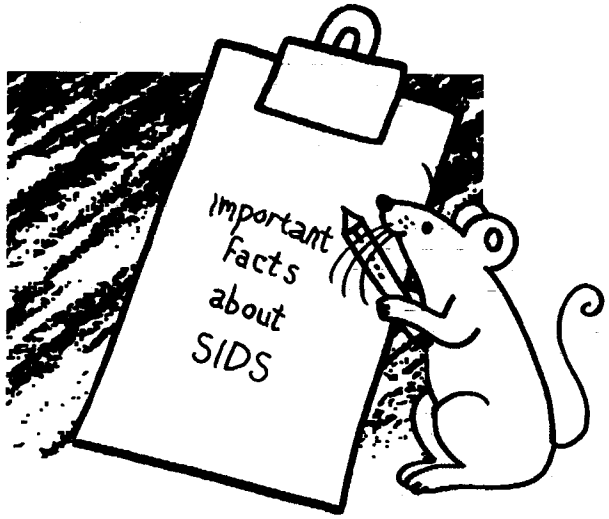
SUPPORT FOR YOU AND YOUR STAFF

Your local public health nurse is available to answer questions about SIDS and offer support and counseling to you and your staff, as well as the parents of other children in your care, when a SIDS death occurs.

In addition, many communities have a SIDS support group that also can help. Another childcare provider who has experienced a SIDS death and trained as a peer counselor, is often available to talk to you about your feelings and reactions to this tragedy.

IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT SIDS

- SIDS happens in families of all social, economic and ethnic groups.
- Most SIDS deaths occur before six months of age. More boys than girls are victims and most deaths occur during the fall, winter and early spring months.
- The death is sudden and unpredictable. In most cases the baby seems healthy.
- Death occurs quickly during sleep. Babies do not cry out or struggle at the time of a SIDS death.
- Although no one knows exactly what causes SIDS, researchers do know that it is not caused by suffocation, choking, spitting up, vomiting, immunizations or child abuse. It is not contagious.

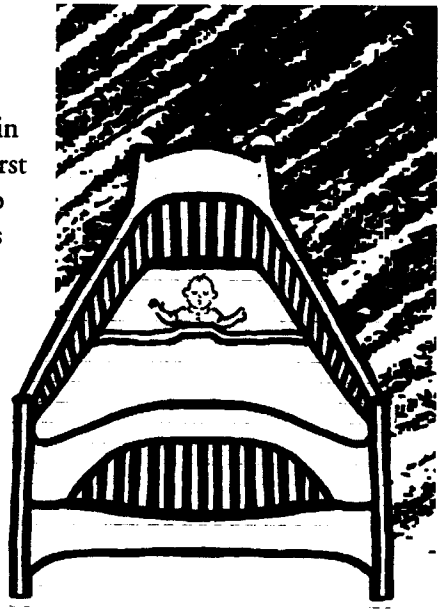


WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP REDUCE THE RISK OF SIDS

Although SIDS cannot be predicted or prevented, research has shown that certain infant care practices can help to reduce the risk of a baby dying from SIDS.

As a childcare provider, you can help lower the risk for SIDS for infants less than one year of age by following these simple risk reduction guidelines.

Sleeping Position

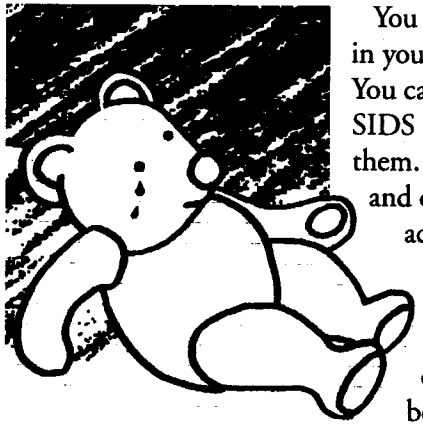


The chance of SIDS occurring in childcare is higher when a baby first starts the transition from home to care. Research shows if a baby has been placed to sleep on his/her **back** by the parents, and the provider sleeps the baby on the **stomach,** there is a higher risk of SIDS in the first two to three weeks of childcare. Therefore, one of the most important things you can do to help reduce the risk of SIDS is to place a baby on his or her **back to sleep**. Do this every time you put the baby down for a nap or to sleep for the night.

Babies who roll over on their own should not be forced to stay on their back but allowed to adapt to their sleep position of choice. If an infant falls asleep while playing on his/her tummy, turn the baby onto their back to continue their rest.

While awake, babies should be placed in a variety of positions. This helps the baby develop upper body strength and muscle control

WHAT TO TELL THE OTHER CHILDREN



You need to tell all the other children in your care about the death of the baby. You can explain that the baby died of SIDS and no one is to blame, especially them. Reassure them that SIDS is rare and only happens to babies. Use the actual words such as "died" and "death" to teach the children that death is a natural part of life. If you use phrases like "went away" or "went to sleep," they may become confused or fearful.

Encourage the children to ask questions. Since they may not be able to express themselves let them use play, books or other activities. Answer all of their questions honestly. Let them know how you're feeling. Your role is to explain the *facts* about the death. Let the parents explain the *meaning* of death in terms of their own spiritual and cultural beliefs.

HOW PARENTS MAY FEEL

The parents of the infant may ask you to go over and over the circumstances of the death. In some cases they may blame you for the baby's death. Until the diagnosis of SIDS is made, both you and the parents will be anxious and unsettled about what caused the baby's death.

Parents of the other children will want to know the details about the death. Tell them the facts and what you've told their children.

necessary for normal growth and development. It also helps improve the flatness at the back of the head that may occur in babies who are all too often placed on their back when awake. Another way to reduce flattening of the baby's head is to change the direction that the baby lies in the crib so the infant is not always sleeping on the same side of his/her head.

Safe Bedding

Make sure the baby sleeps on a firm mattress or other firm surface. Babies should not sleep on waterbeds, couches or other soft surfaces. Do not use fluffy blankets or comforters under the baby, or put the baby to sleep on a sheepskin, pillow or other soft materials.

Remove stuffed toys, bumper pads and pillows from the crib while the baby is sleeping. Make sure the mattress is tight fitting in a crib that meets current safety standards.

Encourage blanket sleepers for infants. However, if a blanket is used, make sure the baby's feet are at the foot of the crib and tuck a thin blanket around the crib mattress, reaching only as far as the chest. This helps to insure that the baby's head will remain uncovered during sleep and the baby will remain positioned on his or her back.

Smoke-Free

Create a smoke-free zone around the baby. No one should smoke around children in your care. Babies exposed to smoke have an increased risk of SIDS. In addition, babies and young children have more colds and other diseases when around smoke.

Temperature

Babies should be kept warm, not hot. Dress the baby with the same amount of clothing that you are wearing. In those areas where the baby sleeps, keep the temperature so that it feels comfortable to you.

AFTER THE EMERGENCY

The Investigation . . . What to Expect

Whenever there is an unexpected death, the law requires an investigation to find out the cause. Several people may ask you for the same information. The investigation may be hard on you and others close to the infant.

The investigators need your help. You may be asked to provide details concerning the death of the infant such as: the time/place the infant was last seen alive and by whom; time, position, and condition of the infant when found and by whom; the infant's last feeding; and any observations regarding the baby's behavior. You may also be asked to help in the following ways:

- **Law enforcement.** You may be asked questions about the baby's health, behavior, naptime and other observations you may have made. Photographs may be taken. Often they may ask you not to go into the area where the baby died or disturb the baby's sleeping area.
- **Licensing.** The licensing agency may ask questions similar to those asked by law enforcement. In addition, they will ask questions related to licensing regulations. A SIDS death is not cause for revoking a license.
- **Coroner.** A corner's investigator may contact you with more questions about the circumstances of the death. An autopsy will be done.

The investigation serves three purposes. It helps determine the cause of death. It also helps us learn more about SIDS. And it may help remind you that no one is to blame for a SIDS death.

OTHER THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Although the steps outlined on the previous pages can help to reduce the risk of SIDS, it remains unpredictable and still can not be prevented. One of the best ways that childcare professionals can possibly save an infant's life, is to know about SIDS and the latest recommendations regarding the care of infants.

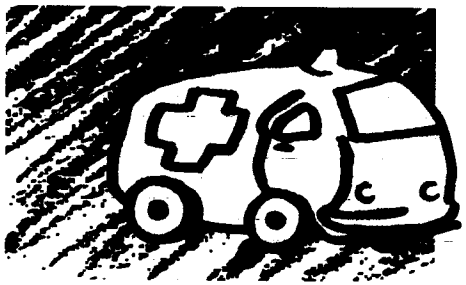
Additional ways that you and other caregivers can help reduce the incidence of SIDS include the following:

- **Ask** parents about their baby's usual sleep position and discuss the recommended back sleeping position with them. Inform parents that your policy is to place infants on their back to sleep. During your discussion, offer *Back to Sleep* information and materials to the family.
- **Develop** policies and waivers to address sleep position. There are exceptions to the general back sleeping policy. If a family insists their baby sleep on the side or stomach, refer them to their health care provider for further information. Request that their medical care professional provide a signed statement if an infant is not to be placed on their back to sleep.
- **Attend** SIDS education programs in your community to learn more about SIDS. The California SIDS Program provides training and education to childcare providers throughout the State which is available at no cost. For more information call 1-800-369-SIDS.
- **Know** local SIDS resources for information and support and make them available to families as appropriate. The California SIDS Program provides SIDS educational and informational materials which can be ordered by mail, phone or fax.

ALTHOUGH RARE, IT CAN HAPPEN

What to Do if You or Another Childcare Provider Should Come Upon an Unresponsive Infant or Child

- Check for breathing: Look, listen and feel.
- Call the paramedics.
- Begin CPR. *
- Contact the child's parents.
- Call a back-up person—a responsible adult to assist you.
- Let other children in your care know that something is wrong. Remove them from the area of the emergency.



* CPR is cardiopulmonary resuscitation. For information about CPR call your local chapter of the American Red Cross or American Heart Association. Everyone should know CPR.