



# What Child Care Providers Should Know

SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME

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## Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or “Crib Death,” is a leading cause of death in infancy after the first week of life. About 1 of every 1,000 babies dies from SIDS every year.

SIDS death can occur in any setting. A growing number of these deaths are occurring in child care centers or homes. SIDS is a centuries-old, worldwide mystery. We still do not know what causes SIDS, so we can't prevent all SIDS deaths.

### What We Can Do To Reduce The Risk

Remember, ***reducing the risk will not guarantee the prevention of SIDS***; but, there are some things that child care providers can do to provide babies with the best start in life.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that healthy **infants should always sleep on their backs**, unless the baby's doctor recommends otherwise in writing.
- Do not smoke around the baby.
- Do not allow the baby to get too hot or too cold.

- The baby's bed should be a firm mattress or other firm surface. Do not place anything in the crib.
- Wash hands before holding the baby.
- For more information, please call the:

**SIDS Foundation of Washington**  
**1-800-533-0376 (WA/ID/OR)**

## **Facts About SIDS**

As a child care provider who cares for babies, *you should be familiar with these facts:*

- SIDS almost always occurs during a period of sleep. The baby is usually found sometime later. The death happens quickly, without suffering.
- SIDS most commonly occurs in babies between the ages of one week and one year of life. Most SIDS deaths happen between two and five months of life.
- SIDS can happen to a family of any race, religion, ethnic or economic group.

**SIDS is not contagious and it is not likely to happen after the first year of life.** Older children are not considered at risk.

**SIDS is not caused by vomiting or choking.** Sometimes milk or even blood-tinged froth is found around the baby's mouth or on bedding. This is upsetting, but it occurs after death, and is normal.

**Suffocation is not the cause.** It is not uncommon for a baby to be found wedged into a corner of the crib or with the head covered by blankets. Sometimes the face may be turned down into the pillow or mattress and it may be discolored. It is natural to assume that the baby smothered. But the baby can also be found without any articles of bedding, clothing, toys, etc. near the face.

**Child abuse or neglect does not cause a SIDS death.** The general appearance of the baby in the crib may be misleading. There may be a large, bruised area, but this actually occurs after the death of the baby.

**SIDS cannot be predicted.** There is still no way to determine which baby may die of SIDS. Even with current scientific knowledge, victims cannot be identified beforehand. SIDS continues as an unsolved problem.

## Child Care Providers

When a child dies of SIDS in child care, it has a profound impact on the provider. Child care providers say they are surprised at the intensity of their feelings. Many say it is almost as if they had lost their own child. Guilt feelings are often overwhelming. They wonder if they could have done anything to prevent the death or if they did anything to cause it. Frequently, they worry they will never be able to take care of another baby.

Child care providers have the initial trauma of finding the baby, calling 911, and trying to revive the baby while taking care of any other children. They may be the ones to call the parents. Then, if the child is taken to a hospital, providers often find themselves waiting for word. Even if they know the parents well, they may not be sure how the parents will feel about seeing or hearing from them. Will the parents blame them for the death? Will seeing them later on be too painful a reminder? Should they contact the family first or wait to hear from them? Should they attend the funeral service? These are difficult questions to answer.

Families are most often very support-

ive of the child care provider. Parents often say while they were spared the trauma of finding the baby, they regret that the child care provider experienced it. They may have many feelings about missing the last bit of time with their baby and may worry that they could have done something to save their child.

Other child care parents may want to know the details surrounding an baby's death. This booklet can be helpful in that explanation. If you are informed about SIDS, then you can answer parent questions and help them feel comfortable with the situation. Also, staff from the SIDS Foundation of Washington can be called to arrange a parent meeting to answer questions.

## **Explaining The Death To Children and Their Parents**

You may feel uncomfortable about doing this, but the other children in your care should be told about the baby's death. You will want to tell their parents as soon as possible. You can explain that the baby died of SIDS and **no one is to blame** because **we do not know why it happens**. Reassure youngsters that SIDS only happens to babies.

The death of a baby is one of the saddest experiences a person can endure. **Remember – you are not alone. Reach out.**

## **The Investigation ... What To Expect**

Whenever there is an unexplained death, the law requires an investigation. Several people may ask you for the same information. The investigation will be hard for you and others close to the child.

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

**The investigators need your help. You may be asked to help in the following ways:**

- **Law Enforcement**

You may be asked about the baby's health, behavior, nap time and other observations you may have made. Photographs may be taken. They may ask you not to go into the area where the baby died.

- **Licensing**

Licensing may ask questions similar to those asked by law enforcement. In addition, they will ask questions related to licensing rules. It is important to work closely with your licensor at this time.

- **Coroner**

A coroner's investigator will contact you with more questions about the circumstances of the death. An autopsy will be done. If you want the results, you can call the coroner's office.

- **Child Protective Services, (CPS) Department of Social and Health Services**

A CPS investigator may contact you to ask questions about the baby's death. The investigation may take some time. You may be asked to close your home or center during the investigation. Or, you may decide to close to give yourself time to begin healing.

## Emergency Telephone Numbers

Emergency Dispatch:

**911**

Your Licensor:

**Phone #**

SIDS Foundation of Washington:

**1-800-533-0376 (WA/ID/OR)**  
**sidswa@SIDSoFWA.org**  
**www.SIDSoFWA.org**

## Emergency Procedures

*When A Baby Is Found Unresponsive:*

1. Call 911
2. Administer CPR
3. Call the child's parents
4. Call your licensor
5. Call the SIDS Foundation

Your licensor can offer support and counseling if a baby should die suddenly while under your care. Licensors are knowledgeable about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

## **Resources To Contact:**

**Contact the SIDS Foundation of Washington for information and support.**

They can put you in touch with another caregiver so you can share your feelings and concerns. This type of contact is often very helpful. The Foundation provides educational programs on SIDS designed especially for child care providers and the families of children in your care. They can also send you books for children of varying ages to help deal with death.

**1-800-533-0376**

Website

**[www.SIDSoFWA.org](http://www.SIDSoFWA.org)**



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