



By Roger Dutson, Isabel Dulfano and Carl Nink

The examining physicians and other medical experts testified that the child had a small bruise on her buttocks, but the cause of death was shaken baby syndrome (SBS). In recent years, SBS has been the basis for many criminal prosecutions. If death does not occur, some prosecute for aggravated or negligent assault, generally where irreversible, serious permanent disability results. The jury in this case found gross criminal negligence, which formed the necessary intent for the murder conviction. “You are hereby sentenced to serve an indeterminate term in the state prison of five years to life,” the judge said. As the judge pronounced the sentence, many people in the courtroom were trying to recall whether they too had shaken their baby inappropriately when the infuriating screaming would not subside.

What is Shaken Baby Syndrome?

Shaken baby syndrome is a term used to “describe the constellation of signs and symptoms resulting from violent shaking, or shaking and impacting of the head of an infant or small child.”¹ SBS causes major trauma to the brain, as well as intracranial bleeding, ultimately leading to severe disabilities or death. Learning disabilities, blindness, paralysis, seizure disorders, and impaired motor and cognitive skills are other long-term effects associated with SBS. An infant’s neck muscles are underdeveloped and the brain is “loose” within the proportionally large and heavy cranium and, thus, with violent shaking, whiplash occurs. This not only kills brain cells in the immediate area and damages the spinal cord and back part of the retina, but also damages adjoining cells. A common symptom is retinal hemorrhaging, which is linked to blindness for many children who survive.

The Concern

Between 70 percent and 79 percent of people convicted of killing or hurting babies are men. The average age of perpetrators is 24, and 62 percent are the parent of the victim and another 20 percent are the live-in boyfriend of the mother.² Bureau of Justice Statistics data on incarcerated individuals indicate that in 1979, an estimated 900,000 children in the United States had one or more parents in jail.³ By 1999, of state and federal inmates, 721,500 were parents

of nearly 1.5 million minor children.⁴ Recently, about 70 percent of incarcerated men were estimated to be fathers.⁵ Since state prisons release at least 95 percent of all inmates, a large proportion will reunite with their families in some capacity. Hence, the demographics of those at-risk for shaking infants point to the male prison population as an excellent target audience for the Dads 101 class.

Dads 101: An Innovative Concept

Good parenting skills do not come naturally to most people. The challenge can be even greater for ex-offenders, who may be in prison for crimes of abuse or assault. With the fiscal constraints imposed on state budgets, some prisons have chosen to reduce meaningful rehabilitation programming. The result is that inmates may then be released back into society without basic parenting or interpersonal skills. This can mean the difference between re-establishing positive family ties and support systems, and reoffending. Research published in the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* has concluded that educating inmates through family-focused programs⁶ about child abuse and parental stress management is an effective way to prevent further victimization, reduce future crime, improve the prospect of post-release success and enable inmates to make better interpersonal decisions.

In order to deliver a holistic approach to offender treatment and instruction, a collaboration with the nonprofit National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome and the Dr. W.C. Swanson Family Foundation has resulted in the introduction of a unique curriculum, Dads 101, in 15 prison facilities managed by Management and Training Corp. throughout the United States, Canada and Australia. SBS/parenting programs are also offered at several MTC operated Job Corps centers.⁷

Dads 101, supportive of re-entry objectives, is a preventative education class intended to decrease the incidence of SBS by presenting hands-on and graphic information on fathering, infant care and child-rearing practices. Students in the prison and jail classes range in age from 18 to 60 and are fathers, grandfathers or do not even have children. Although tailored for new fathers, other individuals take the class “to be more educated and look at how they were as fathers,” said Bill Larsen, corrections staff development coordinator for MTC. “They want to improve on their par-

enting skills and pass the information on to their grown kids so they don't repeat their mistakes. The data mentioned in the class allows these guys to comprehend the effect of being an absentee father or abusing your children."

Why Teach About SBS?

Approximately 12 percent of child abuse-related deaths occur as a result of SBS. Roughly 25 percent of SBS victims die, with another 35 percent suffering long-term disabilities; 41 percent are under the age of 1.⁸ The cost of caring for a surviving SBS child during his or her lifetime is often exorbitant. Initial hospitalization for SBS victims is estimated at \$75,000 to \$95,000.⁹ Additional costs are incurred for rehabilitation, or medical expenses and special education needs. Perhaps the most insidious side of SBS is seen in the thousands of children who suffer severe physical and mental disabilities throughout their lifetime.

The National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome is the foremost national and international SBS information clearinghouse. It is leading a massive national and international awareness program at hospitals, schools, community centers and emergency rooms. Poster campaigns now depict macho males holding their tiny babies stating, "Tough guys don't shake." Pamphlets appear in hospitals and pediatricians' offices explaining the danger of shaking and tossing babies, and films for parents and childcare professionals exist. The organization has also sponsored numerous large conferences, including one in Australia and most recently in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Raising awareness about the potential injury to a child in a classroom setting has been shown to decrease the incidence of SBS.¹⁰ "By explaining the damage caused and how many infants fall victim to [SBS], we can reduce the number of cases. Oftentimes, people don't realize how easy it is to hurt an infant," said John Baldwin, senior instructor at Marana Community Correctional Treatment Facility in Arizona. "With this class, inmates receive graphic and vivid lessons on the impact of shaking an infant and really think twice about how to handle a baby."

Curriculum Outlines

The core curriculum touches on the following topics: "Fathers — Expectations in the Past and Expectations Today"; "Consequences of Absent Fathers"; "Benefits of Father Involvement"; "Pregnancy, Labor and Delivery"; "Why Babies Cry"; "Soothing a Crying Baby"; "Coping with Crying"; and "What Triggers Shaking — Shaken Baby Syndrome."

Ancillary topics include discussions on communication, expressing emotion, anger management, controlling frustration, making good choices, building self-esteem, assessing situations and needs, and developing proper action steps to resolve conflict.

Though the overarching theme centers on understanding the tragic consequences of SBS, another component underscores the day-to-day duties of being a parent and how to handle the pressure of dealing with babies. The class also incorporates information about the advantages

and disadvantages of breast milk versus formula. Materials, including an infant doll, bassinets and diapers, allow inmates to practice through demonstrated hands-on activities such as holding, feeding and bathing a baby.

In addition, the class watches the movie *Elijah's Story*, a heart-wrenching view of victims and their families that brings home the real consequences of SBS. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the class focuses on the individual and his impact on those around him, which helps strengthen an offender's ability to re-enter society successfully.

The National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome stresses the following key messages in its newsletter for those hoping to raise awareness of the problem.¹¹ Any curriculum should emphasize these points:

- Shaking a child or infant is dangerous. Infants have heads that are large compared to their bodies. Shaking an infant or child can cause serious injury, even death.
- Crying is often the trigger for the shaking. The caregiver is often frustrated and loses control.
- When an infant will not stop crying, there are steps to take.
- Most important, it is OK to let an infant cry if numerous things have been tried to quiet the baby. Check on the baby every 15 minutes or so. If concerned, contact the baby's health care provider.
- Remember, a crying baby is not a reflection on parenting skills and does not make a person a bad parent.

Program Model

Although the class is typically a six-hour course, there is a modified two-hour, high-impact module on the SBS curriculum. One experimental program at Arizona's Marana Community Correctional Treatment Facility offers Dads 101 every Tuesday night as open-entry, open-exit for about 16 to 18 inmates. Other facilities teach the class either as a stand-alone unit or embedded in other life skills or substance abuse awareness classes. Many deliver the curriculum over a three-day, six-hour option with instruction on diapering, packing a diaper bag, washing babies and dealing with babies crying inconsolably, the most common trigger of SBS.¹²

Outcomes and Responses

In 2002, more than 1,250 inmates at MTC facilities completed the Dads 101 curriculum. Marana graduated 154 inmates, roughly 20 percent of the inmate population that year. Its program boasts a 99 percent graduation rate. Not surprisingly, each facility where the class is offered has seen increasing numbers of participants and graduates who are attracted to the class because of the content and certificate earned. In fact, an added benefit of Dads 101 is the nationally recognized certificates that participants receive upon completion. These certificates have proved instrumental during child custody matters with protective service agencies and judicial hearings.

Growing numbers of facilities have had a positive response rate from their female population as well. At Dawson State Jail in Dallas, female inmates requested a Moms 101 equivalent class because of the course's good reputation. These women were familiar with the curriculum and requested the option to learn the same skills.

Likewise, Bob Runciman, Ontario, Canada's minister of public safety and security, expressed interest and support when apprised of the effectiveness of the class offered at Central North Correctional Centre near Toronto. The class is the first of its kind in Ontario.

After a tragic case of SBS occurred in Lubbock, Texas, the program manager from West Texas Intermediate Sanction Facility in Brownfield, brought attention to the efficacy and timeliness of the class offered at his facility, as well as its broader applicability. Community members appreciated the need to heighten awareness about the consequences of shaking infants and this class provided the ideal way to deliver the information.

In fact, the recognized Dads 101 curriculum is gaining significant attention in communities adjacent to many of the original training locations. Classes now target high school students, civic community groups, church groups and nonprofit organizations, as well as babysitting and nanny training classes.

Inmates at MTC prisons overwhelmingly praise Dads 101 for adding an important dimension to the programming they receive. One Marana inmate said, "This class helps me to raise my children right and show them the right things. It helps me to communicate with them and my wife so that I can make a difference in their lives." Individuals who take this class may still feel the goose bumps running up their spines when a baby screams for attention, but now they understand that it is better to leave the child alone rather than shake it to death.

This re-entry program has had excellent inmate responsiveness and interest. It has been easily incorporated into life skills, substance abuse treatment and other educational programs, or taught as a stand-alone course. Anecdotal evidence from security staff suggests that the program has had a calming effect on prison yards. Dads 101 adds value to any re-entry program efforts at a minimal cost — approximately \$1,000 for program materials, training materials and instructor — and the benefits clearly outweigh those nominal costs.

ENDNOTES

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² *Child abuse medical diagnosis and management, second edition.* 2001.

³ Fishman, S.H. 1982. Impact of incarceration on children of offenders. *Journal of Children in Contemporary Society*, 15(1):89.

⁴ LIS Inc. 2002. *Services for families of prison inmates.* Special issues in corrections. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Corrections. (February).

⁵ Tilbor, K. 1993. *Prisoners as parents: Building parenting skills on the inside.* Portland, Maine: Edmund S. Muskie Institute of Public Affairs, University of Southern Maine. (June).

⁶ Hairston, C.F. 1988. Family ties during imprisonment: Do they influence criminal activity? *Federal Probation*, 52(1):48-52.

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⁷ For more information about Management and Training Corp., visit www.mtctrains.com.

⁸ Chadwick, D.L., S. Chin, C. Salerno, J. Landsverk and L. Kitchen. 1991. Deaths from falls in children: How far is fatal? *Trauma*, 31(10):1353-1355.

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Tilbor, K. 1993.

⁹ Merritt, C. 2002.

¹⁰ Showers, J. 1992. Shaken baby syndrome: The problem and a model for prevention. *Children Today*, 21(2):34-37.

¹¹ *Who can I talk to in my community about SBS?* The National Center of Shaken Baby Syndrome Web site. Available at www.dontshake.com/sbsquestions.html.

¹² *What is shaken baby syndrome?* The National Center of Shaken Baby Syndrome Web site. Available at www.dontshake.com/sbsquestions.html.

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