

This information is intended as a guide for parents grieving a baby who has died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Nothing can remove the pain of that loss but there are two things might help:

1) *Knowing that others have experienced just such overwhelming feelings and have emerged to once again be productive, happy and perhaps stronger people.*

2) *Finding one or more people with whom you can share your burden of sadness.*

### IS SIDS THE SAME AS CRIB DEATH?

SIDS used to be called Crib Death, Cot Death or SUD (Sudden Unexplained Death). However, the previous terms may have included additional deaths in which the cause was later explained.

### WHEN DOES SIDS OCCUR?

SIDS most commonly strikes infants between three weeks and twelve months of age (most often close to twelve weeks). The baby probably appeared healthy or may have been just recovering from a mild cold. The baby is unexpectedly found dead, usually in his or her bed.



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### MISINFORMATION

Many people are misinformed about SIDS. Sometimes the parents' friends repeat this misinformation to them, causing them needless distress. If this happens to you, try and explain about SIDS to your friends. Give them the information in this document.

A further resource for more information is the Canadian Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths.

If you have any inquiries or need assistance, please contact Victim Services.



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# SIDS

## SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME

Information for parents who have lost a child through SIDS

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## IS ANYONE TO BLAME?

Many parents blame themselves at first for the baby's death, feeling that the cause must be something they did or failed to do.

Even doctors cannot explain SIDS. It is very mysterious and so, with no other explanation, parents tend to blame themselves.

This feeling is understandable, but there is no reason for this guilt. The fault cannot be theirs when even physicians do not know why the death occurred.

## WHAT DOES THE AUTOPSY SHOW AS CAUSE OF DEATH?

When pathologists perform autopsies on these children, they find no adequate explanation for the death.

## HOW CAN A HEALTHY BABY DIE SO SUDDENLY WITHOUT APPEARING ILL?

Babies who die of SIDS nearly always die when they seem to be asleep. Usually no one is aware of the event at the time.

## DID THE BABY SUFFOCATE OR SMOTHER?

### **SIDS is not caused by suffocation**

Most SIDS cases occur where no possibility of smothering or external obstruction could have existed.

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## DID THE BABY ASPIRATE OR CHOKE AFTER HIS LAST FEED?

Sometimes there may be some stomach contents found in the air passages. During the rapid death process, any person is apt to vomit and so the vomitus found there is not the cause of death, but really the result of the act of dying.

## DID THE BABY SUFFER?

Most of these babies die in their sleep. Even if they are not really asleep, they appear to be undisturbed while they are dying. It is most likely that such a death is without pain or suffering.

## IS SIDS INFECTIOUS OR CONTAGIOUS?

SIDS is unknown after the first year of life so there is no risk of SIDS in older children or adults. Even among twins it is likely that one of them will survive. SIDS is not transmitted from the baby who died to other babies or children.

## WOULD IT HAVE HELPED IF BABY HAD BEEN BREAST FED?

SIDS occurs in both breast and bottle fed infants and neither type of feeding has been shown to decrease the likelihood of death.



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## HOW OFTEN DOES SIDS OCCUR?

U.S. studies suggest that the death rate is down from 1.5 babies in a thousand to .74 babies (1996) in every thousand. It is the major cause of death in the first year of life.

## DO WE KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT SIDS?

Research has identified some factors that are not considered as causes, but which are associated more frequently with deaths from SIDS.

These factors include male babies, twins, prematurity, younger mothers and mothers who smoke, who use phenobarbital, who are anemic or who have had urinary tract infections.

Of special interest is the discovery that babies who die of SIDS had sustained some developmental deviation a relatively long time before death, probably before birth.

Evidence suggests that the tissues had failed to receive their full oxygen requirement over a period of time. As yet, the cause of these changes is not understood, but this finding stimulates a strong research thrust.

## WHY DID THE CORONER AND POLICE INVESTIGATE?

It is their duty to investigate all unexplained deaths to make sure that they are due to natural causes. Later, the parents will find it a relief that their baby's death was investigated.

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