

SIDS: Did My Baby Suffer?

It is very important that all those touched by a SIDS death understand that SIDS has no specific symptoms, that SIDS occurs in the best of families and to the most capable, careful and loving parents.

Even if the baby had recently shown symptoms of a cold and had been taken to a doctor, there were no signs leading anyone to suspect that the baby would die. No one can tell ahead of time whether a baby will die of SIDS; and no one can stop SIDS from happening.

Because SIDS occurs unexpectedly and usually at home, nearly every parent feels in some way responsible for the baby's death until the facts are explained. Often one parent blames the other, or relatives blame one or both of the parents. Families sometimes blame a childcare provider or the doctor who told them the baby was healthy a short time before the death.

Even after receiving accurate information about SIDS, some family members find it difficult to accept these facts. They may continue to search for answers or to blame themselves or others.

Articles and reports about SIDS often appear in the news media. Periodically such reports imply that "the cause" has been discovered. It is important to restate that SIDS continues to be an unsolved problem. Even with current scientific knowledge, SIDS victims cannot be identified beforehand.

SIDS is considered to be an almost instantaneous event. There may be some movement during the last few seconds of life, accounting for the unusual positions in which some babies are found.

Babies do not cry out and often show no sign of having been disturbed in their sleep. Parents who have witnessed their baby's death have reported that they appeared to die very peacefully in their sleep, that they appeared simply to stop breathing.

The reality of a SIDS death, however, is that they did not just stop breathing – their entire body shuts down in an instant, making it impossible to revive these babies even if immediate intervention is made. While scary and hard to understand, this can be of some comfort to those that struggle with feelings of guilt for not being there when their baby died.

From First Candle/SIDS Alliance, a national nonprofit health organization uniting parents, caregivers and researchers. (www.sidsalliance.org)