

The Impact of SIDS on Childcare Providers and Foster Parents



When a child dies of SIDS while in the care of a day care provider, babysitter or foster family, it has a profound impact on that person. Childcare providers often tell us 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 paramount. They wonder if they could have done anything else 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-to trust themselves to overcome the anxiety that this might happen again. (If the childcare provider's family was not there when the baby died, they often do not understand the intensity of the feelings, nor do they appreciate how long the grief and anxiety will continue).

Feelings a childcare provider may have about a baby are not dependent upon the length of time they have known the child. Caring for a baby brings out the feeling of protectiveness and a sense of responsibility in everyone. This sense of responsibility leads to the often overwhelming feelings of guilt. We all wish we had more control over the important things in life.

Childcare providers have the initial trauma of finding the baby and then dealing with the crisis of calling the rescue squad, trying to revive the baby, taking care of any other children at the home or center, and maybe even calling the parents. Then, if the child is taken to a hospital, the providers often find themselves waiting for some word. Their relationship with the parents is frequently uncertain and uncomfortable. 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 difficult of a reminder? Decisions about contacting the family first or waiting to hear from them and about attending the funeral services are often difficult.

Families are most often very supportive of the childcare provider. They may have many feelings about missing the last few moments with their baby and may worry that they could have done something to save their child. Parents expressed a sense of relief when they were not present to experience their infant's death, but regretted that the childcare provider had to endure the trauma.

Other parents may want to know the details surrounding an infant's death. If you are informed about SIDS then you can answer a parent's questions and help them feel comfortable with the situation. The staff from the California SIDS Program or your local SIDS Affiliate can be contacted to arrange a parent meeting to provide SIDS awareness information to parents in your community.



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