

Course's information could save lives, child care providers learn

By Nancy Royden
Georgetown News-Graphic

Holding her hand over her fist, Deborah "Debbie" Acker demonstrates how babies' brains can be damaged during excessive movement.

"The brain of a baby is very fragile," she said, as she illustrated the trauma a child can incur when shaken or struck.

The registered nurse, who is also a certified forensic nurse, was on hand recently at Royal Spring Elementary School in Georgetown to lead a continuing education course on pediatric abusive head trauma for child care providers, but the information she taught could be useful to anyone who is around children, she said. The event was sponsored by the Scott County Early Childhood Council and coordinated by Scott Turner.

Acker said Kentucky House Bill 285 mandates pediatric abusive head trauma education for many a wide array of people, including those who work directly with, or care for, young children and even high school students. The training she offers was created by staff of the University of Louisville's School of Medicine.

"There are 16 different groups of folks who are getting the training," she said.

They range from state police personnel, to foster parents of

young children and nurses. Every high school senior is required to take the course before graduation, she said.

Formerly called shaken baby syndrome, it now has a longer name — pediatric abusive head trauma. It is the most common cause of disability and death in physical child abuse, Acker said.

"Abusive head trauma usually occurs in children younger than 1 year of age, but older children can be victims as well. It is the most common cause of death from brain injury in children less than 1 year of age," she said.

Crying is what usually triggers someone to shake, impact or both, a baby's body, Acker said.

"Again, it is not typically a one-time event," she said.

Other triggers include the child's misbehavior, a family conflict, toilet training, parental stressors outside the home and discipline gone awry, Acker said.

An infant's brain grows tremendously during the first year of life, and there is more space between the outside of the brain and the inside of the skull.

Infants' brains are 25 percent more water than an adult's brain, and Acker used the example of under-set gelatin to illustrate their delicate state.

"This is a very serious subject," she said.



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