

'Awareness Day' provides information for parents of crib death victims

By KATHY PARRISH

Carol Meltzer awoke one morning in her Troy home to find her first born dead in his crib.

Royal Oak resident Jan Maloney was an experienced mother with three older children when her infant son stopped breathing and died in her arms.

Joyce Warren of Dryden is a health professional who futilely tried to resuscitate her dying infant.

For all three mothers, speaking at a Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Awareness Day Nov. 28 at Oakland University, the crib death of a child was unexpected and traumatic.

But it might have been easier if more people knew a little about SIDS, a leading killer of infants in this nation.

"Friends all of a sudden don't show their faces," Mrs. Warren told the audience of about 40.

"Other people look at you and you don't know if they don't know what to say or if they are blaming you."

Sponsored as a project by students in OU's "Grief, Death and Dying" class taught by William Jones, the Awareness Day was set up to provide information about the mysterious killer and to dispel wrong ideas about SIDS which lead officials and friends to blame rather than support grief stricken families.

"Hopefully, this will never happen to you," Jones told the audience, mostly university students. "But you'd be surprised at the number of people who experience SIDS deaths."

"You can have a big impact on people going through this. Be there to help them."

SIDS kills babies who appear healthy. Death usually occurs rapidly, apparently without suffering and most often when the child is sleeping.

ABOUT 8,000 U.S. infants a year die from sudden infant death syndrome. But while re-

search is going on around the country, it cannot be predicted or prevented.

"There's nothing you can do. When it strikes, it strikes," said Carol Meltzer of Troy, vice president of the Michigan Chapter of National SIDS Foundation.

But she admits she became overprotective with her second child, now 17 months old. "I kept her in a bassinet in my room until her feet were sticking out."

"I did everything the opposite of what I did with my first child."

"You play the 'if game,'" said Jan Maloney. "If only I had done this or that."

"Your whole world just falls apart. You don't think you can survive, but you do."

OFTEN THE GUILT doesn't come just from self blame. There are police and other authorities who question the parents about the death. And friends and family members who often unknowingly add blame.

"People used to be put in prison for this," said Zoe Smialek, coordinator of the Michigan Regional Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Center, which has offices in Children's Hospital and Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office.

"People in the community remember this and often feel the family is to blame."

Ms. Smialek, a nurse, said everyone has a different idea of how babies should be cared for.

"When something like this happens they often say they never did agree with the way the baby was being handled."

"It seems unfair, but it happens over and over again."

The center is working with police and hospital authorities to see that parents are treated properly.

Parents' meetings are held at 8 p.m. the first Tuesday of each month in Children's Hospital. Ms. Smialek said the group offers much-needed support for grieving families, whose own relationships often suffer following a baby's death.

"A child's death has a very profound effect on families," said Ms. Smialek, who is trying to get parent groups started around the state. The National SIDS Foundation now has chapters in Grand Rapids and Lansing.

"The parent groups really try to help members. It doesn't place so much stress on just the two. There are others."

George Williams, one of the students who put together the Awareness Day, said he was "overwhelmed" by the number of people who stopped to ask questions of the SIDS parents, see the film presentations and listen to the noon program which included a mime show by the Alternative Theater from Common Ground in Birmingham.

"This is something that is very remote to most of them, but they have a lot of questions. There's just so little known about SIDS, but it's a major cause of infant death — and has such a devastating effect on parents who experience it."

The Michigan Chapter National SIDS Foundation can be reached through Children's Hospital of Michigan, 3901 Beaubien Blvd., Detroit, Mich. 48201. The phone number is 494-0222.

Here's safety rules for winter storms

Winter storms are on the way and Southfield public safety officials suggest rules to save you and your car from damage.

Col. Arthur Becker, director of Southfield civil defense, has pamphlets on new winter storm safety rules available for the public, private groups, businesses and schools at no charge.

Anyone interested in receiving these pamphlets may pick them up at the civil defense office or they may be mailed on request by calling 354-9152. The address is Public Safety Building, Civil Defense Office, 26000 Evergreen, Southfield 48076.

Becker, Rollin G. Tobin, public safety director, Southfield Police Chief Edward Rittenour and Southfield Fire Chief Jerome McGrath offer the following tips for safety in stormy weather.

- Get independent. Check battery-powered equipment, heating fuel, food stock and other supplies.
- Don't kill yourself shoveling snow. It's extremely hard work and can bring

on a heart attack — a major cause of death during and after winter storms.

- If a blizzard traps you, avoid overexertion and exposure. Stay in your vehicle but keep it ventilated. Exercise, turn on dome light at night, stand watches and don't panic.
- Dress for the season. Layers of protective clothing are more effective and efficient than single layers of thick clothing. Mittens are warmer than gloves. Hoods should cover your mouth to protect lungs from extremely cold air.
- Take winter driving seriously. Keep your car winterized. Carry a winter car kit containing equipment to help you keep warm, visible and alive if you're trapped in a winter storm.

Public safety administrators recommend you know the following winter words of warning:

- Ice storm, freezing rain and freezing drizzle mean a coating of ice is expected. Heavy means the weight of the ice will cause extra damage.

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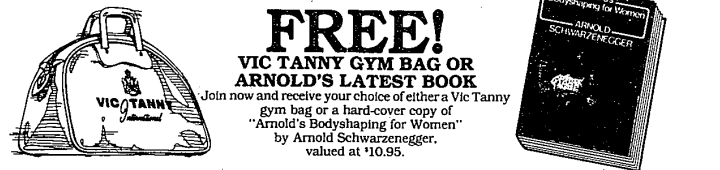
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