

Head banging (SEND)

Head banging is when a child knocks their head on a solid object (e.g. a wall or bars of a cot). They may also rock their whole upper body at the same time.



0 to 19
TORBAY
for you

It is very common. It usually begins towards the end of the first year. It can then peak between 18 and 24 months, and ease off by around four years of age.

Head banging may happen when a child is tired, during sleep or during a temper tantrum.

Children don't tend to engage in habits to injure themselves. It is unlikely they will bang their head hard enough to cause pain or brain injury, even if it can look or sound violent.



Reasons for head banging

- The rhythmic movement may be a comfort mechanism similar to rocking.
- It can test brain systems and improve balance.
- Children may head bang for stimulation.
- It can be a way to release tension, relax or self-soothe (e.g. to help sleep).
- Some young children may head bang for relief and distraction if they are teething or suffering from an ear infection.
- If your child is frustrated or angry, head banging may become part of a temper tantrum.

If you'd like further help in managing your child's head banging, speak to your GP or Health Visitor.



Things to try

- As long as your child is healthy and developing normally, the best way to deal with head banging is to ignore it. Giving the behaviour attention could worsen the habit, especially if it occurs during tantrums.
- Distracting them with a toy or offering a drink may stop them.
- Tap into your child's love of rhythm by encouraging them to play marching games or 'air drums' (e.g. beating a rhythm on cushions).
- Rhythmical music may also help to calm your child. A ticking clock placed in their room can give them a regular, rhythmic sound to focus on as they drift off to sleep.
- If your baby sleeps in a cot, regularly check that the bolts and screws aren't being loosened. Attaching a piece of foam rubber to the wall will reduce noise. If your toddler sleeps in a bed, consider moving it away from the wall.