

News

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***SIDS Parents Trying Again

DALLAS--Six-month-old Zachary was at the age to sleep through his 2 a.m. feeding -- so when he didn't awaken his waiting father no one was alarmed. The next morning Kathy Thomas found her husband Michael asleep on the couch, the TV still blaring.

"Zachary must have slept through his feeding time," he said, a bit embarrassed.

But when Kathy went to check on her son, he was in the same position he had been in when she kissed him good-night.

Zachary Thomas was a victim of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), bewildering cause of death for children under one year of age that strikes 2.5 out of every 1,000 children in the United States each year. Approximately 60 infant deaths per year in Dallas are diagnosed as caused by SIDS, or crib death. And Texas has the highest number in the nation with about 550 deaths per year.

"We can't tell parents why their baby died," says Leslie Malone, coordinator for the UT Health Science Center's SIDS Information and Counseling Project in the Department of Pediatrics. In fact, SIDS quite likely may be caused by a heterogenous, or mixed, group of diseases rather than a single cause.

Guilt and fear in parents whose child has died from SIDS are inevitable, says Malone. In fact, helping parents overcome these emotions are a major part of her work with the SIDS program and the related parent group.

Even after the parents work through their guilt -- wondering what they could have done to prevent their baby's death -- there is a problem with fear. And this fear often exhibits itself in a reluctance to have another child.

"They don't want to hurt that badly ever again," says Kathy Thomas, the mother of a new child, Casey, whom the couple had after Zachary's death. And the mother is now pregnant again.

Happily, other parents in the North Texas group are following their example, Malone reports. Never, she says, have there been so many pregnant mothers among the group of SIDS parents who are continuing to work with the support group. The fact that parents want to have children again shows that the support system is working.

Saturday, Sept. 8 at the Crown Plaza Holiday Inn, the parent group is sponsoring an art auction to raise money for the group and its projects. The public is invited. and complimentary tickets are available at the door.