

Babies & Toddlers

PARENTS: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Babies and toddlers are never too young to be affected by domestic and family violence. Building trust and independence may be harder for babies and toddlers who grow up in fear and violence. This fact sheet is about the effects of domestic and family violence on babies and toddlers. It gives you some ideas to protect your children from its effects. There are services who can help you and your children.

You and your children have a right to live safely.
Violence is never your fault.
Violence is an act that hurts you or your children.

It may be:

- physical: hurting your body
- emotional: hurting your feelings
- sexual: making you do sexual things you don't want to do
- mental: threatening you, putting you down, trying to control you or harming your mind
- financial: controlling your budget

Violence can harm your baby before they are born. If you are feeling unsafe, there are people who can help you and your children.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF

There are people who can provide free confidential counselling. They can help you think about your options. They can help you with safety planning, whether you decide to stay with a violent partner or leave. The priority is you and your children's safety.



Call DVConnect, for free confidential assistance on 1800 811 811 (24 hours)

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Violence is NEVER your fault.

The person who uses violence is responsible for it, not you. If you are not able to leave, there are things you can do to reduce the effects of violence on your baby or toddler.

Remember, being loving and caring is important for your baby.

- Learn your child's moods, signs of tiredness or distress. Hold your child closely, rock gently and use a soft voice to soothe them.
- Look at your child in the eyes when you are talking to them.
- Smile and use a gentle voice when you're changing nappies, feeding, bathing your child.
- Play short games with your child: gentle tickles, peek-a-boo, sing songs or read to your child.
- When your child 'talks' to you, follow them. Copy their noises (babbling, coos, 'ba-ba-bas'). Follow them in games as they make up their own versions.
- Say kind words like "you're beautiful; Mummy/Daddy loves you".
- Use gentle touch and kisses and firm cuddles to show your child that they are safe in your arms.
- Be regular with timing: meal times, sleep times, bath times and quiet times. This helps your child to feel secure.
- Join a playgroup with your toddler- mixing with other parents and children can be fun. You will see that you are doing a good job.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF IT'S VIOLENCE? ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS...

- Does my partner regularly shout or swear at me and/ or my children?
- Am I sometimes afraid of my partner?
- Does my partner hurt me or my children?
- Does my partner threaten me or my children?
- Does my partner force me to have sex?
- Am I always trying to 'keep the peace' around my partner?
- Am I worried that my partner's actions and words are affecting my child's development?



If you have answered 'yes' to any of these questions, contact a domestic violence support service. They will provide you with free, non-judgemental, confidential help and advice to keep you and your children safe.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES

A list of domestic violence services in Queensland is available at:

qlddomesticviolencelink.org.au

or, if you do not have access to the Internet:
Call Womensline, DVConnect's 24 hour domestic violence telephone service on 1800 811 811.

STAYING SAFE

Babies and toddlers need safe places to grow into healthy and happy children. If a home is violent and fearful, it is not safe. Some people stay with a violent partner so their children can have a family, but this can be harmful. Research tells us that parents' fighting can have a worse effect on children's growth than separation or divorce. You may decide to stay with your partner, or you may decide to leave your partner. If you stay or leave, in most cases, your children will still have contact with both parents.



ABOUT BABIES AND TODDLERS: BEFORE YOUR BABY IS BORN

Pregnancy should be a happy time for you and your partner.

It is important that you are healthy, so that your baby is healthy too.

If you have violence in your life, you and your baby can be hurt by:

- Not getting enough, or the right, health care before birth
- Baby's brain growing slowly
- Your ways of coping (e.g. using alcohol or other drugs to deal with stress)
- Injuries to you and/ or baby
- Early delivery
- Low birth weight



Some people play music to their unborn baby when they are pregnant, to make the baby feel calm and loved. So, what does the unborn baby feel when their mother is being abused? What would a baby feel if:

- Their mother was screaming because she was being dragged across the room by her hair?
- Their mother was gasping for air because she was being strangled?
- Their mother was constantly anxious and fearful and unable to sleep?

AFTER YOUR BABY IS BORN

Living with violence can hurt babies and toddlers. Babies and toddlers can be hurt by thrown objects, or by being hit. Living with threats of violence can hurt them too.

They can:

- have problems with brain growth
- get very upset or angry, and unable to settle
- be very scared, and 'clingy' or very shy
- be slower in their learning (e.g. speaking and toileting)

Violence causes fear and stress for parents. Babies and toddlers react strongly to stress, fear and violence around them. This can happen when they are as young as six weeks. Babies and toddlers need comfort. Sometimes parents cannot comfort their babies and toddlers to help them feel safe again. If their parents can't comfort them, their relationship with their parents is harmed. If this happens, children can have emotional problems- now and in the future. The right support services can help you and your children with these problems.



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