

About this brochure

People caring for a child who has experienced violence are often very worried about how that experience will affect the child. Children – regardless of their age – do respond to what's going on around them. However, **the effect on children and their recovery can depend on many things.** You can do a lot to help.

This is one of a **set of brochures** to help you understand and respond to some of the effects of violence on a child.

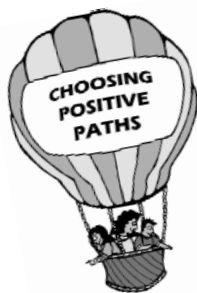
The main focus of the brochures is domestic violence – that is, intimate partner violence – and its effects on children. We also touch on issues of child abuse and other violence experienced by children, usually included in the term family violence.

The brochures talk about children who have experienced violence. This means knowing about, seeing or hearing violence against someone else. It also means being assaulted or abused by family members. All forms of violence in the family affect children.

Mostly the language in the brochures is directed at mothers. However it will also be helpful for other people who are taking on the role of primary carer – fathers, grandparents, aunts, family friends and even foster parents. In this brochure, the phrase 'your child' means 'a child in your care'.

This brochure contains tips and information about:

- the impact of domestic violence
- activities for babies
- stages of development



Parenting a baby (birth to 1½) who has experienced violence



During or after an experience of domestic violence, your child will probably be feeling a huge mix of emotions. **Common feelings** in babies who have witnessed or experienced violence in their family are:

- Fear
- Distress
- Anxiety

Babies are **fully dependent** on their carer and usually pick up on the emotions and stresses of those around them.

How Babies Think

Some people think that babies don't pick up on what's going on around them. This is not true. The early stages of a child's life are very important. This is when verbal language is forming and when a child learns to relate to other people.

Your child can't talk yet, but is interacting with the world in many different ways. Their body language might give you many clues about how they are feeling. For example, they might tense up when scared or they might smile when they are happy. If they are not confident or interested in you, they might not make eye contact with you.

You and Your Baby

You might find that experiences of violence have affected **your relationship with your child**. It might take time and patience to **rebuild trust** and communication between the two of you.

Getting through this experience

You are one of the people who knows what's good for your child. Your judgement and **instincts are valuable**, so listen to them and to your child.

It's important to also listen and learn from other people whose wisdom and experience you respect.



Activities



Encourage your child to **talk** and **sing** by singing and talking with them

Catch your baby's eyes, **make faces**, smile

Read stories with your baby

Play **Peek-a-boo**

Clap and sing with your baby in front of a **mirror**

Play **hide and seek** (for young babies use an object for them to seek)

Play **imitation** games (babies love to copy you laughing, coughing, poking out your tongue, blinking your eyes and moving your hands, arms and feet)

Play **chasing** games when your child starts crawling / walking (make sure you give your child a head start!)

Encourage your baby to do the things they enjoy (rolling, crawling, sitting)

Cuddle your baby often



Play is a fun, normal and very important part of growing up. Playing lets babies learn and practice many different skills.

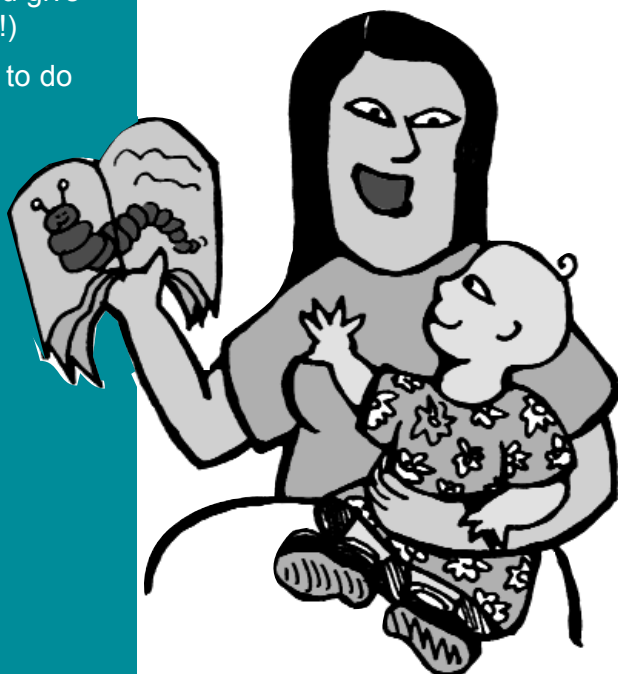
Play helps your baby to develop:

- Physical skills such as placing objects and co-ordination
- **Imagination, creativity and problem-solving skills**
- The ability to communicate, and to play and share with others
- **The beginnings of knowing right and wrong and the consequences of their actions**

Babies who have experienced violence usually have **lots of mixed feelings** that they aren't yet able to talk about.

Play is one of the easiest and safest ways for babies to express how they are feeling. Play can help them to develop their self-confidence and to relax.

Playing with your child can **help your relationship**. It can also **help you understand** into how they see their world. For you, play can also be a great way to relax and to **have a good laugh**.



When you are playing with your baby

- Watch what they do
- **Be patient**
- Allow them to try different things and to make mistakes
- **Give them praise and encouragement**
- Be prepared to have fun!

Parenting can be very stressful, especially in stressful circumstances. If you feel unable to protect your child or are worried that you are not coping or might harm your child in any way, call **ParentLine on 13 22 89**

The impact of domestic violence



Many people worry that the domestic violence will have an effect on their child forever. Babies are just like anyone else. They need time and support to recover from traumatic situations. Like you, once the violence has stopped and they feel safe, your baby can heal from their experience.

If your baby has experienced violence they:

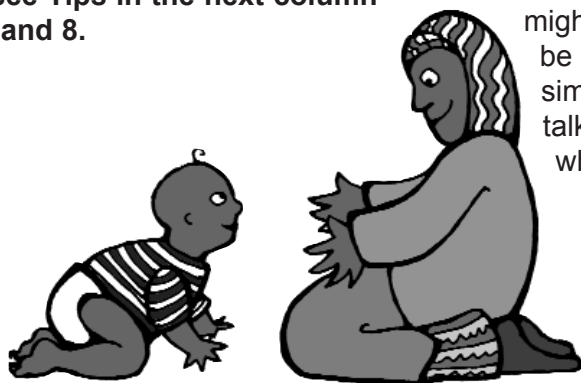
- Might be **fearful of new people, unknown voices or loud noises**
- Might be **slower to start** rolling over, pulling themselves up, crawling, learning to walk and showing other physical signs of development like holding small objects
- Might not be as **responsive** or interested in the world as other babies
- Might **not go to adults** for help
- Might not develop or learn to talk as quickly as other babies
- Might find it **difficult to follow** requests
- Might be very **distressed**

In the short term, these kinds of difficulties can make things very tiring and stressful for you and your child. It's important to look after yourself and to find support through these hard times.

Ways that **you can help your baby**:

- **Give them lots of affection** – hugs, cuddles, rocking
- **Respond** to them with eye contact and with words
- **Talk** to them (your baby learns language from before they are even born and the early months are very important)
- **Keep to your routines**

For other ideas, see **Tips in the next column and Brochures 7 and 8.**



TIPS



Feeding, eating and sleeping

Babies in this situation might not be easy to feed. They might **not be interested in food** or they might **refuse to eat**. Older babies might be very **picky**. Sometimes babies **do not put on enough weight** for their age.

Sleep might also be a problem. You might find your baby is **unsettled** or **not sleeping well**. It can help to try to stick to a regular routine of “feed, play, sleep”.

Often sleeping and feeding problems end up in a **vicious circle**, where one feeds into the other.

If your baby is experiencing **difficulties with sleeping or feeding**, it might help to talk with your Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Nurse about ways to help settle your baby and get them eating

Crying, screaming and distress



One of the most difficult effects of violence can be having your baby **scream or cry more than usual**, or become too quiet.

It's important to make sure there are no **physical reasons** for your baby to be crying or being too quiet. This might mean taking your child to the doctor or to a Maternal and Child Health nurse.

If the crying is driving you crazy, it's okay to leave your baby in a safe place and step outside for a few minutes. If you do this, make sure you check regularly that your baby is not in any danger.

If your baby is being too quiet, use your face, your voice and toys to encourage them to interact with you. Seek professional advice if your baby continues to be too quiet.

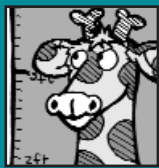
Illnesses

Babies who have experienced violence might experience **lots of illnesses**. This might be related to sleep or feeding issues, or it might simply be a reaction to stress. It might help to talk with your doctor or MCH nurse about what's going on.

Concerns about sexual abuse

If you think someone might be sexually abusing your child call The Gatehouse Centre on 9345 6391.

Ages & Stages



Every child is different and each develops at their own rate.

However, trauma or stress can mean that a child's development might be slower than **average**.

Often your child will **catch up** when the violence has stopped and **they feel safe again**. The **ideas** mentioned in this brochure can help as well.

If you are **worried** about your child's development or if you would like some new ideas to help them out, it might be good to **talk with somebody** whose opinion and knowledge you value.

Talking things through might also help you to feel better. This is just as important.

Some people who might be able to help are:

- **Doctors**
- **Maternal and Child Health Nurses**
- **Social workers**
- **Children's workers**
- **Counsellors**

You can find these people at your local Community Health Centre, regional Parenting Service or local Council.

For other suggestions, see Brochure 10 – Who Can Help?

newborn to 6 months

- Responds to cuddling, rocking and familiar voices
- Smiles at familiar faces
- Starts to learn to trust
- Sits with support
- Rolls over, kicks arms and legs about
- Pulls themselves up to sit with some help
- Sees things clearly and reaches for them
- Holds objects in hands and puts them in their mouth
- Makes a lot of different noises and shows feelings by squealing, screaming or smiling

6 to 12 months

- Crawls or shuffles around
- Pulls themselves up and walks a few steps with support
- Holds a cup and tries to feed with a spoon
- Gets upset and frightened when left alone
- Babbles a lot
- Recognises own name and understands a lot even though they don't speak clearly yet
- Tries things out using trial and error (for example, drops toys from high chair)

12 to 18 months

- Walks quite well but falls easily
- Climbs stairs and explores
- Can turn pages of books and point to pictures
- Copies adult sounds and can say simple words
- Points to what they want
- Is getting skilled at playing with simple toys
- Makes marks on paper with a crayon
- Can't remember things you tell them for long
- Begins to develop basic trust