

## 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.

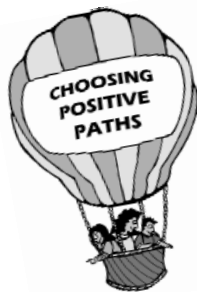
The main focus of the brochures is domestic violence – that is, intimate partner violence – and its effects on children. We also touch on issues of child abuse and other violence experienced by children, usually included in the term family violence.

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 toddler (1½ to 3) 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 toddlers who have experienced violence in their family are:

- Confusion about what is happening and why
- Fear of being hurt, of you being hurt, or of their other parent being 'taken away' by police
- Sadness about their parents fighting, about the separation, about their own losses

Toddlers usually show their feelings through their behaviour. They may use toys or play to act out things they have experienced. They might talk about what they have seen or experienced.

### How Toddlers Think

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

Toddlers also **think the whole world revolves around them.** They usually don't understand why their parents are fighting or why their whole family is not together any more. They often believe that the problems and the violence are their fault.

The ways **children see the world** might be **different** to the ways we see things as adults, so it's important to ask your child regularly how they are feeling.

### You and Your Toddler

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



# Activities



Encourage your toddler's language development by **talking naturally** to

them about what you are doing and where you are going

**Point out objects and places** and name them when you are going for walks, on the bus or in the car

**Ask your child questions and give them choices**, for example: 'Do you want an apple or an orange?', 'Which pants do you want to wear today?' or 'Would you like to play with your toys or read a story?'

**Sing** and play with **noisemakers** (pots and spoons, simple instruments)

Play with non-toxic **dough** and non-toxic **crayons**

**Dress up** and pretend

Play with **cardboard boxes**

Do **finger painting** with non-toxic paints

**Read simple stories** to your toddler. Reading to your child at bedtime can encourage easier settling and set up a good routine

Encourage your toddler to **do simple tasks** like packing up toys and putting dishes away. Praise your child for their efforts

Teach your toddler **how to** brush their teeth and to do up and undo buttons or zips

**Go to the park** – toddlers enjoy the outdoors, swings and small slides



**P**lay is a fun, normal and very important part of growing up. Playing lets children learn and practice many different skills. It helps them to develop:

- Physical skills such as catching, throwing, holding and drawing
- **Imagination, creativity and problem solving skills**
- The ability to communicate and to play and share with others
- **The ability to know right and wrong, to take responsibility and to understand the consequences of their actions**

Children who have experienced violence usually have **mixed feelings** that are hard to talk about. They often have low self-esteem and **low self-confidence**, which might be shown by not wanting to try new things.

**Play** is one of the easiest and safest ways for children to express how they are feeling. Play can help them to develop their self-confidence and work through their worries.

Playing with your child can **strengthen your relationship**. It can also **help you to understand** 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 child

- Follow their lead, but make sure the game is safe
- **Let them make the rules wherever possible**
- Listen to them
- **Talk with them about what they are doing**
- 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



**M**any people worry that the domestic violence will have an effect on their child forever. Toddlers 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 toddler can heal from their experience.

If your child has experienced violence they might:

- Be **afraid** of the person who has hurt them, or whom they have seen hurting you or others
- Be **clingy** and **afraid** of new people or new situations
- Find it **hard to share** or play with other children
- Have trouble with speech, movement or memory
- Find it hard to **listen to you, ask for help** or **show you what they need**
- Have problems in their social relationships
- Be a **restless sleeper** or a **picky eaters** (their experience may be a factor, but your child might just be being a typical toddler!)

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

- Give them lots of affection, care and reassurance (hugs, playing, positive words)
- Give them simple, truthful explanations and responses (for example 'This isn't your fault' and 'It's okay to love both me and your Dad')

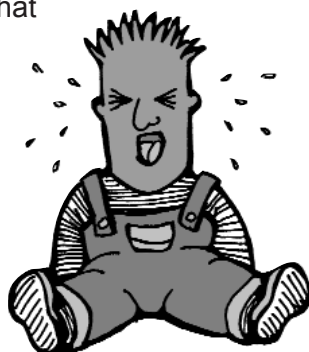
**For other ideas, see Tips in the next column and Brochures 7 and 8.**

## Parenting Boys and Parenting Girls

Parents often get worried about how their child will grow up. They worry that they might behave like the parent who is the same sex as them.

All children need to learn to express their feelings and to know what behaviour is okay.

It's best for boys and girls to learn from people they can rely on, regardless of their gender. Safety, security and stability are more important than finding them same-sex role models.



# TIPS



## Communication

**Tell your child** that the violence is never their fault.

Be patient; listen and watch what your child is showing you.

Toddlers have a short attention span and don't always follow instructions. **If they are not doing as you ask**, try saying it another way.

Toddlers also have a different view of time, so it can be helpful to **talk about actions rather than minutes**. For example, you could say 'Sally, we can play with the game after you've finished your ice cream.'



## Behaviour and self-esteem

It is important that children learn from an early age what behaviour is **okay and not okay**. For example, it is never okay to hit or hurt anyone.

If your child is **not doing what you ask**, you could **also try distracting them**. So, if Con is throwing blocks near the window, you could say, 'Hey Con, come and help me make something with this playdough.'



## Feelings

**Listen to your child** and show that you **understand** that things are hard, scary, or frustrating for them.

Let your child **cry and be sad** if they need to.

Talk with your child about ways of **showing feelings** ... especially about safe ways of showing anger.

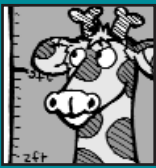
Reassure your child that it is **okay to be angry**, it's just not okay to hurt anyone!

Don't feel you have to always hide your own feelings but **let your child know that whatever you are feeling, you will be okay**.

## Concerns about sexual abuse

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

# Ages & Stages



**E**very 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?**

## age 1½ to 2

- Gets around with increasing ease
- **Wants to try out lots of new things**
- Wants to be independent but often feels insecure
- **Very dependent on familiar adults**
- Rapidly developing verbal communication skills
- **Understands simple questions**
- Likes to imitate sounds (particularly animals)

## age 2 to 2½

- Enjoys the company of other children and adults
- **Still enjoys playing alone**
- Usually not yet ready to share
- **Likes to help with simple tasks**
- Remembers people, places and books
- **Can name some foods and body parts**
- Can say two-word phrases
- **Toddles but falls frequently**

## age 2½ to 3

- Can talk in simple sentences
- **Understands most of what is said**
- Likes adult attention
- **Asks a lot of questions**
- Possessive about playthings
- **Has more control over their body (including bladder) and has better control of fine movements such as picking up small objects**
- Needs help to understand about sharing
- **May be rebellious and have tantrums**

