

Begin to teach your child about what are ok and what are not ok behaviours

Keep to routines, these help your child to predict what will happen

Your child needs you. If you feel that you are unable to meet their needs because of the abuse or violence at home then it is important for you both to ask for help sooner rather than later. There are agencies that will help you without judging you. You can speak with your IDVA, your health visitor or your local safeguarding team. Please be aware that if there is significant risk of harm to your child, all agencies have a responsibility to seek further advice on your situation. They will try to do this with your permission; however, sometimes they may have to do this without your permission if it would increase the risk to you or your toddler. If you suspect that your toddler has been sexually abused, please contact the police.

Other factsheets in this series

- Leaflet 1** Pregnancy and domestic abuse
- Leaflet 1a** You, your child and domestic abuse
- Leaflet 2** Parenting a baby 0-18 months
- Leaflet 3** Parenting a Toddler 18-24 months
- Leaflet 5** Parenting 5 - 12 year olds
- Leaflet 6** Parenting Teenagers
- Leaflet 7** Issues around moving home, separation and contact
- Leaflet 8** How to talk to your children about domestic abuse/violence
- Leaflet 9** Communication with your child about domestic abuse. What children need to hear from the victim.
- Leaflet 10** Respectful parenting and establishing leadership with children who have witnessed domestic abuse.

You can access these factsheets and find out more information about domestic abuse at the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership website www.cambsdasv.org.uk

Cambridge Women's Aid **01223 361214**
(City/South Cambs)
Refuge **07787 255821**
(Fenland, East Cambs, Hunts)

Children's Social Care (Cambridgeshire)
0345 045 5203
Specialist abuse services for children
& young people (Peterborough) **01733 669404**



**Cambridgeshire
& Peterborough**
Domestic Abuse & Sexual
Violence Partnership

Parenting a pre-schooler who has experienced domestic abuse



Leaflet 4

PARENTING A PRE-SCHOOLER WHO HAS EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE

This leaflet contains information on how to parent a pre-schooler who has witnessed domestic abuse or violence. It gives information on how the abuse can impact on your child and some tips on how to help your child recover from their experience.

Many parents worry that the impact of the abuse/violence will remain with their child throughout their lives and that their children will be influenced negatively by the abuse. This is not the case. In many situations, supporting your child through the abuse and communicating with them about the abuse will help to get rid of any negative effects the experience of domestic abuse and/or violence has caused.

PARENTING A PRE-SCHOOLER WHO HAS EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE

Your pre-school aged child is developing at a fast pace. They are using language and behaviours to negotiate their way through life. They are incredibly mobile and understand most things that are going on in their environment. They are still very dependent on their caregivers and will now begin to think in terms of 'like mummy' or 'like daddy'. They will begin to mimic behaviours of the adults around them and their parents are their most important influences. They are beginning to understand concepts that are adult such as relationships and are getting their belief systems from you.

During or after an experience of domestic abuse or violence, your child will be experiencing the following;

Confusion about what is happening and why

Fear of being hurt

Fear of you being hurt

Fear of losing their other parent

Sadness about the fighting, separation and own losses

Anger and frustration at what is happening

Like younger children, pre-school age children are very susceptible to the emotions and feelings of those around them. They will generally be able to show you and tell you how they are feeling and they will understand you if you talk to them about their experiences.

Your relationship may be affected with your child because of the abuse. You may become frustrated with their needs when you are being abused. You may not be allowed to parent your child by your partner or you may not have the energy or time to spend with them because of the abuse.

It is important that you acknowledge this so that you can begin to support your child to overcome their experiences. Children learn from what they see and in order to help them cope with the violence you need to communicate with them and spend time with them reassuring them and giving them the sense that you will protect them. Children see the world differently to adults. They believe that the whole world revolves around them and this is when they can really start to believe that the abuse is their fault. They begin to learn that life is unpredictable.

They begin to believe that domestic abuse and violence is normal and that they are not responsible for their behaviour. It may take time, patience and trust to rebuild your relationship with your child and it can be difficult for both of you.

HOW DO I BEGIN TO OVERCOME ANY EFFECTS WITH MY CHILD?

Listen to your child. Although they are still young and developing, they can still show and tell you how they are feeling by their behaviour and words. If they have witnessed domestic abuse, they can show the following behaviours;

They may feel responsible for the arguments

They may be clingy and unwilling to try new things

They may revert to babyish behaviour

They may be harder to manage and challenge your authority

They may be a picky eater

They may be unusually shy

Be aggressive towards others or themselves

They may regress with toileting

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD?

The more loving and positive contact that your child has with you and other 'positively impacting' adults, the more resilient they will become to distress and anxiety and they will feel more secure. It is also important to let your child spend time with other children their age.

Give your child time—this is very important, particularly where the abuse prevents you spending time with your child

Hug your child often and more so when there has been an incident of abuse or violence

Play with your child, dolls can be used to see how your child perceives the world

Give them simple truthful explanations

Be patient with your child - they may have short attention spans