

## HOW CAN I HELP MY TODDLER?

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 toddler spend time with other children their age.

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

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

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

**Give them simple truthful explanations Be patient with your toddler - they may have short attention spans**

**Try to teach your toddler what is ok and what isn't Keep to routines, these help your toddler to predict what will happen**

Your toddler 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 toddler, 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 4** Parenting a Pre-schooler

**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](http://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 toddler 18-24 months who has experienced domestic abuse



**Leaflet 3**

## **PARENTING A TODDLER 18 – 24 MONTHS WHO HAS EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE**

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

Many parents worry that the impact of the abuse/violence will remain with their toddler throughout their lives and that their children will be influenced negatively by the abuse. This is not the case. In many situations, supporting your toddler 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 TODDLER 18 – 24 MONTHS WHO HAS EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE YOU, YOUR TODDLER AND DOMESTIC ABUSE**

Your toddler is learning a lot about their world at this age. They are taking risks, learning to walk and talk and are developing belief systems about relationships and their social world. They are still wholly dependent upon their caregivers and they look to them for guidance on how to behave and what to expect from people around them who they come into contact with. They pick up the thoughts and feelings of those around them and this contributes to their social and cognitive development, as well as their physical and emotional development. Young toddlers are still particularly at risk from abuse and violence, and as with babies, they cannot articulate their fears, worries or any act that has been carried out on them very easily. They are generally beginning to

trust adults and will begin to go to new people more readily.

Managing your toddler in situations where there is domestic abuse may be more difficult. You may think that your child has not been impacted by the abuse and/or violence, but research indicates this is not the case. Most children are aware of the abuse and/or violence, even when they are not in the room. They may be impacted even if they were not in the same house due to the stress of their parents and seeing physical injuries to their parent. Relationships with caregivers are still vitally important to a toddler's development, and while it may be easier to ignore the abuse and/or violence, it is better to work with your child to explore how they feel and to manage any behaviours that may be present which indicate that your toddler has been affected by the abuse.

You may have found that sometimes when your toddler was acting out that you yelled at them or smacked them. You may not have been allowed to parent your toddler and in some cases, your abuser may have used your toddler against you in his cycle of control and abuse. You may have been made to feel that you were a bad mother. All of these things may have impacted on how you parented your toddler and your relationship with your toddler. Toddlers can often grow up to have low self esteem and self confidence as a result of witnessing domestic abuse and/or violence. Toddlers can often have mixed feelings about the world and can be confused by life events if they are not consistent with the behaviours they have seen at home. Toddlers are like everyone else. They need time and support to recover from traumatic situations.

The abusive parent may not allow you to parent your baby and may attempt to make you feel like an unfit mother. Remember, you are the person

that knows your baby best and can care for them best. The attempts to make you feel like a bad mother are tactics, wrong and not true! The very early years in your infant's life are when they are developing senses, thoughts and responses to emotions. Domestic abuse can take its toll on the physical and emotional development of your baby, so it is important to acknowledge this potential early and respond to overcome any effects.

## **HOW DO I BEGIN TO OVERCOME ANY EFFECTS WITH MY TODDLER?**

Listen to your toddler. Although they are still developing language, they can still show you how they are feeling by their behaviour. If they have witnessed domestic abuse, they can show the following behaviours, but please be assured that sometimes it is just your toddler being a toddler;

**They may be afraid of the person who abused you or who has abused others**

**They may be clingy and afraid of new people and new situations**

**They may find it hard to share or play with other children**

**They may have trouble with speech, movement or memory**

**They may find it hard to listen to you, ask for help or show you what they need**

**They may have problems in social relationships**

**They may be a restless sleeper**

**They may be a picky eater**

**They may be unusually shy**