

# EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Even infants and toddlers are affected by family stress and domestic violence. By understanding how and why, you can help protect your baby or toddler from the effects of family stress.

Why does domestic violence affect babies and toddlers?

**\*Because babies and toddlers are sensitive to your feelings.** Babies use their caregivers to help them learn how to 'regulate' their feelings. When you are scared, anxious, stressed or angry all the time, your baby or toddler will feel your feelings and it can be confusing.

YOU CAN HELP PROTECT YOUR BABY OR TODDLER by spending a little time every day, getting down on the floor and enjoying playtime with your child. Let go of your worries, get away from distractions and give your child all your attention.

**\*You may be distracted and less available to them.** Babies and toddlers tell you what they need or what they feel by crying, clinging, using body language etc. When no-one answers their cries they might stop trying or they might cry or cling more.

YOU CAN HELP PROTECT YOUR BABY OR TODDLER by trying to figure out what they want or need, and responding to them as soon as possible. Babies and toddlers are learning to trust. They might have a hard time trusting after experiencing domestic violence or it's aftereffects. They will learn to trust again, if they get their needs met by you.

**\*Stress causes chemical changes in the brain and interrupts learning.** Babies and toddlers can become 'hypervigilant' when scary things happen around them. That means that they have a hard time focusing on learning, and are 'jumpy' at loud sounds or new people, or try to keep track of everyone around them.

YOU CAN HELP PROTECT YOUR BABY OR TODDLER by leaving a place that is not safe, and by giving your baby or toddler comforting routines. Make bedtimes, eating times and naptimes the same each day. Do 'bedtime routines', sing the same song every time you clean up toys, have a 'comfort object' like a blanket or pacifier, that they can have whenever they're sad or scared.