



Adapted by Cat Gander from
Helping Children Thrive

© Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System
2004

You & Your Baby or Toddler



During the first two years of life, babies grow and change very quickly. To be able to develop well, infants need lots of frequent bodily contact (such as hugs), lots of face-to-face interaction and stability through routine.

Infants are completely dependent on adults, so it is also important to meet their physical needs as soon as possible – this includes being fed nutritious foods, being changed, getting enough sleep and getting good health care.

Normal behaviours for infants aged 0–2 years old

Which things do you see in your baby or toddler so far?

- Taking in information through watching, listening, touching, tasting and smelling
- Following you with his or her eyes
- Grabbing and holding small objects (and usually puts them in his or her mouth)
- Smiling, laughing, making gurgling noises
- Being attached to one person more than others (usually the primary caregiver)
- Being anxious with a stranger or when he or she is away from the primary caregiver
- Getting frustrated and crying when they want something (since they cannot ask for it with words)
- Temper tantrums, doing the opposite of what you ask them to do
- Over time, sleeping less and being more active during the day
- Getting stronger: rolling over, crawling, sitting up, walking with support, walking by themselves
- Feeding themselves with a spoon, holding a crayon

How to help your baby or toddler

Children should not live with violence and getting away from abuse is the best thing you can do as a mother. Here are some other ideas:

- Spend a lot of quality face-to-face time with him or her, e.g. baby talk and giggles, infants love to see your face and hear your voice
- Hold them and hug them and tell them that you love them
- **NEVER SHAKE A BABY.** Although it is normal to feel stressed or frustrated, shaking can cause permanent brain damage and even death
- Take a parenting course or read some parenting books, especially if you feel unsure of yourself or if this is your first child
- Find other new mothers to spend time with, like at a mothers group
- If you feel too overwhelmed to take care of them, find people you trust to baby-sit so you can give yourself a break. You might want to go shopping, take a walk or see a movie
- Ask a Refuge Worker if there is a child care centre available

Effects of violence at home

When a baby or toddler sees violence at home, they may feel...

- distress or fear when he or she hears loud noises such as yelling
- upset because he or she is not having their needs met (such as hunger, tiredness, discomfort)
- too scared to explore and play
- some of the tension and stress of their mother

What your baby or toddler may be feeling

Babies and toddlers are too young to understand what is happening between adults in their homes but they can hear the noise and sense tension. Now that you are away from violence and conflict, they will be happy being with you and being fed and played with. Babies and toddlers live in the present so the past and future do not concern them too much. However, predictable routines are comforting.

What you may be feeling about your baby or toddler

Resentment

You may feel exhausted or too distracted to have to meet his or her need for constant attention

Guilt

You may feel regret that he or she does not have a responsible father

Concern

You may be worried about his or her safety if he or she visits their father or your ex-partner

Babies and toddlers need your attention 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That is overwhelming and exhausting. Finding ways to take a break (if possible) is important, so you are not too stressed out and tired to meet the demands of a baby or active toddler.