

Your child  
does not  
have to be  
hit to be  
hurt



Children have  
the right to live  
free of violence.

There are people who can help – speak to a trusted friend, family member, doctor, community nurse, community agency, Family Violence Worker or contact a Women’s Shelter.

If you are concerned that a friend or neighbour is experiencing family violence, offer support and encourage them to seek assistance.

It is never too late to change  
the life of a child.

#### CONTACT

National Domestic Violence Hotline  
1800 200 526

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Seeing,  
hearing  
and feeling  
violence  
changes the  
way your  
child’s brain  
grows



# Children are never too young to be affected

At birth your baby's brain is not completely connected up. Most brain development happens in the first three years of life. This early development affects the way that your children think, act and feel for the rest of their lives. Exposure to violence and abuse in these early years can have a severe effect on brain development.



## Children who grow up in a violent environment can develop:

- Learning difficulties
- Problems with controlling anger
- A tendency towards criminal activities
- Mental health issues
- Abusive relationships
- Addiction to drugs and alcohol
- Suicidal thoughts

If you are the victim of violence or abuse during pregnancy, your brain releases high levels of stress hormones. These hormones cross the placenta into your baby.

What your baby sees, hears, feels, touches and smells shapes the way your baby's brain grows. All experiences – good and bad – will have an impact. Neurons, or brain cells, connect up with each other during your child's first three years. The brain can become 'hard-wired' for life.

Children who repeatedly witness or experience yelling, fighting, pushing, hitting and the smashing of objects around them form unhealthy brain connections. This type of stress releases hormones which are toxic to brain growth, no matter how young your baby is.

Children are most vulnerable to damage before the age of three. Having caring and supportive family and friends who provide consistency, stability and positive non-violent role models can make a difference.



Help them to explore their world & always keep them safe

Children need lots of love and attention from good, strong, non-violent people to grow into healthy adults. The choices you make now will affect your child forever.

## Babies' brains grow in a healthy way when they have:

- someone to trust
- safety and security
- lots of love, cuddles and hugs
- comfort when hurt, sad or scared
- talking, reading and singing
- interesting things to do
- smiles, fun and play