

YOU & YOUR BABY OR TODDLER



for
Women

From birth to age two, babies grow and change quickly. Important for developing infants are frequent bodily contact, prompt meeting of needs for food and changing, adequate sleep, and lots of face-to-face interaction. They are completely dependent on adults and need good nutrition, reliable access to health care (e.g., vaccinations, monitoring of development), stability through routines, and lots of hugs.

These things are typical of children as they grow from birth to age 2. Which things do you see in your baby or toddler so far?

- smile, laugh, make gurgling noises
- follow you with his eyes
- grab and hold small objects (and usually put them in his mouth)
- become attached to one person more than others, the primary caregiver
- soak in information through watching, listening, touching, tasting and smelling
- get frustrated and cry when they want something but cannot ask for it with words
- be anxious with a stranger and away from his primary caregiver
- over time they will sleep less and be more active during the day
- get stronger: rolling over, crawling, sitting up, walking with support, walking by himself
- feed himself with a spoon, hold a crayon
- temper tantrums are common, and he may do the opposite of what you ask him to do
- moves from baby words to real words, stringing two or three words together

Each child is unique. Pick six words to describe your baby or toddler to someone who does not know him or her (e.g., babbly, cranky, adventurous, busy, bright, shy).

When a baby or toddler sees violence at home, he may feel things like this...

- he may be distressed or scared at the loud noises such as yelling
- he may be upset because he is not getting his needs met when he wants them met
- he may be scared to explore and play
- he may sense the tension and stress of his mother

What your baby or toddler may be feeling now

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

What you may be feeling about your baby or toddler...

resentment ...if you are too tired or distracted to meet the need for constant attention

guilt ...if you regret he does not have a responsible and loving father

concern ...if he visits your ex-partner and you worry about his safety

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 is important, so you are not too stressed out and tired to meet the demands of a baby or active toddler.

A baby's visits with your ex-partner

When he visits your ex-partner, you may worry about his safety, or worry that your ex-partner cannot look after a baby properly. You want a visitation agreement that takes your concerns into account. This may be difficult or impossible for you to negotiate by yourself so get a lawyer to help. Depending upon your income, you may qualify for Legal Aid. The information on page 66 may be helpful.

Explaining the violence to your baby or toddler

Don't. Children of this age, even those starting to talk and understand simple words, cannot understand the concepts involved in family violence and marital separation. Your actions will speak louder than words.

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 time in face-to-face interactions, lots of baby talk and giggles: he loves to see your face and hear your voice
- hold him and hug him and tell him you love him
- take a parenting course or read some parenting books, especially if you feel unsure of yourself or this is your first child
- find other new mothers to spend time with, like at a moms-and-tots group
- find people you trust to babysit so you can go shopping, take a walk or see a movie
- consider using a high-quality child care centre even if you are not working
- if you have a home visitor from public health, ask her for suggestions
- if you feel too overwhelmed to take care of him, find someone immediately to babysit, to give you a break
- NEVER SHAKE A BABY. Shaking causes permanent brain damage and even death
- take care of yourself: he needs you



Visit an Ontario Early Years Centre. You can find the nearest one at www.ontarioearlyyears.ca or call Ontario Government Information at 1-800-267-8097 (1-800-268-7095 TTY)