

Be Connected Think About Me



Building safety and connection is the first step when supporting a family where domestic violence and abuse is suspected/present.

Think about the child:

Gently bring the baby or young child into the space by using their name and looking at them. Use a calm, soothing voice to create a safe containing space for child and parent.

Think about the parent:

Create a safe relationship with the parent to begin thinking together about the young child and what he/she needs. Be present, listen, ask.

Think about the parent-child relationship:

Observe how the parent interacts with the young child and how the child responds. Nurture an attuned, responsive relationship between baby and parent; use and create opportunities to model sharing delight and enjoyment in the baby.

Think about the environment:

Provide a consistent safe space to meet the child and parent. Create opportunities for young child and parent to relax, play and enjoy each other.

Think about the practitioner:

Use opportunities in supervision to share your observations about the child's responses, presentation and the parent-child relationship. Be mindful of your own emotional well-being and seek support when needed.



Enhance Protection Ask About Me



Be aware of and keep updated about local area support services for families:

www.alwayshere.ie (DOJ)
www.barnardos.ie
www.tusla.ie



It is also important to help the parent to consider what supports may be available within their own extended families.

Ensure a strengths-based focus while prioritising the protection and welfare of children.

It is important to ensure that a focus is maintained on the abusive parent as responsible for the harm their children experience.

Central to young children's recovery from domestic violence and abuse is supporting the parent-child relationship and releasing mothers from any feelings of guilt or feeling not good enough as parents, so that they can focus on recovering with their young child.



Women's Aid



Drogheda Women's & Children's
Refuge Centre C.L.G.

Remember that negative outcomes are not inevitable. Families and children are resilient and can be supported to recover from experiences of domestic violence and abuse.

Notice Me Think About Me Ask About Me

Practice Guidance for Professionals

Supporting Families with Babies and Young Children Living with Domestic Violence and Abuse



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Barnardos
Because childhood lasts a lifetime

The information in this practice document is informed by mothers who are surviving domestic violence and abuse, adults who look after and work with young children, and current research.

Having a domestic violence informed lens means being aware of and understanding the impact domestic violence and abuse can have during pregnancy, and on the development and wellbeing of babies and young children.

By adopting the key practice principles of Notice Me, Think About Me, Ask About Me professionals, in partnership with families and support agencies, can support children to recover.



Responding to Trauma in Early Learning and Care: Domestic Abuse (Barnardos E-book)



Supporting women and babies after domestic abuse Women's Aid Federation of England

CHY 6015 \ RCN 20010027

Stay Informed Notice Me



Pregnancy is often a time of increased violence and abuse.



The women we spoke with highlighted the following:

- Low birth weight
- Increased risk of miscarriage
- Premature baby
- Baby stops growing
- Lack of movement in utero
- Being forced to conceal the pregnancy

Infants are especially vulnerable to experiences of domestic violence and abuse.

The feedback highlighted the following:

- Lack of expected cooing/babbling
- Unsettled, irritable baby
- Difficulty feeding – short feeds
- Erratic sleeping patterns – short naps
- Hypervigilant state – eyes darting around the room
- Startled if someone walks into the room
- Resists being held and holding breath
- Zoning out – quiet, eyes half closed but not asleep

For toddlers, the following pointers were highlighted:

- Screaming if separated from non-abusing parent
- Constantly seeking closeness to non-abusing parent
- Poor sleeper
- Presenting very differently when the abusive parent present
- Seeking comfort from older sibling



For those in the early years and pre-school age range, the following were highlighted:

- Delay in reaching developmental milestones
- Separation anxiety
- Hypervigilant, anxious and easily startled by loud noises
- Trying hard to please those around them
- Quiet and withdrawn
- Aggressive, acting out behaviour
- Difficulty engaging in imaginary play or re-enacting experiences through play

Next steps

- Consider that the presence of these indicators may not always mean that domestic violence and abuse is present
- Remember to ask about the babies and younger children in the family
- Share your concerns with your supervisor/line manager and agree next steps together
- Link with other key professionals involved with the family
- Your local area family support and domestic violence specialist services will be valuable sources of advice about discussing your concerns with the child's parent

