

Your child
does not
have
to be hit
to be hurt

Children
have the
right to live
free of
violence

Seeing, hearing
and feeling
violence

There are people who can help – speak to a trusted friend, family member, doctor, Plunket nurse, health worker, Police Family Violence Coordinator, Women's Refuge, local domestic violence centre, community agency or family lawyer.

If you are concerned that a friend, neighbour or whānau is experiencing family violence, offer support and encourage them to seek assistance. When children are living in a violent home, their brain may be harmed, even when the violence is not directed at them. The sooner they can be supported to feel safe the sooner they have a chance to thrive.

Contact Oranga Tamariki (MVCOT) or the Police immediately if a child is at immediate risk of violence, abuse or neglect.

You can make a real difference



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can change
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.

A lot of brain development happens in the first two to three years of life.

This early development affects the way that your children think, act and feel, possibly for the rest of their lives.

Exposure to violence and abuse in these early years can have a harmful effect on brain development.

Children who grow up in a violent environment are more likely to develop:

- Learning difficulties
- Problems controlling anger and emotions
- 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 body is likely to release high levels of stress hormones. These hormones cross the placenta to your baby.

What your baby sees, hears, feels, touches and smells shapes the way your baby's brain grows. All experiences - good and bad - influence how the brain grows.

A lot of neurons, or brain cells, connect up with each other during your child's first few years to build your child's brain. Experiences your child has that happen over and over again or very powerful experiences tend to make lasting connections.

When children repeatedly see, hear or feel violence, including yelling, fighting, pushing, and hitting, this is very stressful for them. This type of stress releases hormones which can be damaging to their brain growth, no matter how young your baby is.

While children of any age are vulnerable to harm from violence, babies and young children are particularly at risk.

Help them to explore their world and always keep them safe.

Children need lots of love and attention from caring and supportive whānau who can meet their needs and show them positive ways to behave. This will help them to grow into healthy adults. What happens to them now can affect your child forever.

Babies' brains are more likely to 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
- Lots of talking, reading and singing
- Smiles, fun and play

