It's not easy being a parent...

Being a parent is probably the most valuable and rewarding job in the world but it is also a job for which most of us get very little training or preparation! Babies and toddlers can be very demanding and even the most loving and caring parents can sometimes feel frustrated and out of control. While this may lead to babies and toddlers being harmed, the good news is that most of these incidents can be avoided.

The NSPCC is campaigning to protect babies and toddlers as part of FULL STOP to protect all children. This leaflet outlines some of the emotions and difficulties that parents often face and gives information so that you can get further advice and support when you need it.

Why a guide about babies and toddlers?

Most babies and toddlers are safe and protected by caring parents. However, all parents come under stress from time to time and their children can be harmed as a result. Did you know?

- Babies and toddlers are more at risk of being harmed than any other age group of children.
- They grow up very quickly! Many parents don't fully understand their babies' and toddlers' changing needs and quite "normal" behaviour may be misunderstood.
- If we can support parents while children are young, helpful methods of parenting and positive relationships can be established that will benefit both children and parents as the children grow older.
- Many parents who have a toddler also have a baby, and managing both of their different and competing demands – including sibling rivalry – can be difficult.

Having a baby is a life-changing event

Babies are dependent on you for their every need. Parents make these adjustments in different ways – we are all different – and some adjust more easily than others. It often takes time for loving feelings to grow, so don't worry – just try to spend time getting to know your baby.
**Every baby is different**

Some babies cry a lot. Others may not respond to you in the way that you would like or expect. Crying is the only way babies can communicate their needs, such as hunger, or discomfort. If your baby’s crying is getting to you, take a deep breath and let it out slowly, put the baby down in a safe place, like a cot or pram, and take a break. If possible ask your partner, a friend, or relative to take over for a while.

**It’s not naughty, but normal**

Once babies get on the move and become toddlers, they can often seem even more demanding. Sometimes their behaviour can be difficult to understand and what is quite normal behaviour may be misinterpreted as naughty or — worse still — deliberately wicked. Refusing to eat, resisting bedtimes, not co-operating with toilet training, being negative, crying every time you leave the room, temper tantrums, biting, and other forms of seemingly anti-social

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**What is a toddler?**

Everyone knows what is meant by a baby but what about a "toddler"? A "toddler" is defined as "a child who is just beginning to walk." This can be as early as 10 months — although most children start walking between 13 and 15 months. Being a toddler is usually thought to finish when the child is about three-years-old. "Toddler-dom" is also seen as a time of change, when your child has unpredictable and demanding behaviour that parents can find difficult to understand and manage.
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Feeling exhausted?
In the early days, it's a good idea to rest when your baby is asleep. It takes time for a baby to establish a night-time sleep pattern. Many toddlers still have sleep patterns that are a problem for parents — they "won't go down", they wake in the night, or wake early in the morning. If possible, both partners should share going to the baby or toddler in the night.

Sad or confused?
Many mothers experience "baby blues" briefly after giving birth. However, around one in 10 mothers suffers longer-term post-natal depression. A difficult birth can add to these feelings. Your health visitor or GP will be able to help. Mothers may find it helpful to talk to other mothers. Dads should think about how they can support their partners.

Are you lonely?
Don't forget to take care of your own needs and spend time with friends or other parents. If you are lonely, ask your health visitor or GP about local support groups. You can meet other parents and your child can make friends at toddler groups.

Domestic violence
If there is violence in your household, seek help to protect yourself and your child. Speak to your health visitor or phone Women's Aid. It can be difficult to break out of violent relationships but you need to look after yourself and protect your children.

Other difficulties?
For advice about any aspect of caring for your baby or toddler, talk to your health visitor, GP or Sure Start worker or join a parenting or National Childbirth Trust (NCT) group. Find out if there is a local family centre. Social services can provide support to families under stress (look in the phone book under the name of your local council).
Organisations that can help

Contact A Family
Helpline: 0800 000 2222
Website: www.cafamily.org.uk
Provides mutual support between families caring for children with any type of disability.

Cry Babies
Helpline: 020 7804 5011 (9am-10pm)
Provides emotional support and practical advice to parents dealing with excessive crying, demanding behaviour, and sleep problems.

Disabled Parents Network
Helpline: 0870 241 0450
Website: www.disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk
A national organisation of disabled parents who are parents or who have become parents, and their families. Provides peer support, information and advice to disabled parents and their allies.

Pathfinder Direct
Phone: 020 7292 0451
Website: www.pathfinderdirect.com
Information service that aims to promote close relationships between men and their children.

Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths
Helpline: 0870 707 0854
Advises on the prevention of sudden infant death and provides support and information to parents and professionals on the risk of sudden infant death. Provides support to bereaved families and those caring for them.

Home-Start
Freephone Information line: 0800 422 422
Website: www.home-start.org.uk
Throughout the UK, parent volunteers offer support, friendship and practical help to families with at least one child under the age of five. Families are visited regularly in their own homes, with some schemes also offering family groups.

National Childbirth Trust (NCT)
Enquiry line: 020 7444 8707
(Sat-Sun & Mon-Thurs, 9am-8pm Fri)
Website: www.nct.org.uk
Provides information and support for parents during pregnancy, birth and early childhood, through its services, local support networks and publications.

National Childminding Association
Advice Line: 0800 125 8460 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)
Website: www.nca.org.uk
Inform childminders, parents and employers about best practice in childminding.

Parentline Plus
Unit 556, Highgate Studios, 69-79 Highgate Road
London NW5 1TL
Helpline: 0208 500 2522
Telephone: 0208 500 2720
Website: www.parentlineplus.org.uk
Parentline Plus is a national charity offering help and information for parents, carers and families via a range of services including a free 24-hour confidential helpline, workshops, courses, information leaflets and website.

Parents Advice Centre (Northern Ireland)
Helpline: 028 9023 6660
Email: BelfastPAC@hotmail.com
Website: www.pacni.org
Provides help, support and guidance to parents on any family problem.

Pre-school Learning Alliance
Phone: 020 7263 0081
Website: www.pre-school.org.uk
Provides learning opportunities for pre-school children and mutual support and activities for parents and information services in your area.

RELATE
England and Wales Telephone Helpline: 0845 130 4000 (Mon-Fri, 9:30am-9:30pm)
Website: www.relate.org.uk
Relationship support and counselling services for individuals, couples, and families.

Women's Aid
England: Helpline 08457 222433 (24-hour a day); Website: www.womensaid.org.uk
Northern Ireland: Helpline 02890 381616
Website: www.womensaid.org.uk
Wales: Local Welsh groups in Yellow Pages or phone 192; Information, support, and refuge for women and their children affected by domestic violence.

Health and social service professionals
They can provide advice on a range of family, social, and health-related matters. Try your health visitor, GP, midwife, or local child health clinic for advice and services on what's available near you.

Sometimes, a child's difficult and challenging behaviour may have underlying physical and emotional causes so it may be necessary to involve specialist professionals to help identify any problems and provide appropriate support.