

# All Babies Count

NSPCC Scotland campaign briefing – November 2011

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**NSPCC Scotland has launched a new campaign, All Babies Count, to highlight the vulnerability of babies to abuse or neglect. We want to help ensure that parents can access support and services to help them care for and bond with their babies. This can significantly reduce the risk of the baby suffering maltreatment.**

**The early years agenda is well developed in Scotland; however, we think more can be done to increase the pace of delivering this agenda on the ground to protect babies. We're calling on the Scottish Government, as well as professionals and the public, to work with us to make the commitments on early intervention a reality.**

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## All Babies Count

On average, babies in Scotland are twelve times more likely to be killed than older children<sup>1</sup>; 27 babies have been killed in the past decade in Scotland<sup>2</sup>. Babies need to be protected from physical harm, but they also need love, care and attention. Babies' brains develop and are shaped by interaction with other people.

Most parents want to do the best for their children, and we recognise that all parents will require some support at some stage. However, there are those parents who will require more intensive support than others. Where parents struggle with mental health problems, domestic abuse, or have substance misuse issues, this can affect the bond between them and their baby, and so may leave babies more at risk. While of course not all babies in these families are at risk, over half of the calls to the NSPCC's Helpline involve concerns about children of all ages in families affected by these issues.

We know that:

- 1 in 5 babies in Scotland are living in a family where one or either parent or carer is at high risk of depression or serious anxiety;
- 1 in 60 mothers and 1 in 12 fathers of babies under one report hazardous levels of alcohol consumption;
- 1 in 50 mothers of babies report that their current partner has ever used force against them.<sup>3</sup>

Babies living in these families might face significant risk, and we can all do more to help them. With the right support, the parents who are most in need can be helped to care for their babies and keep them safe. That is why we're calling on everyone – the public, professionals and the Scottish government – to ensure that all babies count.

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<sup>1</sup> Figure based on the ten year average homicide rate per million population using Scottish Government statistics (2000/01 – 2010/11).

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin Crime and Justice Series: Homicide in Scotland 2009/2010, Table 5.

<sup>3</sup> These statistics are generated from analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study, Wave 1, conducted in 2000-1 and weighted by country.

## The need to protect babies

No single factor causes babies to be abused, and singular explanations of child maltreatment don't do justice to the complexity of family life. Research suggests that the primary caregiver-child relationship and the parents' capacity to provide love, care and nurture are of major importance.

At the heart of any strategy for intervention should be work to support the development of secure attachment between baby and caregiver, strong family relationships and quality parenting. Additional pressures on parents from factors such as mental illness, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol misuse, can adversely affect their capacity to be good parents. Services which address these factors will not automatically lead to improvement in the care of babies. Such services need to be combined with work which explicitly aims to promote secure attachment and positive parenting.

Early adversity casts a long shadow. Recent research highlights more clearly than ever before how critical pregnancy and the first years are to a baby's development, providing the essential foundations for all future learning, behaviour and health. Put simply, if we don't act early, we risk storing up problems for the future. It is vital that we act now to ensure that every vulnerable baby is safe, nurtured and able to thrive.

## What can the Scottish Government do to protect vulnerable babies?

A recent Ofsted report<sup>4</sup> highlighted under ones as a particular 'age of concern' in England, due to the high proportion of serious case reviews<sup>5</sup> which involve babies less than one year old. As yet we have no equivalent process in place in Scotland to analyse significant case reviews; and so our knowledge about babies' safety is poorer as a result. Work to address this is being taken forward by the Scottish Government and the Multi-Agency Resource Service (MARS). We want to highlight the importance this work in helping to learn lessons from tragic incidents in order to protect babies and children in future. We are keen to see this agenda progress as soon as possible.

More broadly, the early years agenda is well developed in Scotland and much progress has been made in this area in recent years. In particular, the Early Years Framework<sup>6</sup> recognises the importance of the first years of a child's life, and makes explicit reference to the role of the early years in improving child protection. Similarly, related initiatives such as the recent Pathway of Care for Vulnerable Families<sup>7</sup> recognise risk-factors where families may require additional support.

However, we think more can be done to increase the pace of delivering the early years agenda on the ground, particularly with a view to preventing abuse and maltreatment for our youngest children.

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<sup>4</sup> Ofsted (2011) *Ages of concern: learning lessons from serious case reviews*, Manchester: Ofsted. See: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ages-of-concern-learning-lessons-serious-case-reviews>

<sup>5</sup> Significant case reviews (known as 'serious case reviews' in England) are undertaken by Child Protection Committees in a number of circumstances, including where a child dies or has suffered significant harm as a result of abuse/neglect.

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government (2009) *The early years framework* Edinburgh: Scottish Government. See: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/01/13095148/0>

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Government (2011) *Pathway of care for vulnerable families (0-3)* Edinburgh: Scottish Government. See: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/347532/0115722.pdf>

We are calling on the Scottish Government to:

- 1. Place the promotion of healthy infant mental health and development at the heart of the National Parenting Strategy, ensuring there is a focus on securing positive parent-child attachment**

The Scottish government's planned National Parenting Strategy provides an opportunity to embed attachment and permanence in the Scotland-wide approach to supporting positive parenting, which research suggests will help prevent abuse and maltreatment.

- 2. Review the level and consistency of early years services across Scotland, highlighting good practice as well as gaps in provision**

There are areas of good practice across Scotland, but there is no national picture about what's available, what's effective, and how these interventions match need. A national overview of what works well and where gaps exist will help drive the early years agenda forward, encouraging the development of innovative services.

- 3. Incentivise the reallocation of resources at a local level towards effective and evidence-based early interventions, so the aims of the Spending Review can be realised locally**

We welcome the Scottish government's emphasis on early intervention in 2011 Spending Review, and the creation of an Early Years Change Fund. It is vital that this prioritised spend is invested in evidence-based interventions which can influence wholesale service change. We need to ensure that budgetary and service-planning mechanisms support long-term investment in programmes that have been shown to protect babies and prevent abuse.

### **What is NSPCC Scotland doing to protect vulnerable babies?**

NSPCC Scotland is launching four pioneering new programmes, which are based on leading international research. Each programme will be subject to intensive evaluation so we will add to the knowledge base of what works to protect babies in Scotland.

- **Minding the Baby:** an intensive home-visiting programme developed at Yale University in America, which builds on the latest research about maternal and infant mental health. Children's services practitioners and nurses visit vulnerable young mothers from pregnancy until their child is two, helping them to develop healthy relationships with their babies as well as dealing with the practical side of caring for a new child.
- **Preventing non-accidental head injuries in babies:** a hospital-based education programme for all new parents, which involves showing them a DVD to help them to cope with the stresses of having a new baby, and understand the dangers of shaking

a baby. This programme draws inspiration from a similar programme in the US which achieved a dramatic 47% reduction in rates of non-accidental head injuries.

- **Parents Under Pressure:** this programme works with parents receiving drug or alcohol treatment who have a child under the age of two in their full-time care. Originally developed in Brisbane, Australia, the programme has achieved positive impacts in reducing the risks of child abuse among methadone-maintained parents. Over the course of the twenty week programme, PUP therapists work with mothers and fathers to help them build parenting skills and develop safe, caring relationships with their babies.
- **New Orleans Intervention model (NIM):**, this programme works with children aged 0-5, who are in the looked-after system as a result of maltreatment. Based on work developed in the US, the NIM model seeks to support professionals in making better and more timely decisions on permanent placements for children.

The NSPCC also runs a **Helpline** which members of the public can call 24/7 if they have concerns about a baby, or indeed any child. We provide individuals with advice and support, and can take action on their behalf if they are concerned that a child is being abused or is at risk of abuse. There are many ways to contact the Helpline, including by phone (0808 800 5000), text (88858) and email ([help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)).

### Conclusion

Babies are at more at risk of being harmed at the hands of another person than any other age group. Evidence shows that intervening early is the best and most effective approach to preventing abuse and maltreatment. If parents with additional needs can access support and services to care for and bond with their babies, and address their own problems, this can hugely reduce the risk of neglect and abuse.

You can keep updated about the progress of the campaign and the work of NSPCC Scotland via twitter: @NSPCC\_Scotland and facebook: facebook.com/nspccscotland .

### For further information, please contact:

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### About NSPCC Scotland

The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children. Our vision is of a society where all children are loved, valued and able to fulfil their potential. We are working with partners to introduce new child protection services to help some of the most vulnerable and at-risk children in Scotland. We are testing the very best intervention models from around the world, alongside our universal services such as ChildLine<sup>8</sup>, and the NSPCC Helpline. Based on the learning from all our services we seek to achieve cultural, social and political change – influencing legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours so that all children in Scotland have the best protection from cruelty.

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<sup>8</sup> Until March 2012, ChildLine in Scotland will be delivered by Children 1<sup>st</sup>, on behalf of the NSPCC.