

# Parental Tools for Supporting Babies and Toddlers Through a Difficult Traumatic Event

## What is Important to Remember?

- Even very young babies are deeply influenced by stressful traumatic events – they hear, they see, they sense, and feel.
- Infants express their distress through behavior, and often through somatic responses
- Infants need parents to help them cope with stressful situations and with the emotional and mental support of adults. Parents are able to help infants cope and provide physical comfort.
- Infants need their parents to help them cope with frightening situations and the emotional and physical distress that comes with them. Parents can effectively help infants calm and regulate emotional and physical distress.

## What Should parents do?

- Think about what the infant experienced – what they saw, heard, felt.
- Make meaning - describe to the infant what happened in their environment and what you recognize when you observe them: 'You were very frightened... there was a loud boom
- Calm the infant through touch, movement, and reassuring words: "You're safe here with me, I'm protecting you, I'll do everything I can to keep you safe"
- Validate the infant's feelings – "You're right, it really was so frightening..."

♥ "Even if infants don't understand the verbal message, they absorb the message at other levels - tone of voice, facial expressions. The verbal message is the adults' way of conveying their precise attunement to the infant."

♥ "Every time the infant's behavioral response recurs (jumping in response to noise, difficulty falling asleep, experiencing pain) - you can return to providing validation, meaning-making, and reassurance ('You're right, there was a frightening noise and you were very scared, now I'm here with you')."

## What Should parents avoid?

- Dismissive responses ("Nothing happened!")
- Hiding, distorting reality, and lying - not even to protect the infant, because the infant senses the tension and may be left with a confusing experience lacking meaning that could increase their distress.
- Intense reaction in the infant's presence: overwhelming and flooding crying, unregulated panic. (And if the parent responded with an intense reaction, it is recommended to explain and mediate it to the infant - "Earlier I was scared and yelled, that frightened you, you're right...")

