

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

WORKING WITH PARENTS IN CONFLICT

PRACTITIONER TOOLKIT



FOREWORD

The Early Help Team in Warwickshire is proud to present this Reducing Parental Conflict Practitioner Toolkit.

The toolkit has been designed and tested by a dedicated team of stakeholders from across Warwickshire Children and Families partner organisations. It has been designed to support practitioners who have completed the Reducing Parental Conflict Practitioner Workshop.

Some level of arguing is normal and a part of life for most couples and when it's resolved well, it does no harm. But, for some couples their arguments are intense and frequent, and they don't get resolved well which we know is not good for children and the wider family.

Conflict and abuse are not the same. Conflict can be part of a normal relationship; this toolkit focuses on how conflict can be constructive rather than destructive.

The use of these tools has the potential to rectify the negative consequences of family stress, family conflict and family breakdown on children and parents, and help prevent the intergenerational transmission of factors that lead to disrupted family relationships and family breakdown.

This toolkit along with the practitioner workshop will help practitioners to work with families earlier and prevent conflict from escalating and causing lasting damage to children, young people and their families.

I hope that you find the practical exercises to use with parents and carers useful, as well as the information and signposting contained within this toolkit.



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CONTENTS

- 3** What is parental conflict and how does it impact on children
- 4** Co-Parenting
- 5** Restorative values and commitment to children and families
- 6** Stages of relationship
- 7** Parent problem checklist
- 8** Relationship scale
- 9** Healthy relationship questionnaire
- 10** Constructive vs destructive
- 11** Constructive vs destructive exercise
- 12** You vs I
- 13** Reducing parental conflict in Warwickshire
- 14** Useful links and resources
- 15** Useful links and resources

What is parental conflict and how does it impact on children?

Definition from the Department for Work and Pensions:

Conflict between parents is normal, but if exposure is frequent, intense and poorly resolved, this can have a damaging impact on children, resulting in long-term mental health issues and emotional, social, behavioural and academic problems as they grow up.

There is growing understanding and awareness of the need to address and reduce parental conflict that sits below domestic abuse.



Conflict between parents, rather than the event of parental separation or divorce, is a key factor in explaining why some children fare better than others when parental relationships break down.

Co-Parenting

It is important to recognise that different kinds of parenting relationships exist:

- Parents living together
- Separated or divorced parents
- Step-families / blended families

Research still supports the view that most co-parenting relationships are mother / father. As we know, this will shift over time to include more:

- Single Parent Families
- Extended Families
- Adopted Families
- Step Families
- Grandparent Families
- Same Sex Families

To view a short guide to working with co-parents visit

www.tavistockrelationships.ac.uk/training-courses/practitioner-guides-resources/200-guide-to-working-parents or scan the QR code using your phone:



Our restorative values and commitment to children and families

Principles for working with parents

Building strong relationships:

- Creating and maintaining respectful and trusting relationships;
- We will work WITH people, rather than just “doing to” or “doing for”;
- Keeping the child(ren) central to our work with the family and everything we do;
- Recognising that families are the experts in their lives and their strengths and goals will be central when providing support.

Helping communities and families to find their own solutions:

- Creating one timely plan together, focusing on strengths within the family and network, as well as being open and honest about what needs to change.
- Promoting health, wellbeing and education for child(ren) and their families.
- We will work together to manage needs, concerns and risks and identify solutions together to keep the child(ren) safe.

Being the best we can be:

- We will work together to provide high support and high challenge with children and families, ourselves and partner agencies.
- We will support each other to develop the services we provide, learning from all feedback to improve our services for everyone.
- We will work together to resolve difficulties quickly and restoratively, by finding the right way to support families.

Principles of working with parents:

- Be curious, identify what is really going on
- Avoid making assumptions
- Don't take sides
- Keep the couple focused on the task in hand – parenting together
- Be clear about how much time is available
- Stay away from “fix it” mode
- Encourage each partner to listen to the other
- If things get very heated, ask them to take time out.



Stages of relationship

Long term relationships tend to go through lots of stages and changes. It's different for everyone and your journey will be affected by the changes in your life.

Throughout your life, you may move up and down through the stages. Big changes like having a baby or losing a job can cause arguments, which may set you back. It's important to remember that you may not always be at the same stage as your partner.

1) Romance - Many relationships start here – everything seems perfect and you want to spend every moment together.

2) Reality - You start to see each other's flaws. You may find that you want different things from life.

3) Power struggles - As you figure out how things are going to work between the two of you, you may have to reach a compromise about important issues like children, money or housework.

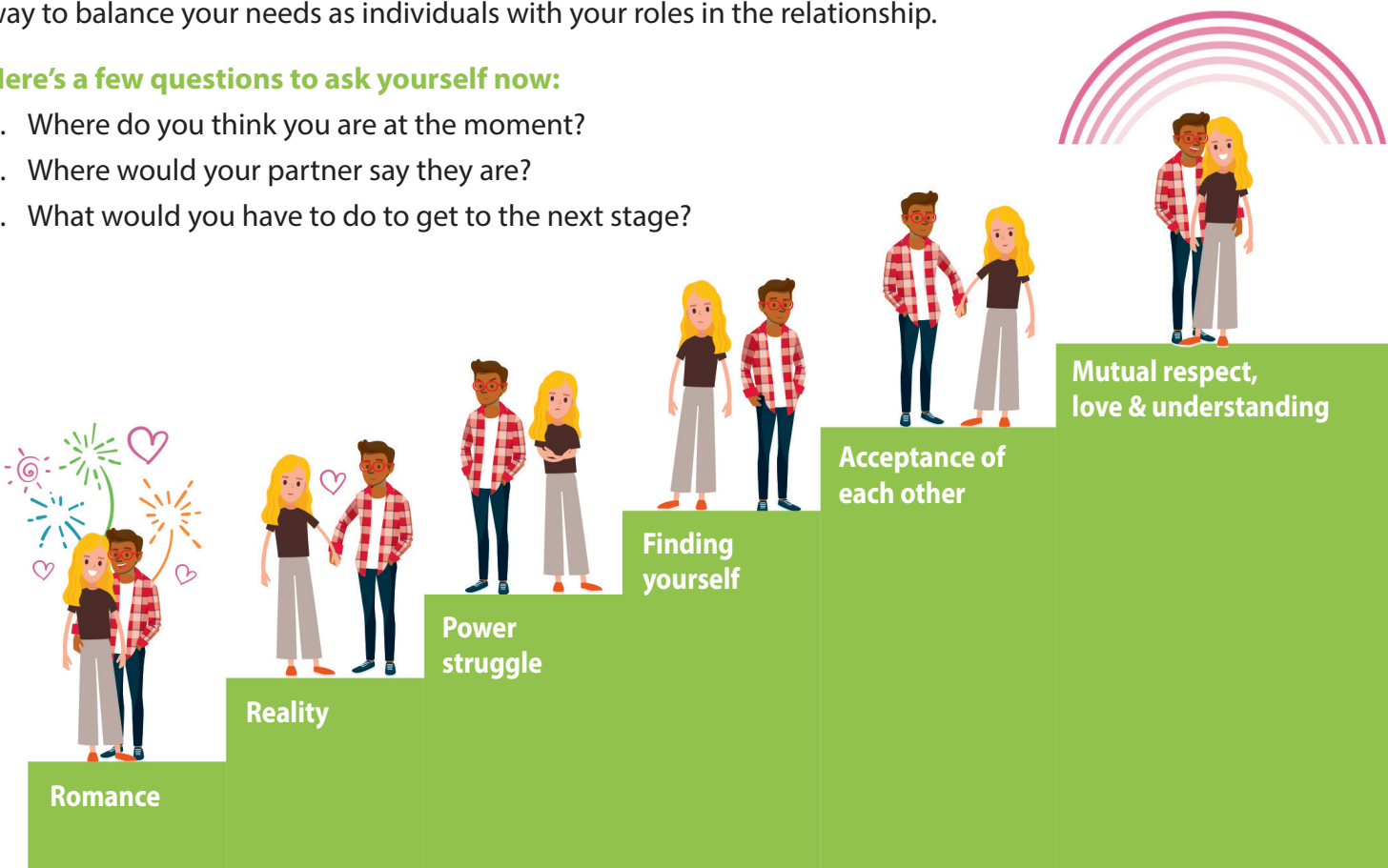
4) Finding yourselves - Once you've figured out how your relationship works, you may need to focus on yourselves as individuals – your personal hopes and dreams. This can be a difficult stage for many couples.

5) Acceptance - When you have learned to respect each other's needs, you can start to see your differences as strengths.

6) Mutual love and respect - You learn to love each other completely – warts and all. You've found a way to balance your needs as individuals with your roles in the relationship.

Here's a few questions to ask yourself now:

1. Where do you think you are at the moment?
2. Where would your partner say they are?
3. What would you have to do to get to the next stage?



Parent problem checklist

Below is a parent problem checklist with a list of issues which parents often disagree on. This checklist will help you identify the different issues and disagreements which may be contributing towards conflict.

1 Please circle either 'Yes' or 'No' to indicate whether each issue has been a problem for you and your partner over the last 4 weeks.		YES	NO
1	Disagreements about rules for children (eg. bedtime, play areas)	YES	NO
2	Disagreements about type of discipline (eg. smacking children)	YES	NO
3	Disagreements about who should discipline children	YES	NO
4	Fighting in front of children	YES	NO
5	Inconsistency between parents	YES	NO
6	Children preventing parents being alone	YES	NO
7	Disagreements about sharing child care workloads	YES	NO
8	Cannot resolve arguments about child care	YES	NO
9	Discussions about child care turning into arguments	YES	NO
10	Parents undermining each other (not backing each other up)	YES	NO
11	Parents favouring one child over another	YES	NO
12	Lack of discussions between parents about child care	YES	NO
13	Lack of discussions about anything	YES	NO
14	One parent is "soft", one parent is "tough" with children	YES	NO
15	Children behave worse with one parent than another	YES	NO
16	Disagreements about what is naughty behaviour	YES	NO



Link to Resource:

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Education-and-skills/Schools-and-professionals/ParentProblemChecklist.pdf or scan the QR code above.

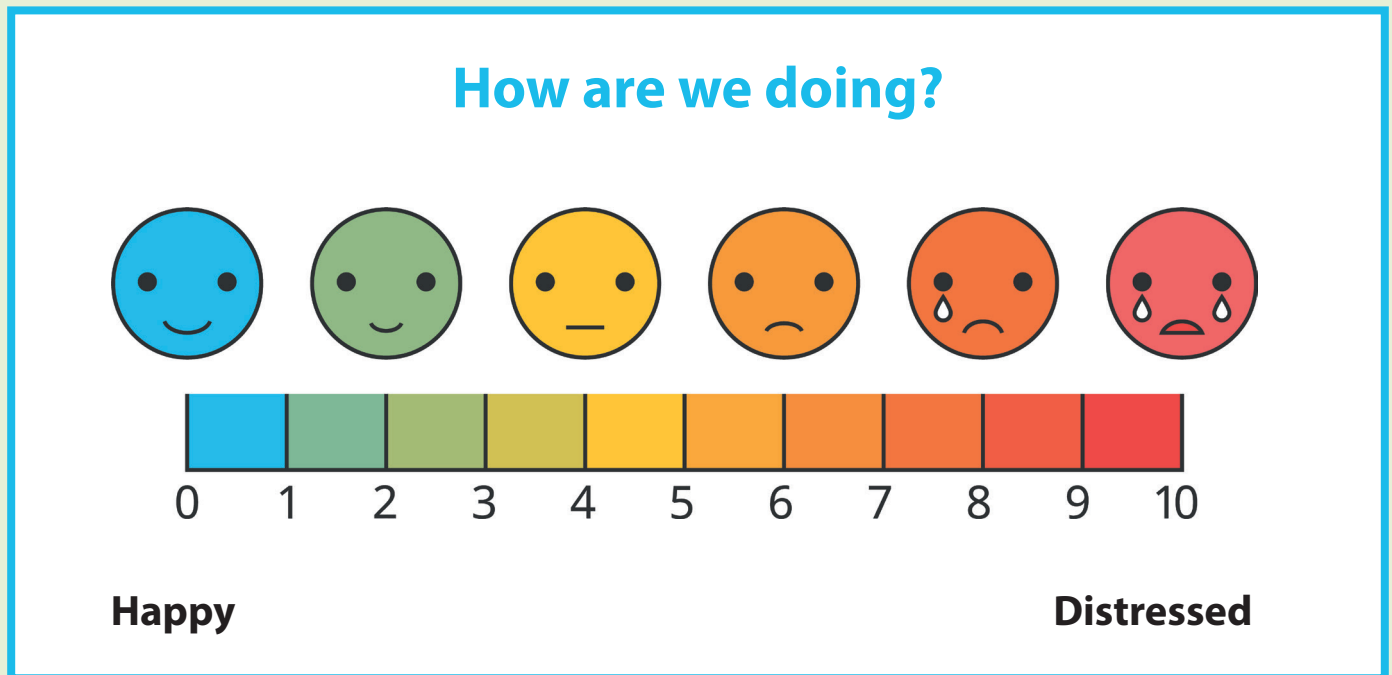
2 To what extent has this issue been a problem for you and your partner over the past 4 weeks?

NOT AT ALL	A LITTLE	SOME	MUCH	VERY MUCH		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Relationship scale

How does each parent rate their situation on the scale from happy to distressed?

This can highlight differences in how they are experiencing their relationship.



This resource will work well as an introduction to a discussion about the impact of parental conflict on children.

Using this scale will encourage an honest discussion between parents about where they feel they are on the scale. It will encourage parents to identify themselves the changes needed to make their relationship more harmonious and consistent for their children.

You may choose to re-visit this scale with parents as you work with them, to make changes to their relationship to identify positive change, or further work that needs to be undertaken.

Healthy relationship questionnaire

This questionnaire has been designed for parents to consider their relationship with each other and the strengths and challenges they may face.

Like most questionnaires and / or quizzes the outcome could change depending on how the parents are feeling when they complete it and what is going on in their life. To get the most reliable outcome, please encourage parents to think about how they feel on a day to day basis, not just right at this moment in time.

Your relationship with your partner				
Green scores 3 Yellow scores 2 Blue scores 1	Never / Almost Never	Once in a while	Frequently	Your Score
My partner makes me feel appreciated				
My partner and I get on each other's nerves				
When we disagree, we find a solution that satisfies us both				
I can get angry and frustrated with my partner				
My partner respects my opinions and feelings				
Little arguments can escalate into accusations and criticisms				
I think about what my life would be like if my partner and I weren't together				
We laugh and have fun together				
I don't feel my partner listens to me when we argue				
How often in a typical week do you;				
Argue with your partner in your children's presence?				
How well you work together as parents				
My partner makes me feel like I'm a good parent				
I feel like my share of the parenting work is more than my partners				
We are growing and maturing together through our experiences as parents				
My partner and I have different ideas about how to raise our child				
My relationship with my partner is stronger now than before we had a child				
The stress of parenting has caused my partner and I to grow apart				
We have fun with our children together				
When I'm at my wits end as a parent, my partner doesn't give me the extra support I feel I need				
My partner appreciates how hard I work at being a good parent				

Add up your total score:

If you scored in the 48 – 60 range, your relationship with your partner seems to be in good shape and you are working well together in parenting your child / children.

If you scored in the 34 – 47 range, whilst your relationship with your partner may be good, there could be a few areas you may want to work on.

If you scored in the 20 – 33 range you may want to stop and think about where the two of you are headed. Your score indicates the presence of patterns that could harm your relationship.

Now you know where your score sits, you may want to consider your next steps. Look at where you scored 'high', these will be the green boxes; these are the current strengths in your relationship.

Consider where your scores are in the 'middle', these will be the yellow boxes; could small changes in these areas help to improve things? Where you have scored 'low', these will be the blue boxes; these areas will be having the biggest impact on your relationship.

If you have ticked multiple blue boxes you may want to think about seeking support or asking for help.

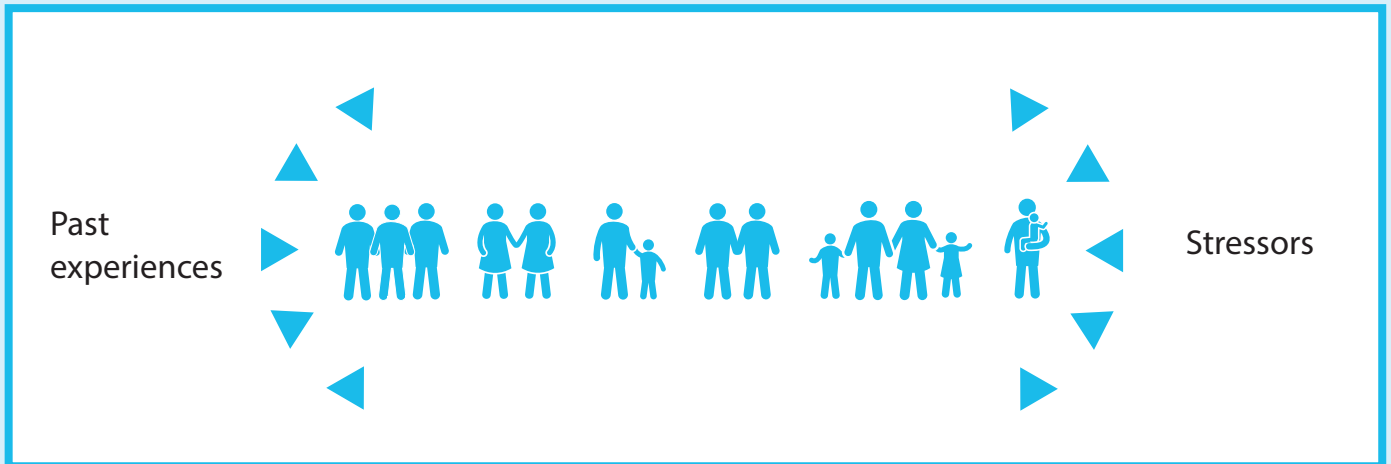
To view the questionnaire online visit www.livewellcampaign.co.uk/app/uploads/2018/10/Healthy-Relationships-Questionnaire.pdf or scan the QR code below on your phone:



With thanks to Essex County Council who produced this questionnaire as part of the healthy relationships project

Constructive vs destructive

Conflict in relationships is a reality...



How we communicate and solve problems

Natural

Damaging

Constructive conflict

Destructive conflict

Part of everyday life

Negative

Normal

Impacts child outcomes

Parents in conflict may be struggling to identify the destructive elements of their behaviour. The constructive versus destructive cards, provide the opportunity to discuss behaviours with parents and if they are present in a relationship. You may choose to add more cards yourself depending on the parental relationship.

Ask the couple to think about the behaviours and place them in the always, sometimes, never columns as they apply to their relationship.

Then ask the couple/individual to identify what they would consider to be constructive and destructive behaviours.

Using solution focussed questioning, help them identify how they could change their destructive behaviour and increase the positive behaviours.

Ask for each other's point of view

Withdrawal from the conversation as it's not going your way

Explain how the situation is making you feel

End an argument upset and angry

Recognise that whilst you may not agree, your partner has a valid point

Offer possible solutions to problems, whilst are willing to compromise and listen to other suggestions

Raise your voice to make sure you get your point of view across

Listen to one another's point of view without interrupting

Accept there may be times where you disagree

Use examples from the past to prove you're right

Use insults to make your point and share your feelings

Allow each other the opportunity to express your views

In our relationship we...

Always

Sometimes

Never

You vs I statements

An "I" message or "I" statement is a style of communication that focuses on the feelings or beliefs of the speaker rather than thoughts and characteristics that the speaker attributes to the listener.

Construct an "I" statement which takes the phrase from accusing to disclosing.
At a basic level consider using the following framework to create I statements.

**You care more about work
than your own family**

I feel anxious when...

**You leave me to do all the tough
parenting, so the kids like you more
than me**

I need help with...

**You're always on the phone texting,
on Facebook.
You care more about someone else's
opinion than mine**

I feel anxious when...

Reducing parental conflict in Warwickshire

Parental conflict is estimated to affect around 1,249,820 children and young people nationally, and 14,000 children experience parental conflict in Warwickshire.

Warwickshire County Council have been successful in securing funding from the Department for Work and Pensions for £40,100.00 to help the authority strengthen its strategic leadership around parental conflict and provide training to frontline staff.



The reducing parental conflict project will also allow us to upskill practitioners in supporting parents to reduce conflict within their relationship, whether they are together or separated, by building awareness and developing the confidence, knowledge and skills to work with parents to reduce conflict and drive for more positive outcomes for children and their families.

We aim to train professionals from organisations including Early Help, Children's Social Care, Housing, ASB, Health, Police, Schools, JCP (TFEAs) YOS, Probation, Drug & Alcohol Services, Domestic Abuse Services, CAMHS and Adult Mental Health Services.

USEFUL LINKS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



1. www.warwickshire.gov.uk/familyrelationships

Warwickshire County Council website providing information on family relationships.



2. www.gov.uk/government/collections/reducing-parental-conflict-programme-and-resources

Information and resources for leaders, managers and practitioners helping to reduce the impact of potentially damaging inter-parental conflict on children.



3. www.tavistockrelationships.org/

Tavistock Relationships is an internationally renowned charity for advanced practice, training and research to support couples, individuals and families.



4. www.eif.org.uk/

The Early Intervention Foundation Champion and support the use of effective early intervention to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of experiencing poor outcomes.



5. www.clickrelationships.org

Relationship support from experts and the community.



6. www.dad.info

Dad.info is Europe's largest advice and support website for fathers celebrating the changing role of Dads with engaging, helpful, practical, entertaining resources and content for every stage of their journey



7. www.netmums.com

Netmums is the UK's most relevant, inclusive and supportive parenting community providing parenting content and community forums.



8. www.relate.org.uk

The UK's largest provider of relationship support.



9. www.contact.org.uk

Support for families of disabled children; supporting families, bringing families together and helping families take action for others.



10. www.youtube.be/XHgLYI9KZ-A

A video explaining Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)



11. www.citizensadvice.org.uk/

A website providing access to knowledge and support to find your way forward, no matter who you are or whatever the problem is.



12. www.seeitdifferently.org/

A resource containing a series of videos highlighting various aspects of relationships and enabling you to see conflict differently.

USEFUL VIDEOS

Here are a list of some useful videos illustrating a variety of family relationships:

Supporting healthy family relationships



www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZUWbIBOyL8&t=57s

Supporting healthy family relationships.



Short animation 1

www.youtu.be/6xUEEHP-WQQ

Supporting healthy family relationships.



Short animation 2

www.youtu.be/Xs1agIIOtN4

Supporting healthy family relationships.



Short animation 3

www.youtu.be/at3mJFiHrXo

A video showing an example of withdrawal within the family and how you can talk through the problem



www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBAgB4P2zv4

A video illustrating relationship struggles around household chores



www.youtube.com/watch?v=As1-90Xsec8

A video showing an example of relationship disagreements between separated parents



www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz-TQ4Qlgyok

Video showing an example of disagreements over finances and pressures



www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbsShSfhrLg



Download a scan app to your mobile device then hover over the QR codes to view more information or to watch videos and animations.



**CHILDREN
& FAMILY
SUPPORT**

This tool kit has been put together by Warwickshire County Council.