

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

WORKING WITH PARENTS IN CONFLICT

ADVANCED PRACTITIONER TOOLKIT





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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Reducing Parental Conflict Advanced Practitioner Toolkit. The original toolkit, which was developed to be used by universal services, has been reviewed and adapted by the Strengthening Families Team for use by the practitioner where there is a more complex relationship and complex conflict pattern.

As has been quoted in the original practitioner toolkit;

'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' (Marina Kitchen, Service Manager for Early Help & Targeted Support Services).

Four sessions have been devised within this toolkit that can be followed in this format or practitioners can use which ever parts are relevant to the individual families. An hour per session, if following the format, would be recommended.

The sessions are aimed to support parents and carers to understand parental conflict and the impact on children.

The information shared is evidence based and this toolkit will use strategies to support the understanding of the information.

To follow restorative practice, consider beginning sessions with a check-in and ending sessions with a check-out. This could be done using ice breaker questions or conversation cubes for example.

The sessions are designed to encourage discussion and increase insight into the individuals own relationship and behaviours within that relationship, so that positive changes can be made, which will improve outcomes for children.



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REDUCING PARENTAL CONFLICT WORKPACK

Consider beginning and ending each session with an icebreaker. For example; conversation cubes, book of questions or would you rather.



The sessions we are planning to do over the next few weeks will look at understanding parental conflict and its impact on children.

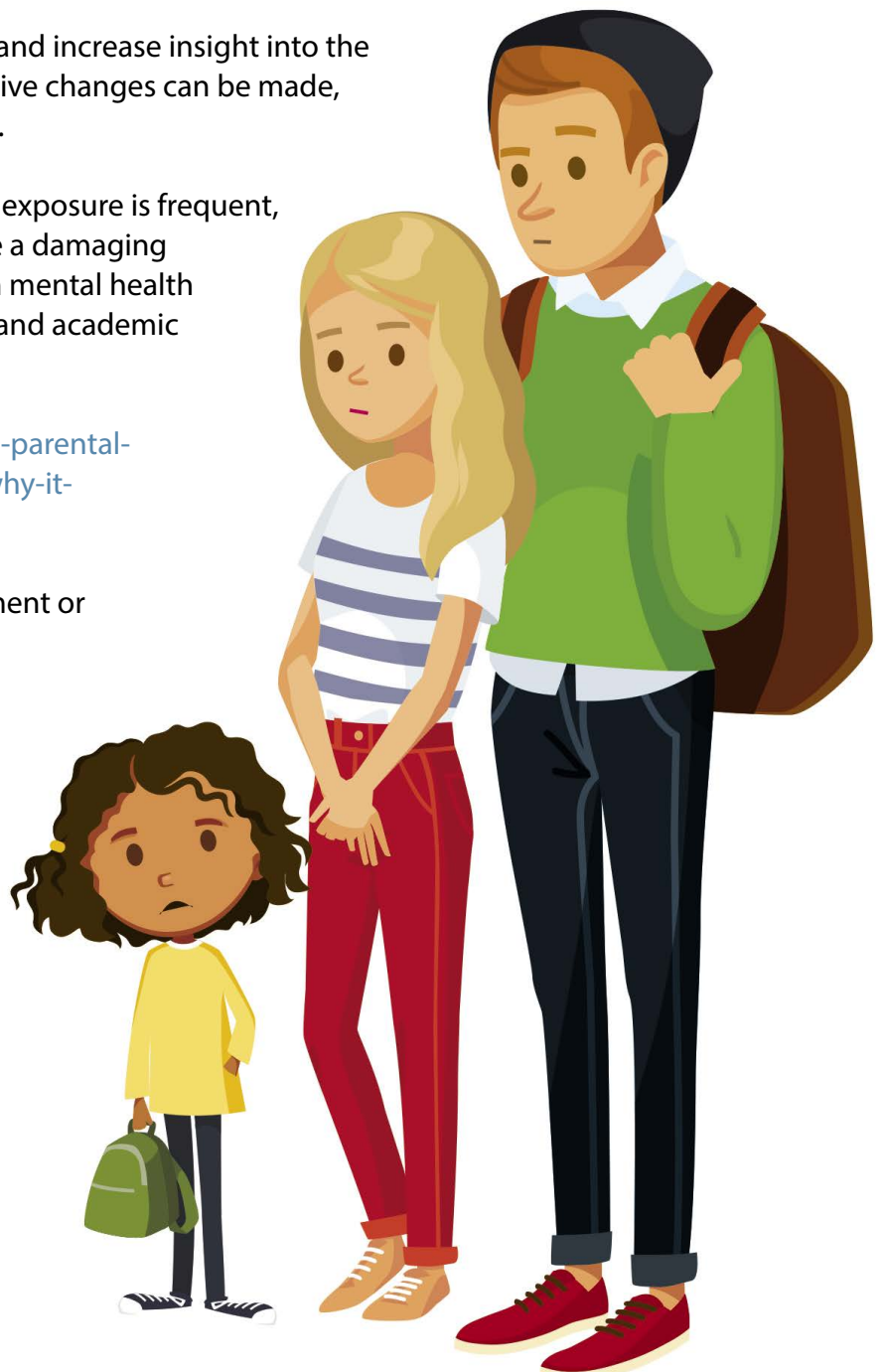
The information shared is evidence based and will use tools to support understanding of the information.

The work hopes to encourage discussion and increase insight into the individuals own relationship, so that positive changes can be made, which will improve outcomes for children.

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.

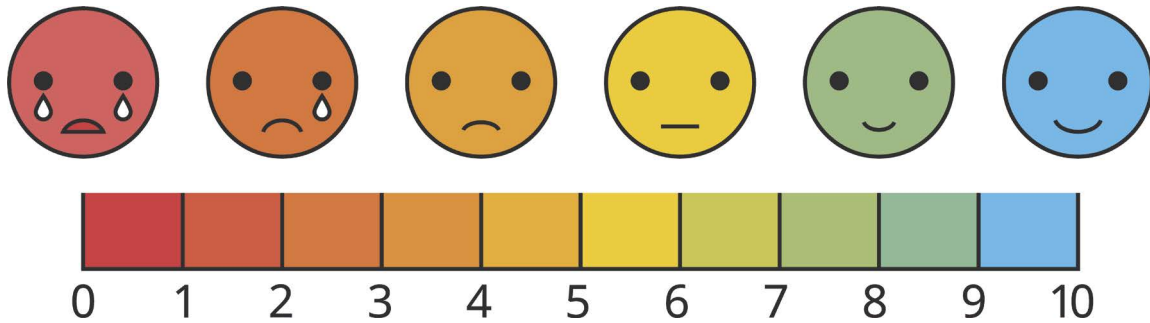
<https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/reducing-parental-conflict-why-it-matters-to-children-and-why-it-matters-to-services>

Definition of conflict - a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one.



SESSION ONE

RELATIONSHIP SCALE



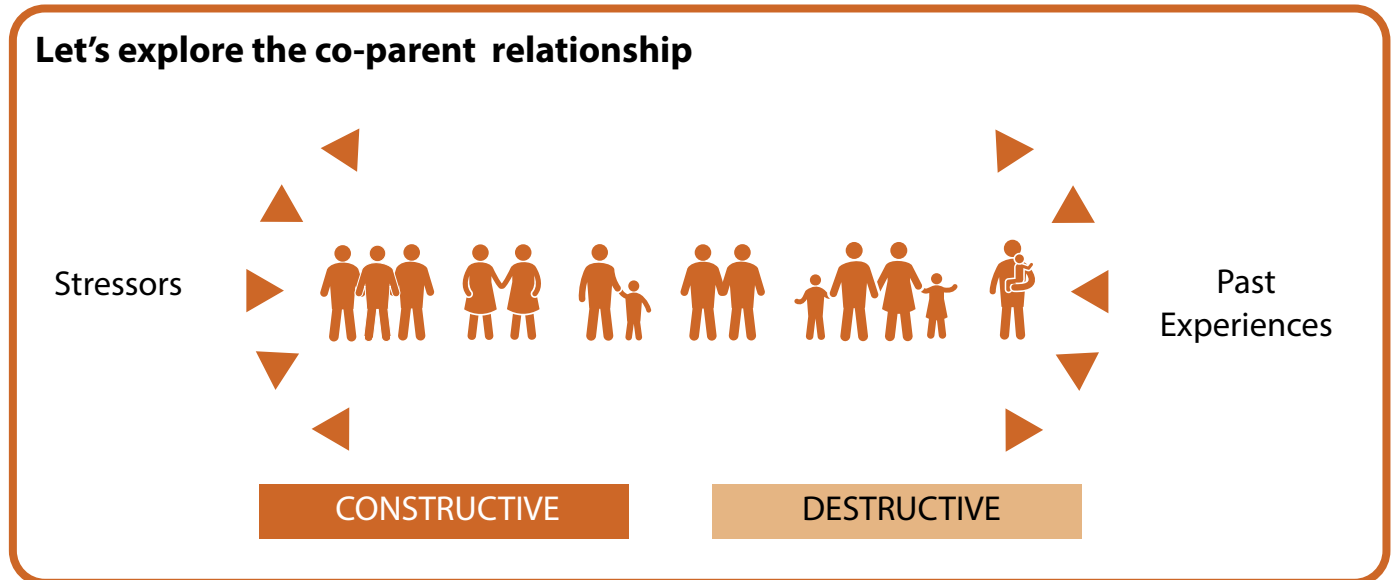
NOT GOOD

AS GOOD AS IT GETS

1. Where would you plot your relationship on the scale? (mark on the scale above)
2. On a scale of 1 – 10 (1 being unhappy and 10 being the happiest you can be) where would you place you co-parenting relationship with _____ and why? (write comments in here)
3. On the scale, where would you think _____ would go for? Would it be a similar number or completely different? (write comments in here)
4. What would you like (CHILD'S NAME) to see? Is it important to you how (CHILD'S NAME) sees their parents communicating? (Write comments here)

SESSION ONE

Let's look at some research. Some true and false statements. (Use your true or false cards here, just pick a couple and see what parents think is true or false).



What is **constructive** conflict?

(USE THIS SPACE TO WRITE PARENTS COMMENTS)

Natural

Part of everyday life

Normal

What is **destructive** conflict?

(USE THIS SPACE TO WRITE PARENTS COMMENTS)

Damaging

Negative

Impacts child outcomes

SESSION ONE

How you were parented and experiences of past relationships all contribute to other relationships in your life. On top of this we have daily stressors.

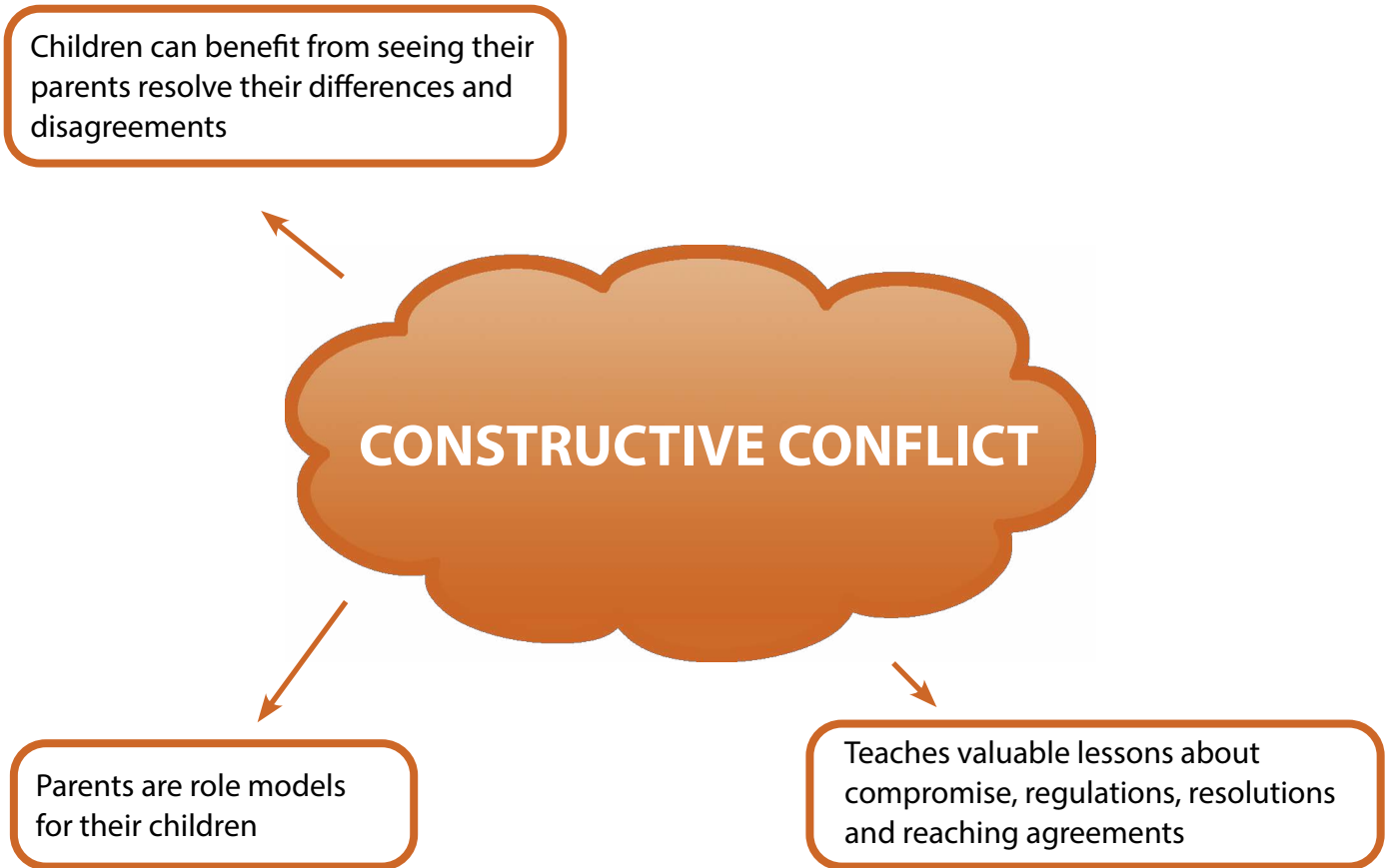
What could **STRESSORS** be?

(USE THIS SPACE TO WRITE PARENTS COMMENTS)

Your experiences in past relationships

(USE THIS SPACE TO WRITE PARENTS COMMENTS)

Stressors and experiences in past relationships can trigger 'constructive' or 'destructive' conflict.



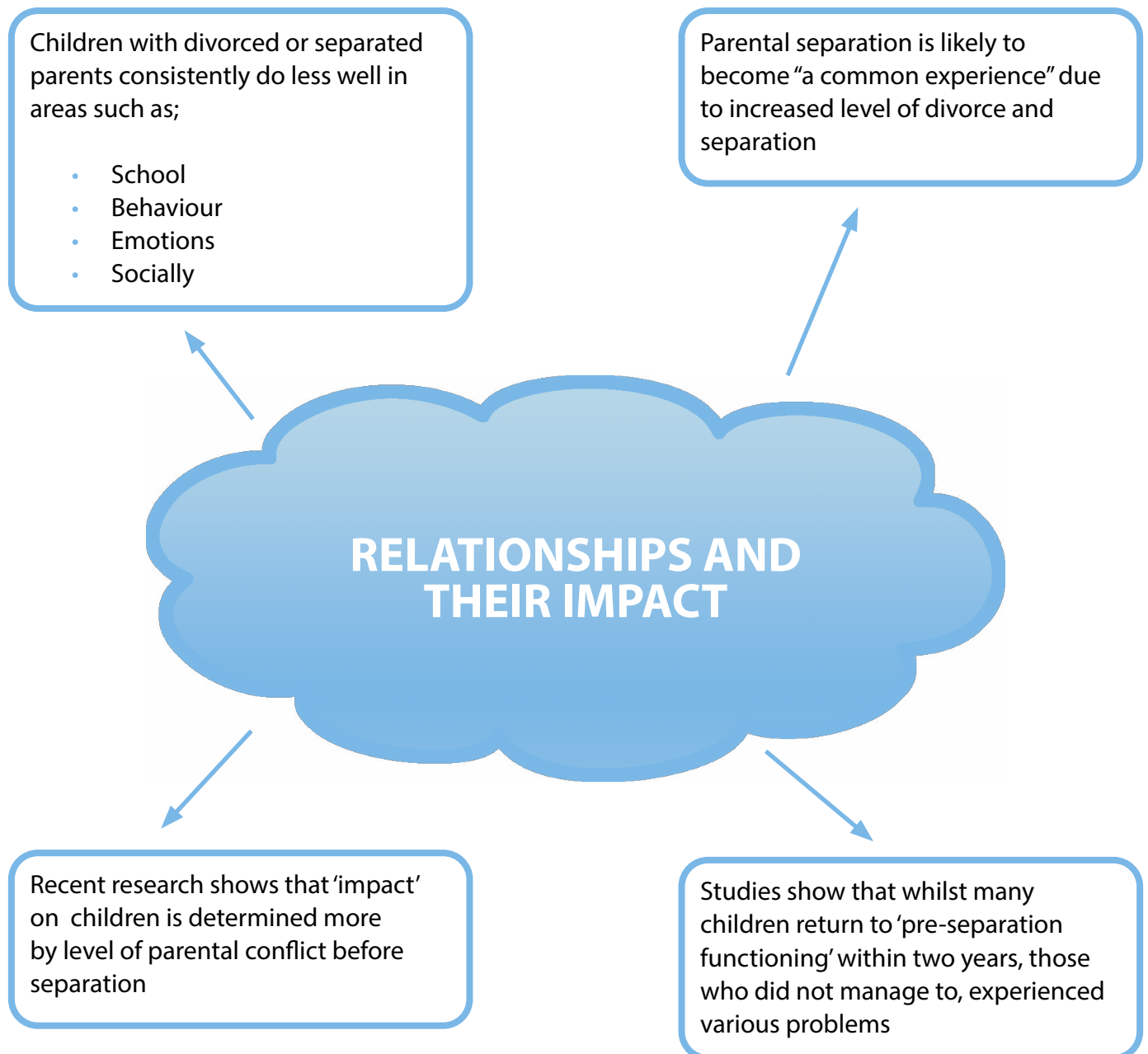
What would your constructive conflict look like to you?

What does the research tell us?

“Parental conflict which is ‘frequent, intense and poorly resolved’ places children at risk of poor social, emotional and educational outcomes”

Developed by Emma Short from Knowledge Pool – Reducing parental conflict

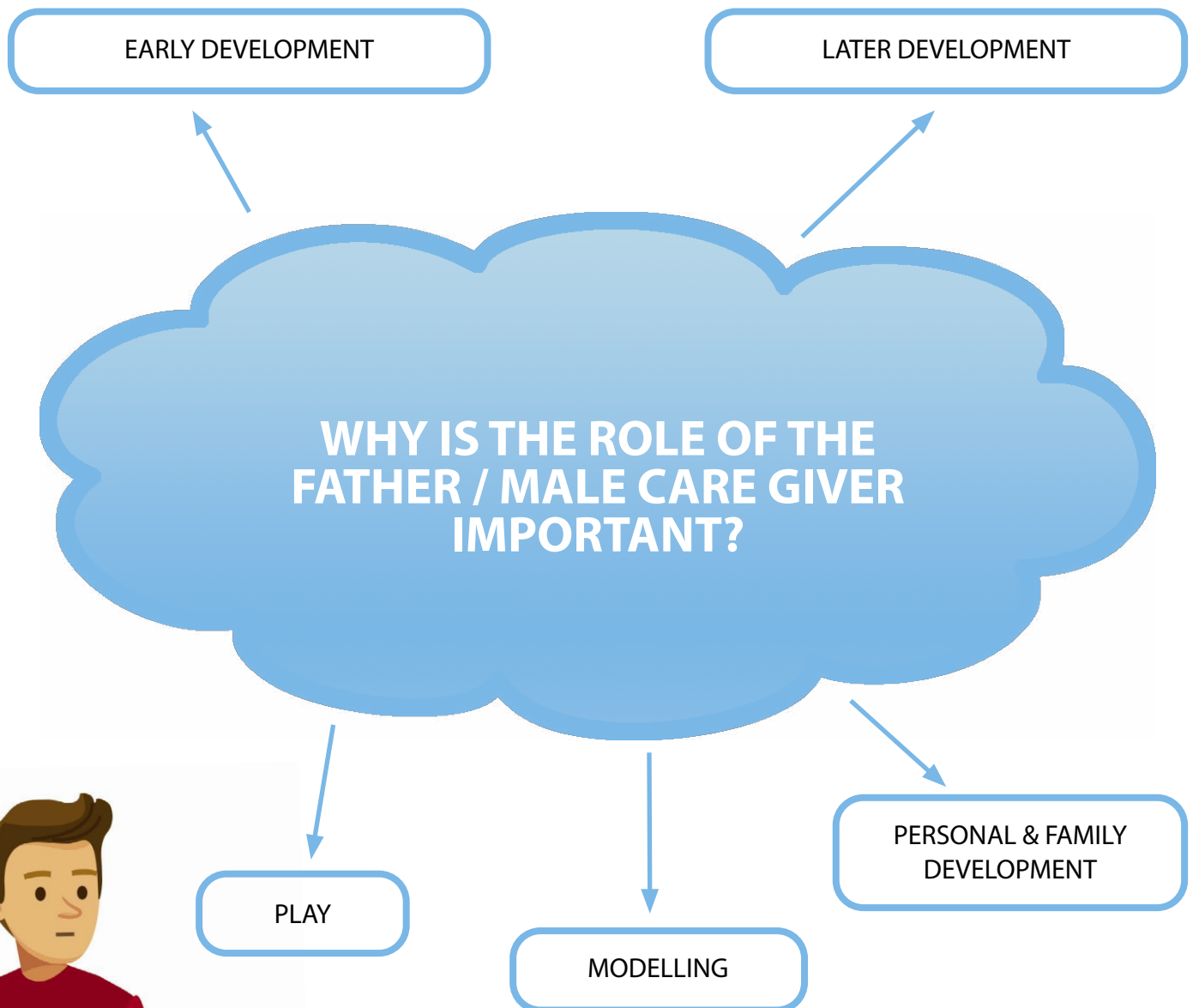
SESSION TWO



This is not promoting staying together if the relationship is unhealthy, it is highlighting the importance of getting co-parenting right and promoting healthy relationships.

**WHAT DOES PARENTAL
CONFLICT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?**

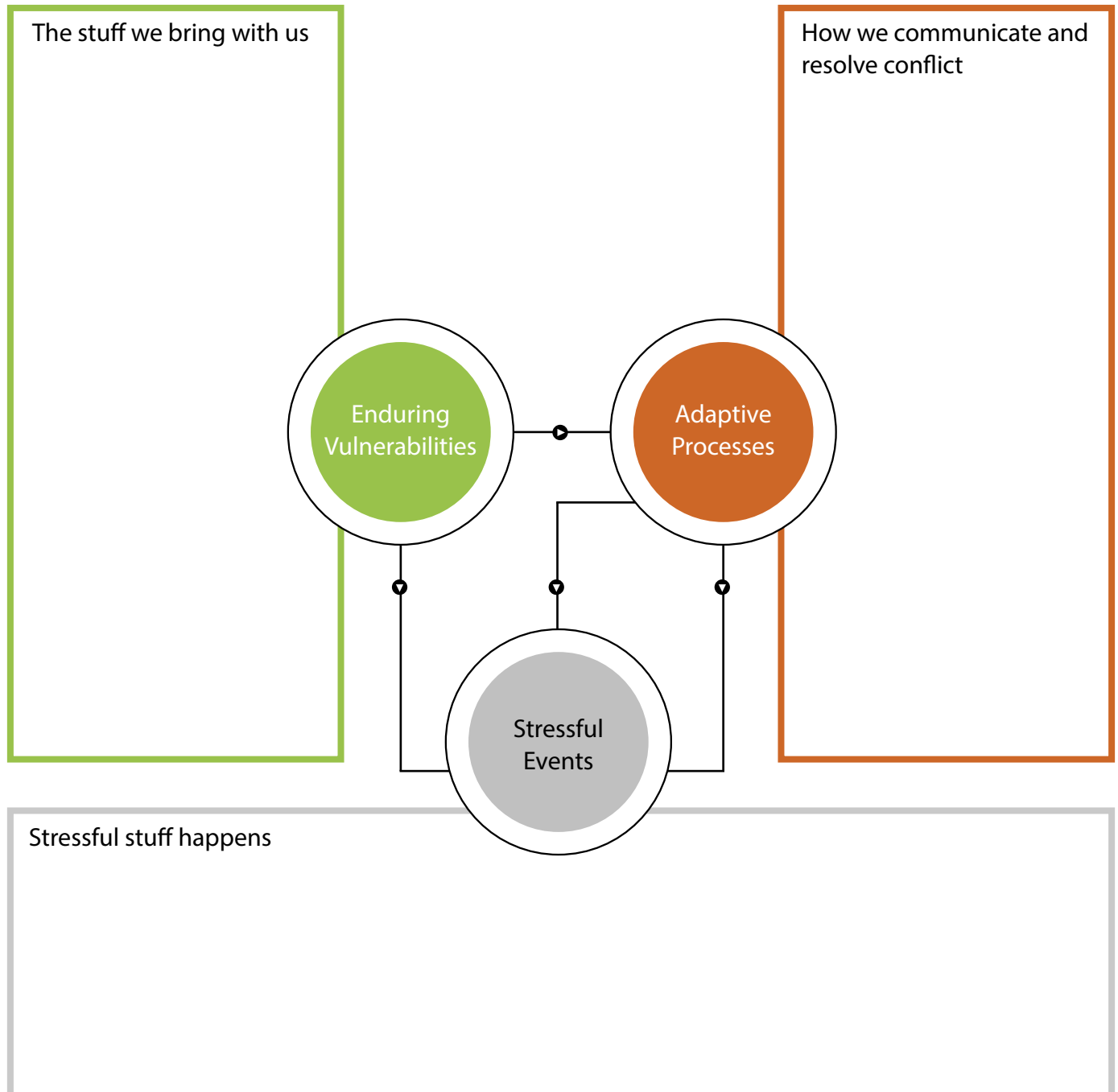
SESSION TWO



Both father and male carers are under-represented in the research



Vulnerability, Stress, Adaptive model



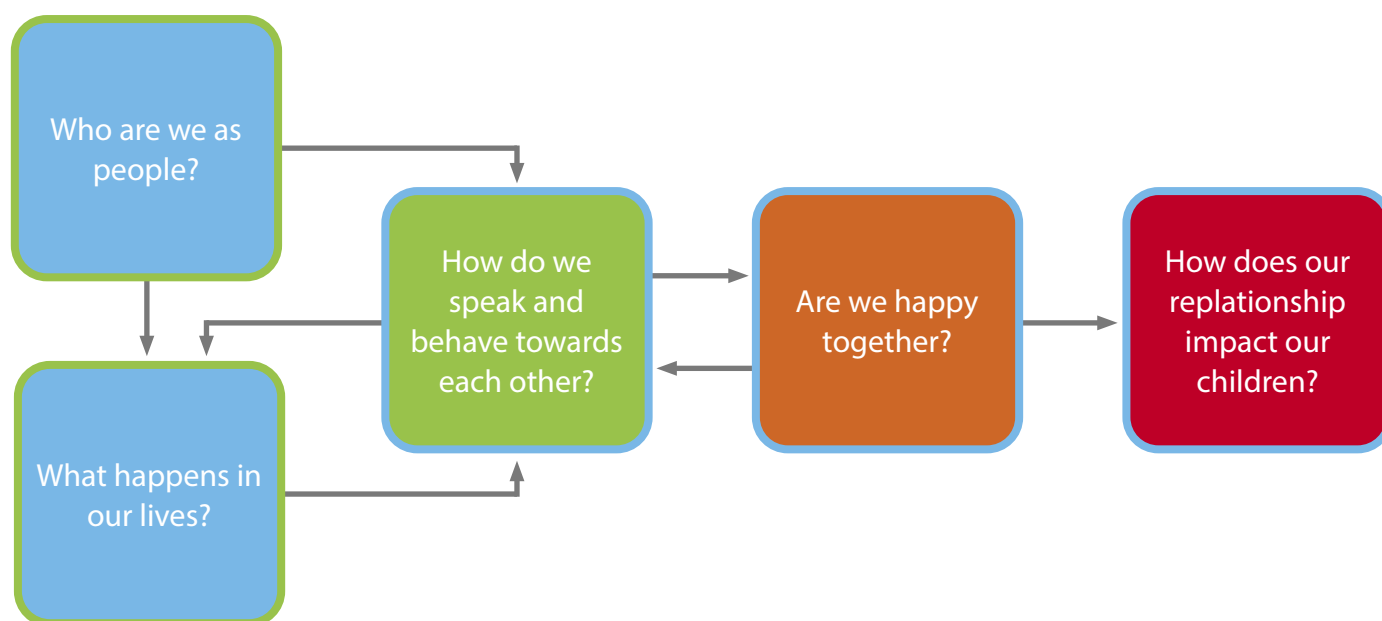
- V** Vulnerabilities is the stuff we bring with us, our baggage
- S** Stressful events/our stressors
- A** Adaptive processes are our coping strategies or how we resolve things

Our stressors and past experiences can influence how we respond to conflict and whether this is constrictive or destructive.

SESSION TWO

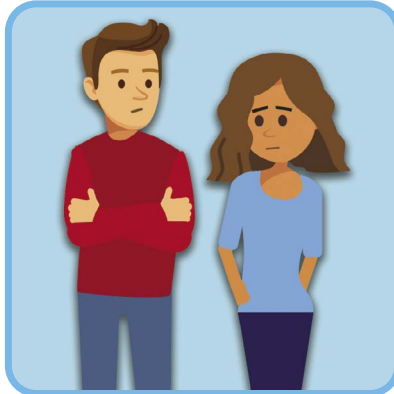
Vulnerability Stress Adaption Model

Using Bradbury and Karney's Vulnerability Stress Adaption model helps parents understand the connection between stressful life events, the parents' past histories, and the methods they use to cope with stress or conflict by asking them to reflect on questions like the following.



Use either the model on page 13 or the model above to look at the participants own VSA model.

Relationship breakdown...



Contempt

Attacking sense of self with an intent to assault or abuse

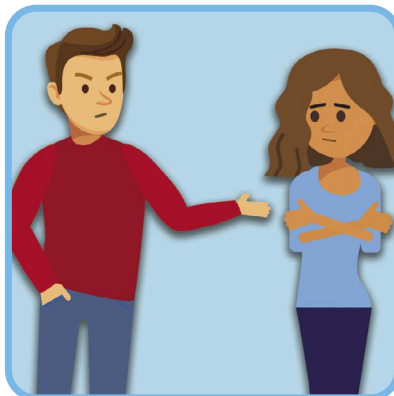
The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse, Gottman 1994

Gottman states that the four horseman will lead to relationship breakdown/separation

Watch video and discuss if you recognise any of these in your relationship.

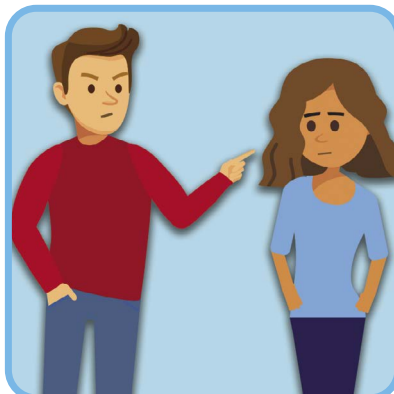
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o30Ps-_8is&feature=emb_logo

Use a scan app and hover your phone over the code below.



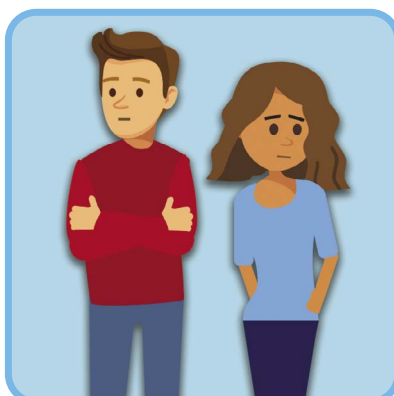
Defensiveness

Victimising yourself to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame



Criticism

Verbally attacking personality of character



Stonewalling

Withdrawing to avoid conflict and convey disapproval, distance and separation



SESSION TWO



Evidence has shown that children who are exposed to conflict between their parents that is 'frequent, intense and poorly resolved' are likely to suffer increased levels of the above.

Are there any behaviours you have noticed in your child that has shown they may have been affected by conflict?

Developed by Emma Short from Knowledge Pool – Reducing parental conflict

Interparental conflict and the outcomes for children – what does the research say?

Children may experience;

- Early attachment/relationship problems
- Higher rates of anxiety, depression, aggression and behaviour problems
- Peer pressure relationships
- Heightened substance misuse and criminality
- Future relationships breakdown and experience of domestic abuse
- Poor physical outcomes
- A need for adult mental health support

Research says that 1 in 5 married or cohabiting couples are in relationships that are classed as 'distressed'.



**AS A RESULT OF THIS
CHILDREN SUFFER**



SESSION THREE

Relationship breakdown...

Remember the four horsemen from session 2?

Stonewalling

Withdrawing to avoid conflict and convey disapproval, distance and separation

Criticism

Verbally attacking personality of character

Defensiveness

Victimising yourself to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame

Contempt

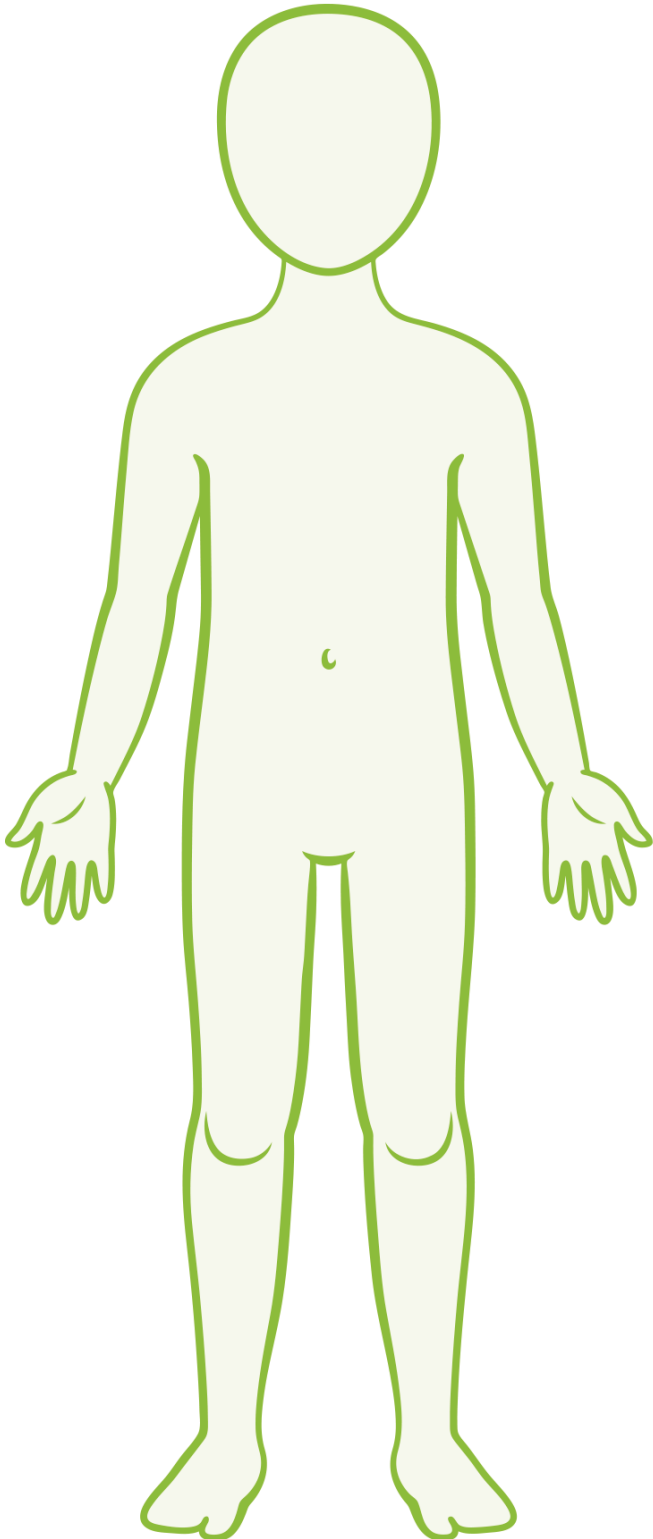
Attacking sense of self with an intent to assault or abuse

Signs of distress in your relationship ...

Can you think of a time when you have been in distress and not been able to address this issues constructively yourself?

SESSION THREE

What do your children see and hear during destructive conflict? How might they feel?



SEE / HEAR

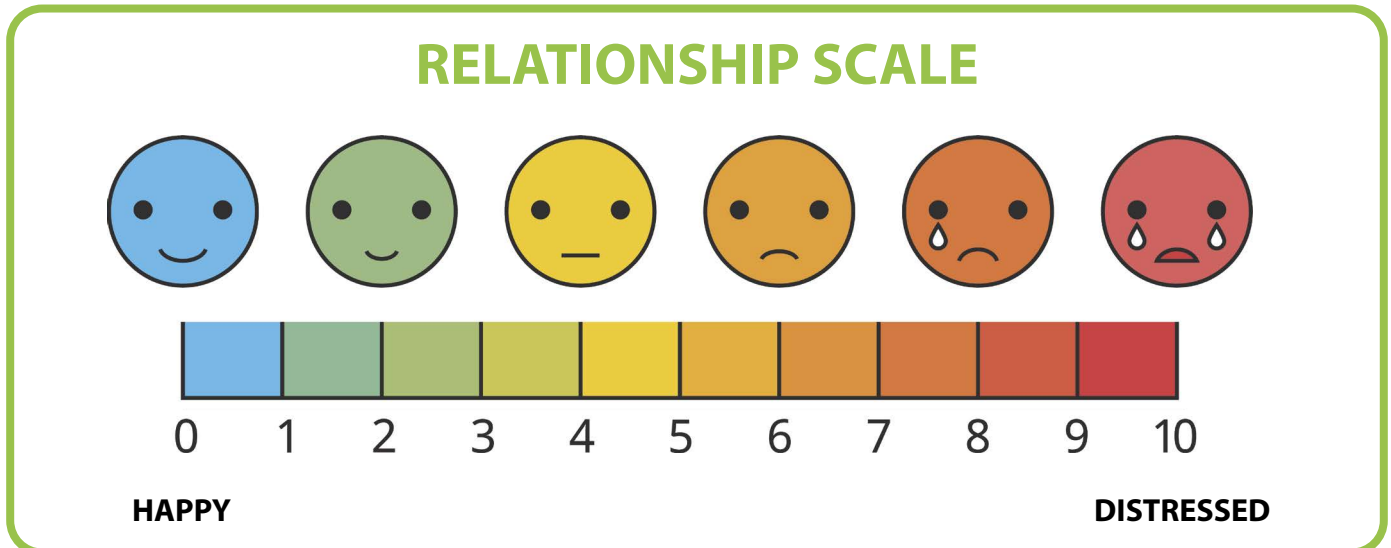
HOW WOULD YOUR CHILD KNOW THAT
CONFLICT HAS BEEN RESOLVED?

WHERE IN THEIR BODY MIGHT THEY
HAVE FEELINGS?

SESSION THREE

Let's look at the relationship scale again.

Where do you rate your relationship (co-parent) on a scale from happy to distressed?



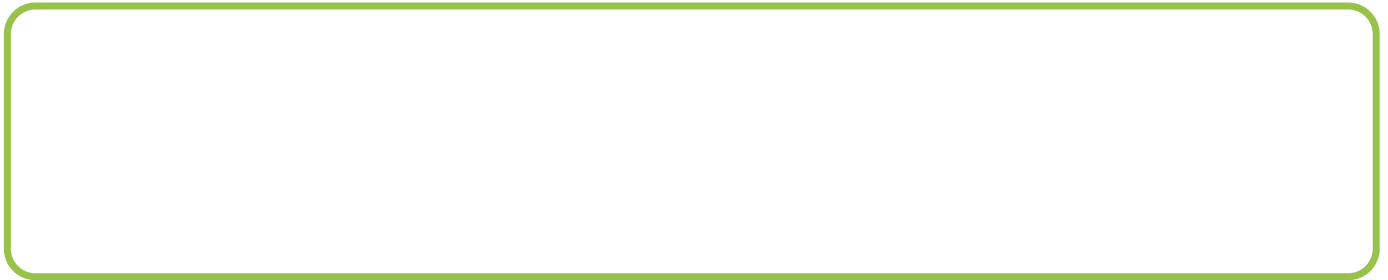
How would things look if they were better?

How would you know?

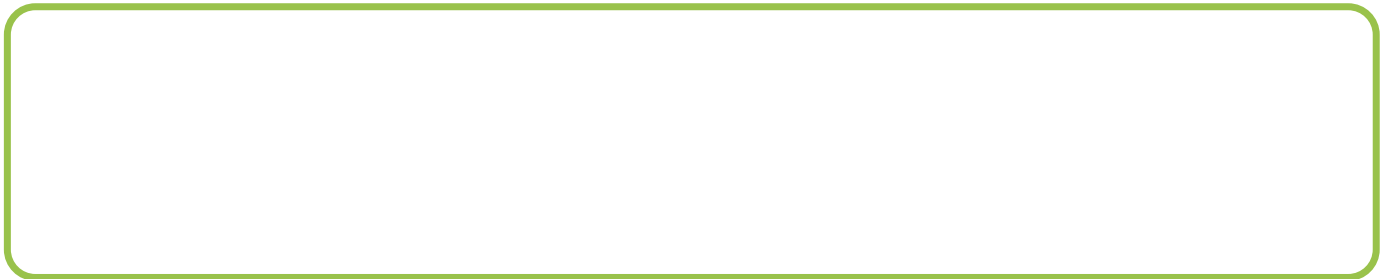
What would you have to change?

SESSION THREE

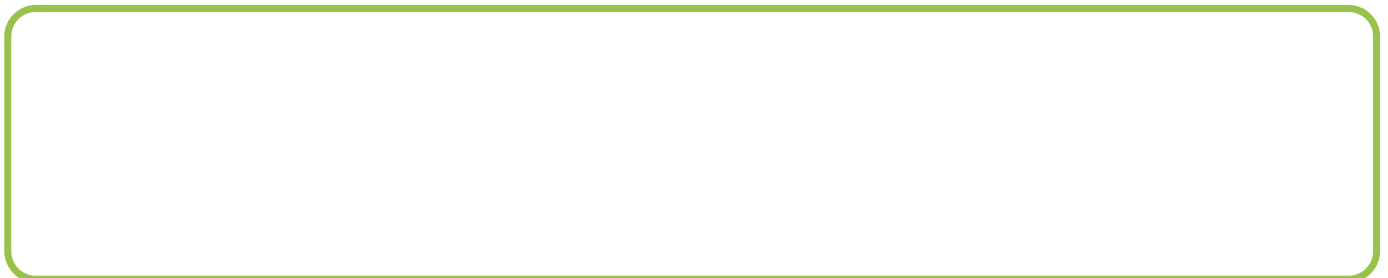
What would you and co-parent be doing differently?



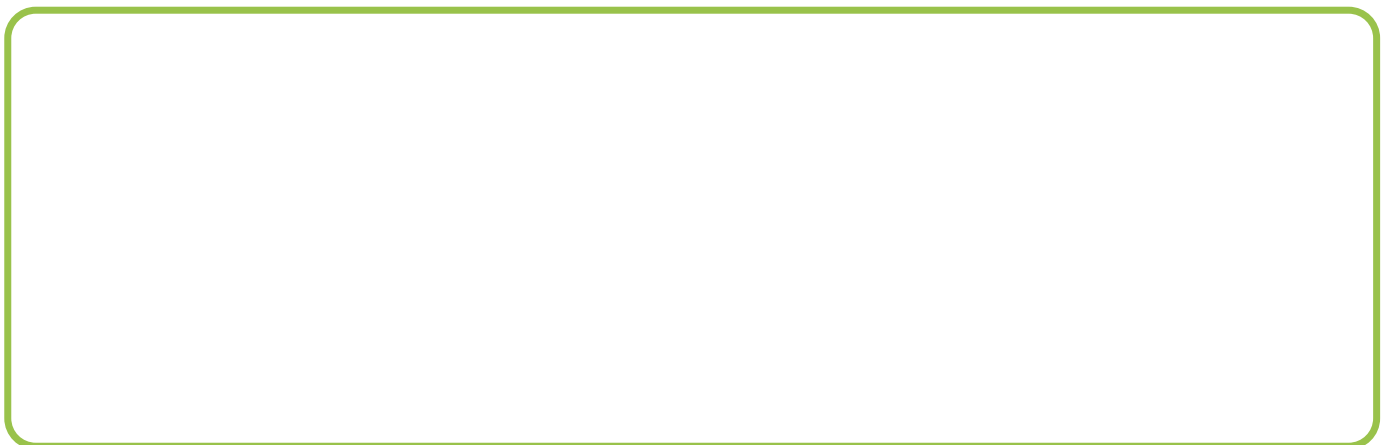
What would you be thinking? How would you be feeling?



What might get in the way?

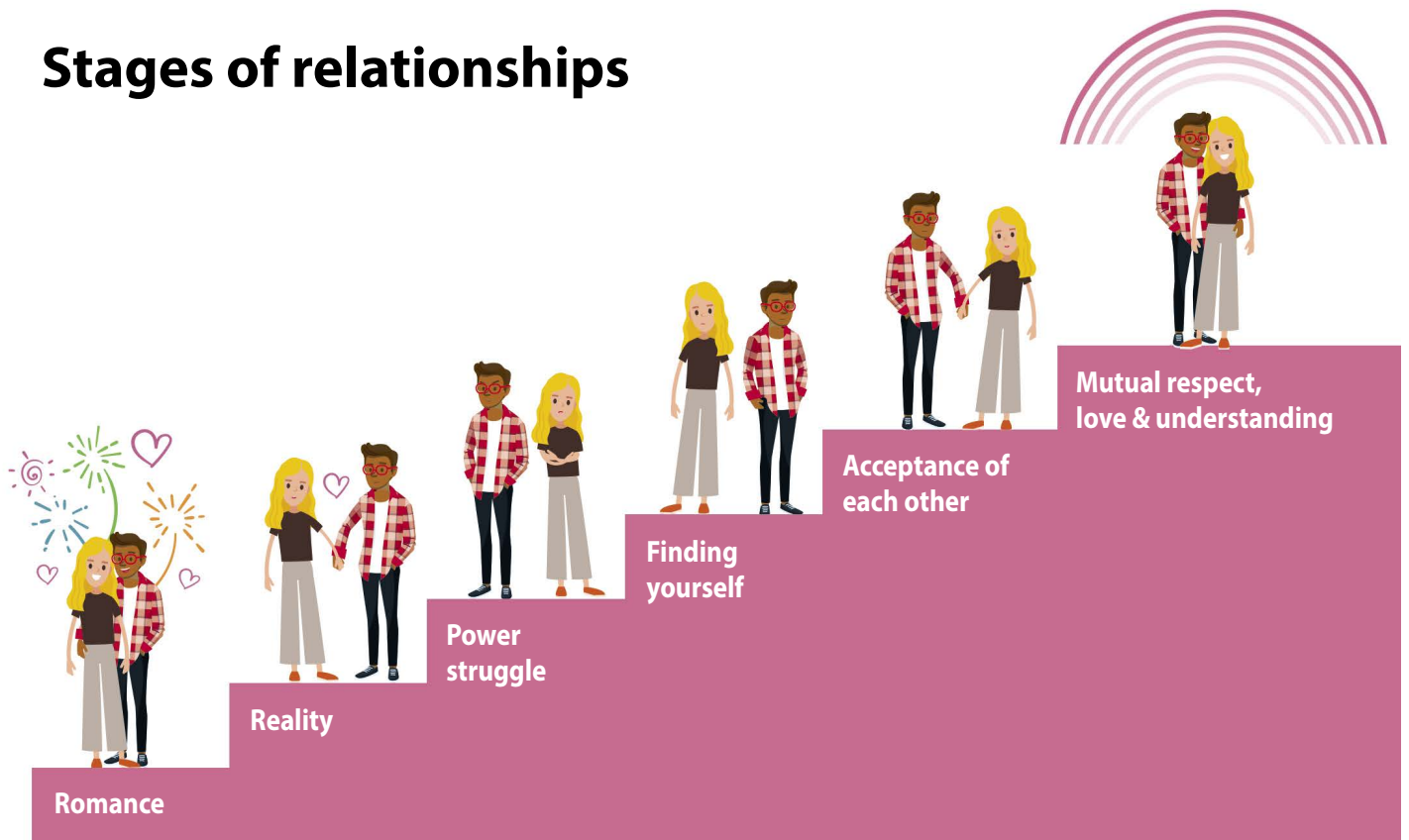


When you have been in conflict before, what helped to make it better? What were you both doing?



SESSION FOUR

Stages of relationships

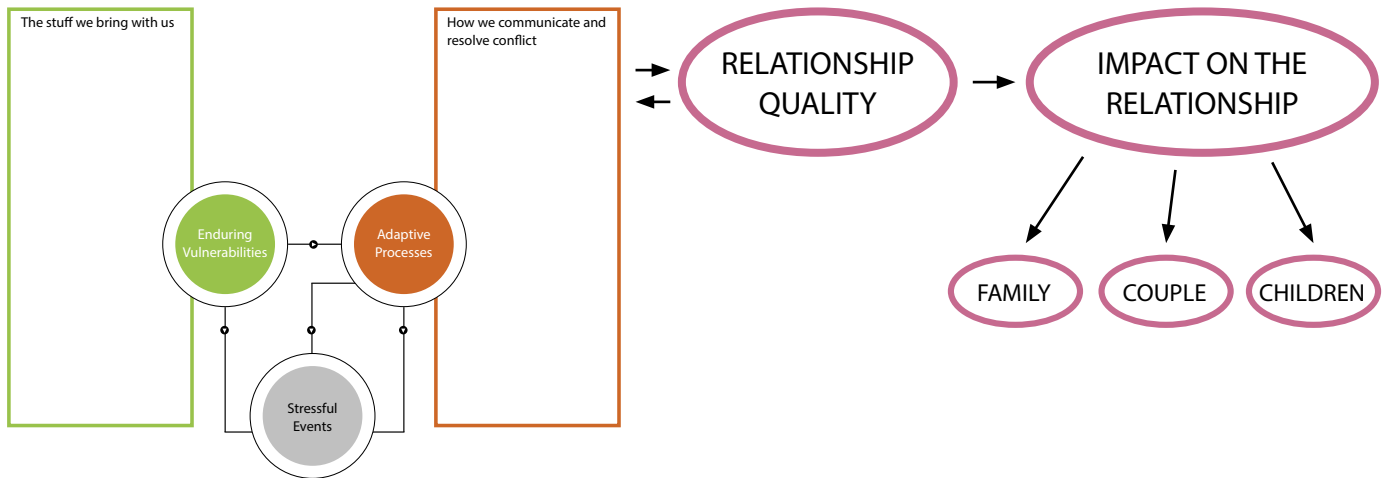


Can you relate to this? Where do you think you are or where did things start to go wrong?

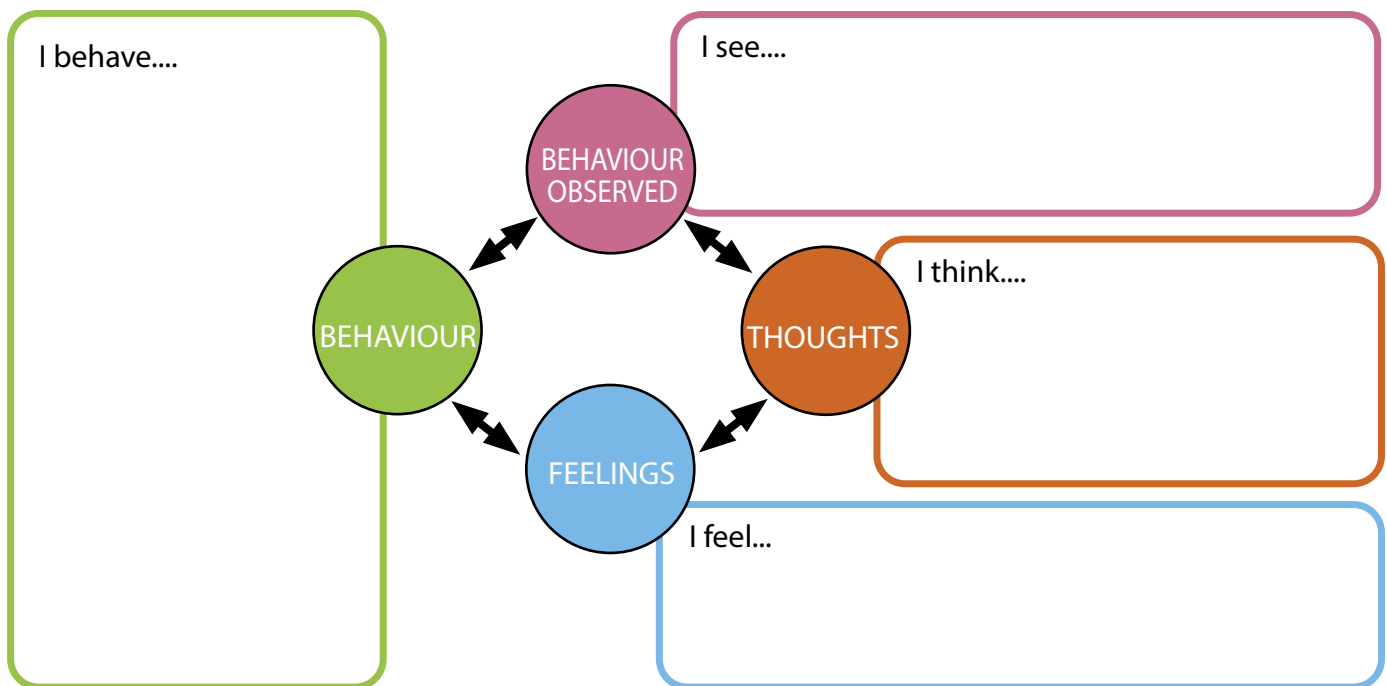
What is going on in the parent relationship and how co-parents manage conflict and communication has a profound impact on outcomes for children

SESSION FOUR

Remember the vulnerability stress model?



Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour:



Can you think of an example of something you have seen, which has made you think, feel and then behave?

We can control our behaviour easier than we can control our thoughts and feelings.

SESSION FOUR

Let's look at constructive conversation.

Remember, all relationships experience conflict, it's about how we resolve it.

Look at the following statements. Can you think of a positive alternative to the destructive approach?

1. Tell my partner what they should be doing

2. Keep repeating my views until my partner realises that I am right

3. Interrupting my partner while they are speaking

4. Using insults to make my point or express my feelings

So what are your daily triggers to conflict?

	What my day looks like	Triggers to conflict	How could I resolve this
Morning			
Afternoon			
Evening			
Night			

In our co-parenting relationship we; (you can use the constructive or destructive cards from your facilitators resources or participants can use their own examples)

ALWAYS...

SOMETIMES...

NEVER...

SESSION FOUR

Having conversations differently around triggers:

How can we start a conversation without blame?

Try changing **you** to **I**.

Try changing the following **you** statements to a more effective **I** statement.

Eg.

1. You never have any time for me.

I would like us to spend more time together

2. You are always late and so unreliable

3. You contradict me all the time when I am talking to the kids

4. You never hear me. You don't understand me

Are there any common **you** statements in your relationship that you could change to **I** statements?
Have a go, practice and see how it feels.

Try having some time to think before communicating after an argument.

Aftermath of a Fight: Am I Ready to Process?

- 1 **Am I ready** to have this conversation? According to Dr. Julie Gottman, “processing” means talking about the specific conflict or incident without getting mired in the emotionality of it again.
- 2 **Am I calm enough** to have this conversation? Am I able to differentiate between my own emotions and the events that occurred?
- 3 **Am I willing to seek to understand** the experiences of this event outside of my own?
- 4 **Am I willing to speak from my experience without trying to persuade?**
- 5 **Am I willing to ATTUNE** to the feelings of others and what the event meant to them?
- 6 **Can I be fully present** for this conversation (am I in a space with limited distractions)?

The Gottman Institute



CHILDREN
& FAMILY
SUPPORT

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