



FOXSTONES TRAINING & LEARNING

Relationships Matter – Understanding the impact of parental conflict

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Why do parental relationships matter?

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- We are not relationship counsellors so we would we need to consider the health of a couple or co-parent relationship?
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- What is parental conflict and what isn't it (i.e DA)
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- The impact of parental conflict on children's outcomes and what children tell us they want
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- Normalising conversations about relationships and relationship challenges
-
- Next steps and services and training available locally

Key Findings: Nationally

- Research has found that the couple relationship has a significant impact on the parenting behaviours of the individual couple members, as well as on the mental health and longer-term outcomes of the child.
- The latest data shows that parental conflict is a significant issue: Where a child lives with both parents in the same household, more than one in ten (12 per cent) of children have at least one parent who reports relationship distress.
- Children living in workless families are 2 times more likely to experience parental conflict than in families where both parents are in work.
- Children in workless families are almost twice as likely to live with at least one parent reporting symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. And they are nearly twice as likely to fail to reach expected levels at all stages of their education.

What the evidence tells us

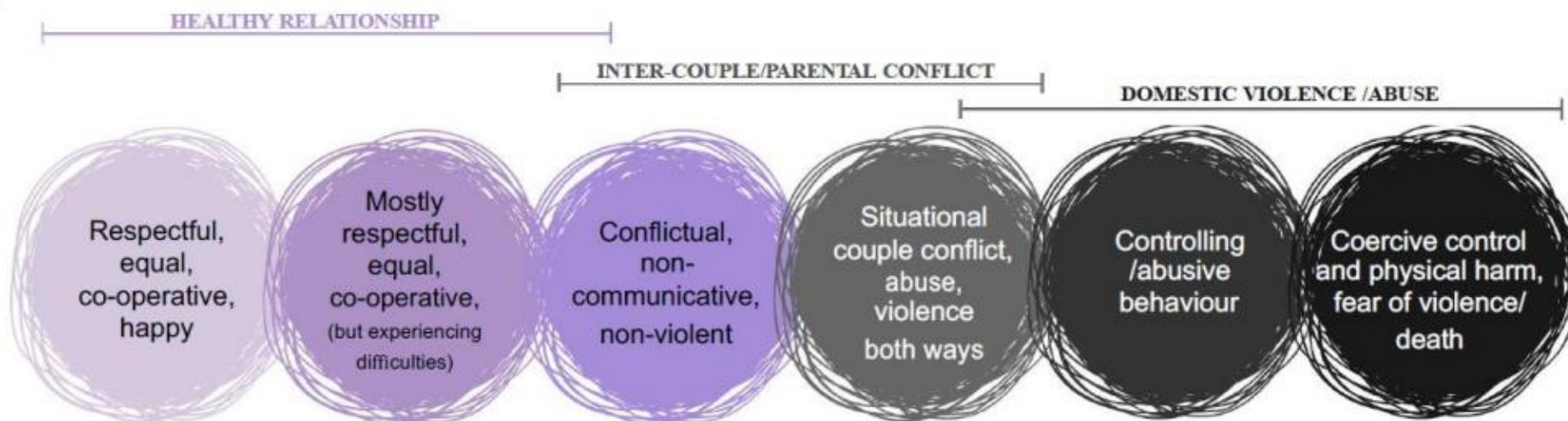
- Parental conflict, which is **frequent, intense and poorly resolved**, (whether parents are together or separated) places children at risk of poor social, emotional and educational outcomes.
- Couples in relationships that are characterised by hostility and distress are typically less sensitive and emotionally responsive to their children's needs.
- Offering evidence-based support with the parent-child relationship alone (i.e parenting) is likely to be ineffective, where there is conflict between parents.
- Parental conflict also impacts on the quality of the relationship between the child and parent.
- **When parents get on well their children do better.**



Relationships on a spectrum

- Research shows that professionals only show an interest in the quality of the relationship between the parents if it is an abusive relationship.
- Professionals may ask *“Is there domestic abuse in this relationship – yes or no?”*
- Instead we want you to ask the question *“How would I describe the relationship between these two people and what does that mean for the child?”*. We may establish the relationship is healthy, equal and cooperative which is still useful information to understand.
- If there are signs of abuse we will treat it as such but if there is no abusive behaviour but it is still distressed and based on poor communication we still want to understand that.

Parental Relationships Spectrum*



SITUATION

All relationships have tricky moments, it's how they're experienced and resolved that matters

Children are experiencing constructive resolution of any arguments, characterised by mutual respect and emotional control

SITUATION

Lack of open and honest communication; difficulties are minimised, not recognised or addressed

Children beginning to be affected by conflict between their parents

SITUATION

Conflict is frequent, intense and poorly resolved; parents emotionally unavailable to their partner and children; lack of consistency in parenting; feeling isolated; toxic atmosphere

Children being adversely affected

SITUATION

Day to day unresolved and unresolvable conflicts; no consistent pattern of 'victim' or 'abuser'

Children being adversely affected; children may show signs of distress and their mental health/behaviour may be affected

SITUATION

Clearer 'victim' and clearer 'abuser'

Children being significantly adversely affected; children's mental health and/or behaviour being affected

SITUATION

Clear 'abuser' and 'victim' who is at significant risk of harm

Children at risk of significant harm; children being traumatised

1 in 5 married and
cohabiting couples are in
relationships classed as
“distressed”.

They argue a lot, regret
being in the relationship
and regularly consider
separating

Who may
be more
vulnerable
to parental
conflict?

New parents

Families on low incomes

Military Families

Parents of children with SEND /
Behaviours that challenge

Younger parents



Arrival of new
babies

During Pregnancy

The quality of the parent's relational experience up to the birth of their new child will have a significant impact upon the relationship they share as new parents and the one they build with their child.

This in turn will be significantly impacted by their own relational history including how they were parented, their support networks, how they build relationships and how they resolve conflicts.

We also know that during pregnancy those affected by an abusive relationship may find that things get worse.



The Post Natal period



One 2016 study found that there was a significant correlation between the level of postpartum depression and relationship quality.

A greater severity of postpartum depression symptoms occurred in women who were less satisfied with their couple relationship.

Women who declared deeper satisfaction with their relationship displayed a greater sense of mental well-being.

More couples split up in the first year of a child's life than any other time. We need frontline practitioners at this particular transition point to actively support new parents to prepare for this potential conflict and to have a number of strategies to cope when they arise.

This will include professionals such as health visitors, midwifery, family hub workers, nursery workers and school staff.

Parents as Carers

“There is specific evidence that couples caring for a child with a disability are at greater risk of marital problems and divorce”

- Under Pressure – The relationships of UK parents who have a child with a Learning Disability (2017) Relate and Mencap
- Growing together, or drifting apart? (2007) Glenn, F for One Plus One
- Relationships and Caring for a Disabled child Contact a Family Survey (2013)
- The Impact of Disability on the Lives of Young Children: Analysis of Growing Up in Scotland Data Scottish Government



So what does
this mean for
the children?





Children may experience

- Arguments
- Name Calling
- Silence
- Atmosphere / Tension
- Lack of routine
- Lack of consistency
- Unpredictability
- Lack of warmth
- Child used as judge / spy/ messenger / mediator / confidant



What the Children Say

“My mum and dad spend so much time hating each other they don’t have a lot of time to love me”.

“They aren’t shouters, they don’t talk at all unless I’m there. I can make them talk, especially if I break a rule like saying I don’t eat that, give me something else please”.

“It’s been like this for years I think, I’m used to it but I’ve got a little brother and he doesn’t understand why our family doesn’t feel like other families”.

“It’s when she picks up her phone and sighs and rolls her eyes, I know it’s my dad. I’d pay a lot of money to stop that, she just forgets that I love my dad too and I’m stuck right in the middle, trying to make it ok for them both”.

“I’ve never had a parent notice what they’re doing. I think what happens is that they blame the other parent. So this parent will say the reason you’re not doing well in school, the reason you’re upset, is because this parent is not doing this, so I’ve never had a parent take responsibility for something they’ve done, it’s always the other parent’s fault.”

How parental conflict
impacts on kids



The impact on children

Evidence reviewed by the Early Intervention Foundation shows that young people who are exposed to conflict between their parents that is **frequent, intense and poorly resolved** are likely to suffer increased levels of:

- anxiety,
- depression
- aggression / behaviour issues
- in addition, they may struggle to achieve at school.

The effect on children & young people

This kind of conflict can have an effect on children of all ages.

Babies as young as six months may exhibit higher physiological symptoms of distress such as elevated heart rate in response to overt, hostile exchanges between their parents when compared to exchanges between non-parental adults.

Infants and children up to the age of five years show signs of distress by crying, acting out, freezing, as well as withdrawing from or attempting to intervene in the actual conflict itself.

Children between the ages of 6 and 17 years show signs of emotional and behavioural distress when exposed to ongoing, acrimonious exchanges between parents (see Harold, Pryor & Reynolds, 2001).

Additional research indicates that exposure to this form of discord can manifest itself in a number of ways including increased anxiety, depression, aggression, hostility, anti-social behaviour and criminality as well as deficits in academic attainment (Harold, Aitken & Shelton, 2007).

Challenging Parental Conflict

Responding to
the situation

We can show a professional interest or curiosity

- Help them reflect that relationship challenges are normal
- Look for opportunities to sensitively ask about the relationship even when that's not the reason you've been asked to attend
- Think about what their conflict might mean for the child
- Encourage them to reflect upon what their relationship looks like, sounds like and feels like to their child
- Try not to make assumptions – every relationship is different
- Don't try to “fix it” – that's not your role. It is your role to encourage them to think about their behaviour
- Don't take sides and make sure both parents can share their views

Best Opening Questions

With everything that's going on for you guys at the moment what's that meaning for you and your partner / child's other parent?

All this stress must put some pressure on your relationship, what's it like for you?

Do you notice you're having more arguments? What do you think that means for the children?

How do you think your child would describe the relationship between you and their other parent? What words might they use? Why would they say that?

Do you get the chance to be a couple, not just parents? How do you take care of your own relationship?

What would be helpful for you?

What support do you need

Free online courses for parents

- One Plus One Digital Resources

Me, you and baby too, Arguing better, Getting it right for children



Me, You and Baby too

Having a baby can be an exciting time, but it can also be a challenging one. This course will help you understand the changes that come with having a baby and how to manage them. It covers topics like sleep, feeding, and bonding.

oneplusone



Arguing better

Relationships can be challenging, but they can also be a source of strength. This course will help you understand the changes that come with having a baby and how to manage them. It covers topics like sleep, feeding, and bonding.

oneplusone



Getting it right for children

Children are amazing, but they can also be challenging. This course will help you understand the changes that come with having a baby and how to manage them. It covers topics like sleep, feeding, and bonding.

oneplusone

One Plus One Digital Packages

How to access the online courses

- [Practitioner guide](#): This contains the course guides which will help you explain the courses to the parents. This site also contains all the downloads you will need such as the Getting on Better cards, course flyers and social media images.
- [Parent resources](#): This is the link you need to give parents so that they can access the three digital programmes covered in the training. Please ensure that parents register their own account. They will need to select **North Yorkshire** from the **Northern England** map.

National Support.

- Click Relationships ([click here](#))

Individuals, couples, families and professionals can use Click to access helpful, evidence-based support from a secure, mobile-friendly space. Its many features include a professional-led listening room, moderated forums, interactive learning, goal-setting, animations, quizzes, personalised recommendations and evaluation. This service is built and maintained by the people at OnePlusOne, an organisation with decades of relationship expertise and technical knowhow.

- Family Lives ([click here](#))

Family Lives offer free and confidential information and advice on all aspects of family life including child development, issues with schools, parenting and relationship support, aggression in the home, bullying, teenage risky behaviour, and mental health concerns of both parents and their children.

- Gingerbread ([click here](#))

Gingerbread are a charity that help single parent families to live secure, happy and fulfilling lives. They give free and confidential support and expert advice on anything from dealing with a breakup to going back to work or sorting out child maintenance, benefit or tax credit issues. If you plan to use the helpline, mornings tend to be busy, so sometimes calling in the afternoon can help.

- See It Differently ([click here](#))

In partnership with relationship charity OnePlusOne, Good Things Foundation launched this digital resource to help parents move towards conflict resolution. The website includes a series of short videos to help parents become more aware of how they argue, how they might change their behaviour and how they might adopt some of the skills demonstrated in the videos.

- Young Minds : A guide for parents on separation ([click here](#))

Every child and young person's experience with the loss of their known family unit will be unique, but it can sometimes cause intense emotional distress. Even if children feel relieved at a family break-up where violence is a significant factor, most children will still feel some loss and grief. There are things you can do to improve the way your child copes with the changes going on around them.



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Bespoke training and learning to the children
and families sector including:

- Safeguarding
- Parental Conflict
- Having difficult conversations
- Working with Dads
- Equality & Diversity
- Healthy Relationships
- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Building Resilient Families
- Team Development Days
- Evaluation Services