



Kirklees
Families Together



Kirklees Relationship Toolkit

Supporting resilient and confident children,
families and communities in Kirklees

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*Relationships affect us all,
they are part of being a human,
they are one of the hardest
things we learn to navigate as
a child and an adult.*

Introduction

This toolkit is designed to help you in your role as a practitioner supporting couples in their relationships whether they are together or separated.

If you work with families across Kirklees, it is likely you will come across couples in conflict. Kirklees vision, strategic priorities and desired outcomes are to help families and children thrive and reach their full potential. This toolkit aims to build on Kirklees strategic priorities and provide you with practical information, theory, research, and advice on how to support couples in conflict. It will also give you knowledge and tools to help you as a practitioner to support couples and young people so that you can have productive conversations and help them resolve difficulties.

The point of this work is not to try to keep couples together but to help couples to understand their conflict and how to repair what is not working between them as an intact couple or parents that are co-parenting. Children are greatly affected by exposure to unhealthy, 'toxic' relationships so working with couples to resolve difficulties can only be a good outcome for children and young people.

Where children do experience the break-up of their parents, if handled well, research shows that the child returns to levels of wellbeing that they experienced before the breakup within 2 years. The information is relevant to all kinds of couples, same sex couples, families with adopted children, families where there is a blend of cultures or religions.

In Kirklees we believe that safeguarding is everyone's business, it is important that everyone is clear about their roles and responsibilities. This is set out in guidance in Working Together and in the statutory frameworks. Working Together states that having a clear framework for making decisions regarding intervention and action and ensuring that these are understood by all professionals is essential if children are to be kept safe.



Principles of practice

It is important that all those working with children and their families work to a common set of principles that underpin good practice. These principles are drawn from the development of our work around early help, working locally together and from our systemic approach to seeing the strengths within families and adopting a restorative style. Our principles include:

- being child centred & hearing the voices of children and young people
- making decisions rooted in evidence
- focused on outcomes
- respecting people always
- listening to family members and giving importance to what they say
- building on strengths as well as identifying difficulty
- communicating clearly regarding concern and what needs to happen to reduce those concerns
- recognising the importance of a child's family and community
- understanding the family's individuality, beliefs, culture, and spirituality
- being honest and transparent
- offering help early, doing all we can to keep intervention at the lowest possible and safe level.

In Kirklees we believe that all children have a right to be healthy, happy, and safe, to be loved, valued, and respected and to have high aspirations for the future. We also recognise that children live in families and families live in communities.

Ensuring that a good local offer is at the heart of the Kirklees approach is important, we know that our partnership, families, and communities need to work together to make this happen.

The toolkit is designed to give you confidence to have conversations with couples about their relationships knowing that it is not your job to be fixing but to be sharing knowledge that gives families the tools they need to make their relationships healthier. The aim is to work in a solution focused way, enabling and empowering couples to understand their conflict and see how to resolve their issues themselves, rather than relying on a practitioner for solutions.

Parental relationships – why do we care about them?

Research tells us that unresolved, destructive conflict has an impact on a child's wellbeing and development. Not all conflict is harmful, but the kind of conflict that is, is the kind that re-occurs because there is never any solution found, including lots of personal insults and a focus on winning. The effects on a child are real and can cause long lasting issues into adulthood. Children exposed to conflict are more likely to experience depression, as well as anxiety, do worse at school, have physical health problems, develop behavioural problems. All of which can affect their relationships later into adulthood affect their psychological wellbeing and economic future.

Why is it important to support families in conflict?

Children's exposure to conflict between their parents, whether the parents are separated or together, can put a child's mental health and long-term life chances at risk. It can have a negative impact on children's:

- social, emotional, and cognitive development
- school engagement and performance
- physical health and wellbeing
- relationships with peers and adults
- mental health
- behavioural difficulties.

The toolkit is designed to give you confidence to have conversations with couples about their relationships. The best way to recognise whether parents are affected by conflict is to ask them and recognise conflict in a relationship is a reality and normal. Make it part of that initial conversation by asking simple questions such as:

- How are things between the two of you?
- How is your partner?
- Are you troubled by any part of your relationship?
- How safe do you feel at home and in your relationship?

The aim of the toolkit is for you to work with families in an open, honest, and transparent way to support them and help them understand the impact that conflict can have on them and their children and young people. This toolkit can support you to help families identify the

things they want / need to change and help them with the support they need. You will need to decide which tools are most useful for you to use and which ones are appropriate for the family you are working with. Tools need to complement the work you are already doing with the family and help you identify with them what needs change, how you can help, measure where they are now and where they want to be.

A note on language

The word 'parental conflict' should only be used in a professional context, and not when talking to families, as this can disengage families. In Kirklees, we prefer to talk with families about their relationship and that 'relationships matter' with a focus on 'healthy parental relationships', or 'healthy relationships between parents'.

Please also refer to this guide from the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) for more information <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/talking-with-families-about-parental-relationships-practical-tips-and-guiding-questions>

Recognising and responding to conflict – how do you recognise this?

Anything can cause conflict both minor and major. There are various signs which might indicate that parents are going through conflict these may include:

- looking sad, withdrawn, or experiencing depression or anxiety
- emotionally unavailable
- arguing or blaming between parents
- changes to their physical appearance or health problems
- developing behavioural problems
- not talking about their partner as much as they used to
- drug and alcohol misuse
- different perspectives between each parent
- they might have recently separated or divorced
- there may be a new baby in the family or other changes such as redundancy
- changes in children's behaviour.

Once someone has told you about problems in the relationship it is important to listen and try to help them think about how they can improve their relationships. It will be necessary to get them to understand the effect their conflict may be having on their child / children.

The tools are available for you to use to start to have those conversations and measure with standardised tools how they can improve their relationship.

There is also a useful website [Relationship Matters](#) which you can show to parents it has lots of interesting information, videos, and links to national and local websites.

The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Relationship Matters Website is a partnership between the 15 Local Authorities (LA) across the region and contains a range of useful Relationship information with a link to each LA's own webpages. In Kirklees, the link from the website you can obtain further information about local Kirklees services and support. To access the Yorkshire and Humber website go to: www.relationshipmatters.org.uk

This website has a range of videos which can be shown to parents. It has sections on:

- signs and symptoms
- parental conflict and the impact on children
- short videos about the effects on children and couples
- stay calm page with information on how to stay calm and techniques to use, how to look after yourself and tips for Dads and separated couples
- work it out page with information
- get some help page has information about children's behaviour, Cafcass links with tips for separated parents, how to handle arguments and disagreements.

As a practitioner you may come across some common issues with couples in conflict that affect them. Most children and families locally may have their needs met by accessing their local universal services however families may have various needs such as in Figure 1 on the following page.

Figure 1



Assessment

When you first visit or contact a family you will be evaluating what is happening with them to identify the relevant factors impacting on them, analysing these and making a judgement about the level of risk / need. As per Working Together guidance and to support you with this, in Kirklees, please make use of the Early Support Assessment <https://www.kirkleessafeguardingchildren.co.uk/safeguarding-2/early-support/>

Kirklees Thrive approach for intervention

Kirklees have aligned decision-making approaches to the Thrive Concept, this is the approach adopted to support children to reach their full potential, and it sits at the heart of approaches to Early Support and to preventative work.

Universal services are accessible to all Kirklees children and families whatever the level of concern. Most children will have all their needs met within their own family and by working with one or more universal services like their school or health centre.

Some children and their families require, at times, a co-ordinated multi-agency approach, and an Early Support Plan alongside a Team Around the Family (TAF) to help identify and address emerging worries, build on existing strengths, and access Early Support interventions that can work with the family to help them.

A much smaller number of children and families will need statutory involvement with a social worker leading to a Child in Need Plan or a Child Protection Plan because there are more immediate concerns for the welfare of the child or because it has not been possible to improve the quality of life for the child by working alongside the family with an Early Support plan.

In Kirklees, the Thrive approach is used to describe the level of help a family and children might need. Getting these decisions right can only be achieved by professionals and families working together, with honest communication and challenge and through evidence and evaluation. See figure 2 on page 7

Figure 2



The five needs-based groups are distinct in terms of the:

- needs and/or choices of the individuals within each group
- skill mix of professionals required to meet these needs
- resources required to meet the needs and/or choices of people
- distinction between advice/support and evidence-based 'interventions'.

Getting help, support and advice

Getting advice – universal services

What the professionals say: Most children will be kept safe from harm and be able to reach their full potential with support from Kirklees universal services.

What we mean: Schools, nurseries, childminders, children's centres, youth projects, local police, midwifery services, family GP, health visitors, job centre, housing officer, mentors, voluntary sector, Community Hubs.

Getting help – early support

What the professionals say: Some children and families will need some additional help for a while, if this can be provided as early as possible, we can work together to stop problems getting worse.

What we mean: Family support worker, a lead professional co-ordinating support

Getting more help – targeted/specialist support services/children in need

What the professionals say: For some children, a holistic assessment of need by a social worker is needed to decide what ongoing multi-agency services and support are needed to keep them safe and to promote their wellbeing.

What we mean: Children in Need plan, targeted support, complex additional needs practical help, specialist health support, section 17 of the Children Act

Getting risk support – safeguarding:

What the professionals say: When children are thought to be at risk of significant harm, a multi-agency enquiry led by a social worker is required to assess the risk and to ensure children are protected.

What we mean: Section 47 enquiries, A child protection conference, core group meetings, statutory intervention, legal action.

Conversation Opportunities

How we describe the level of help a family and children might need based on concerns is often the area for disagreement between professionals and between families. Conversation opportunities are the phone calls and meetings that take place between children and their families and between professionals across services.

In Kirklees if you as a professional are concerned that something more is needed to improve the outcomes or quality of life for a child professionals need to talk to each other, this encourages sharing of information, creates effective challenge, and enables a climate of effective safeguarding across agencies. We see these conversations as 'vantage points' to take stock of emerging issues, to effectively assess risk, and to share strengths and protective factor information.

Conversations need to be constructive and sharing concerns may be a starting point for a conversation but reviewing the support and services available to the child or young person must be made in the context of delivering the best outcomes. Many conversations will start with the child and their family because an anxiety or uncertainty has arisen regarding the welfare of a child. The value of knowledge and trust that a professional already working with a family has, must not be underestimated. Working with a child and their family to address worries as they arise, rather than waiting for concern to escalate is appropriate for most children and can ensure much needed consistency for a family.

Providing encouragement, building on strengths, and sharing information with or about other services that might help are all key ingredients to promoting children's wellbeing. We must also recognise that where concerns regarding children exist there is often a story of family life, and there may be involvement from various agencies with family members. Different professionals will each have important knowledge and a crucial role to play in supporting a family. This highlights why conversations are important and why drawing professionals and families together in a coordinated way is helpful to everyone.



A strong and simple focus for conversations about needs and risk focuses on some simple questions.

- What are we worried about?
- What is working well?
- What needs to happen?

The last question provides an opportunity for the multi-agency network to share and explore differing views around need and risk and to resolve disagreements about how best to offer support to reduce levels of concern. This approach is grounded in collaboration and partnership; promotes shared responsibility and flexibility; recognises the unique needs of each individual and family; and is intended to reduce agency bias- giving us a clear framework to facilitate dialogue and map need and risk effectively. Once the assessment is completed and you have gathered all the information and discussed this with the family you may need to measure progress and seek consent from the family. There are a variety of tools which can help with this process to inform your TAF plan and measure progress.

Using Tools

Once you have completed your Early Support Assessment, tools can be used to decide base line data (where families are now) and have a conversation about where they would like to be (their goals). There are five steps necessary when you use any tool.

When using tools, you need to have the following in mind and agree with the family.

- **Defined and agreed goals** (an objective or target someone is trying to achieve)
- **Step 1** = Plot the base line scorings / data in each area you are measuring (where the child, young person, family are now)
- **Step 2** = Discussions about exit planning and what good looks like for the family
- **Step 3** = Agree a support plan of a kind that will work for the family.
- **Step 4** = Use a tool to measure progress from Step 1 to Step 2
- **Step 5** = Set within a timeframe so that drift does not take place.
- May need a review date (this can be used to track change and progress)
- The tool you choose can be used to demonstrate the family's progress and outcomes achieved.

For more information about outcomes frameworks and validated measurement tools for parental conflict, please see the EIF guide here <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/reducing-parental-conflict-outcomes-framework>

The next three sections of this toolkit include some tools to complement your Early Support Assessment and start to help couples understand how the conflict in their relationship is impacting on them and their children and young people. These will help you have conversations about the conflict and how to work with them to resolve and improve relationships. The tools can track progress and help them understand what needs to change.

If you're supporting parents with needs, such as:

- parents with poor mental health
- parents from minority ethnic backgrounds
- parents from LGBTQIA+ community

- parents of children with special needs and/or disabilities
- parents who are separating/are separated

then please refer to this guidance from the EIF which has a section which provides a set of questions for you to ask about your services and your own practice, to help increase the chances that you are providing support in a way that works well for as many families and parents as possible:

<https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/talking-with-families-about-parental-relationships-practical-tips-and-guiding-questions>

Relationship support tools

Stage 1: Identifying parental conflict

1. [Relationship scales](#)
2. [Stages of relationships](#)
3. [Relationship breakdown](#)
4. [Intimate relationship continuum](#)
5. [Index of family functioning](#)
6. [Me and my family quiz](#)

Stage 2: Exploring the causes of conflict

7. [Vulnerability stress adaptation model](#)
8. [Thoughts, feelings, behaviours](#)
9. [Our typical day](#)
10. [How am I treated?](#)
11. [Anger iceberg](#)
12. [Our relationship](#)
13. [Parent problem checklist](#)
14. [Healthy relationship questionnaire](#)

Stage 3: Supporting constructive conflict communication

15. [Always, sometimes, never](#)
16. [Constructive/destructive communication](#)
17. [Role cards](#)
18. [You and I statements](#)
19. [Aftermath of a fight](#)

Relationship support tools – Stage 1: Identifying parental conflict

Tools for working with parents.

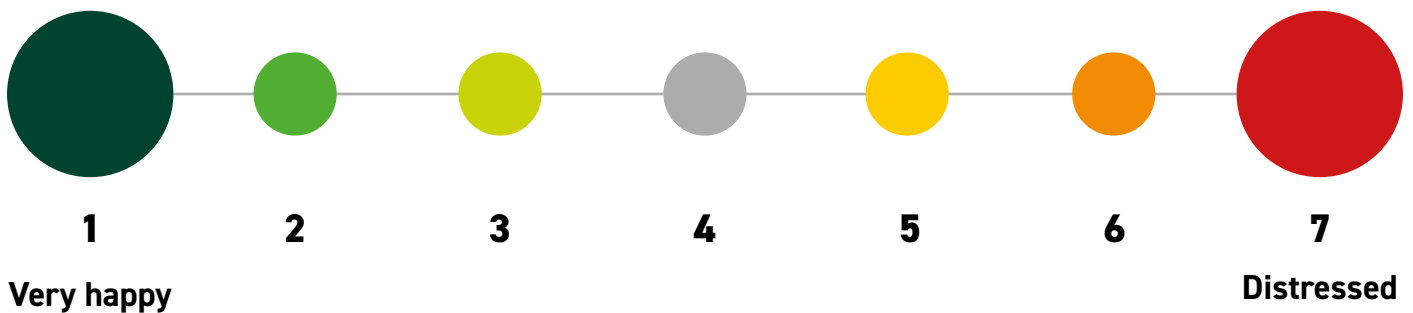
Signposting parents

<https://relationshipmatters.org.uk/>

<https://www.forbabysake.org.uk/>

Tool 1: Relationship scales

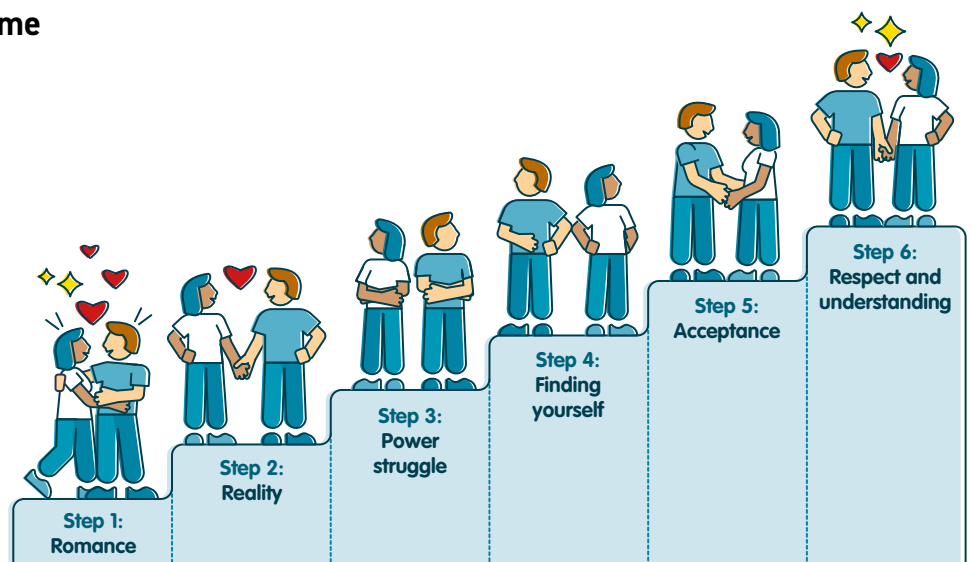
How are we doing?



Tool 2: Stages of relationships

Relationships develop over time

1. Romance
2. Reality
3. Power struggle
4. Finding yourself
5. Acceptance
6. Respect and understanding



When building a relationship there are stages you will go through so as practitioners it is useful to speak with parents / carers about which stage they see themselves in, why they are in that stage and which stage they would like to be in now and what support they need to go to that stage. The stages are as follows:

Step 1: Romance

This is the addictive beginning where you are excited by the newness and potential of what exciting times may lie ahead. You are making a big effort to show the best of yourself and keep the not so desirable bits of yourself hidden!

Step 2: Reality

The reality is you cannot keep that up. No one is perfect and every relationship requires some compromise, so in the end you either accept the reality of the other person, imperfections on your part and theirs, or you leave that relationship. (it's very common for young people to leave when they realise the imperfections and continue their search for that mythical perfect person!)

Step 3: Power struggle

At this point in a relationship, you are learning to compromise and negotiate the small things, the everyday issues that eventually add up to whether you feel happy sharing your life with this person. For example:

- Are you happy to go to their mums every Christmas for lunch?
- Do you sleep on your side or on your back?
- Which do you prefer dogs or cats, Indian or Chinese?

It is at this point some couples realise they are not a good fit. They are not able to find a way to both feel happy with the compromises required.

Step 4: Finding yourself

If you have managed to get through the power struggle stage and build on some solid foundations, this stage challenges you to hold on to your identity whilst being part of a couple. Healthy relationships tend to be healthy because each person has retained their identity as an individual, they have not morphed into one just because they are a couple. Having a clear idea of the identity of who you are as a couple helps you to feel confident to also thrive as individuals who may have different hobbies that they feel free to engage in as well as shared interests. If one partner finds this hard to do, it can lead to the breakdown of the relationship.

Step 5: Accepting

Every relationship has its own quirks and what is happy bliss for one couple certainly is not for another, you create your own relationship reality. If you have accepted one another for all the good and not so good bits you are able to move on to....

Step 6: Love, respect and understanding

At this point you have worked out how to meet each other's needs, how to love one another in the way that you need to feel safe, secure and thrive. Life, with its stressful events (e.g., unemployment, housing issues, health issues) upsets the balance and we can quickly be transported back to Power struggle/Finding yourself for example as a result of having to re-adjust to a new situation/life transition. That is totally normal. You build strength and resilience into your relationship by working through these relationship stages multiple times. So, what we perceive to be bad at the time can turn out to be good for your relationship in the long term.

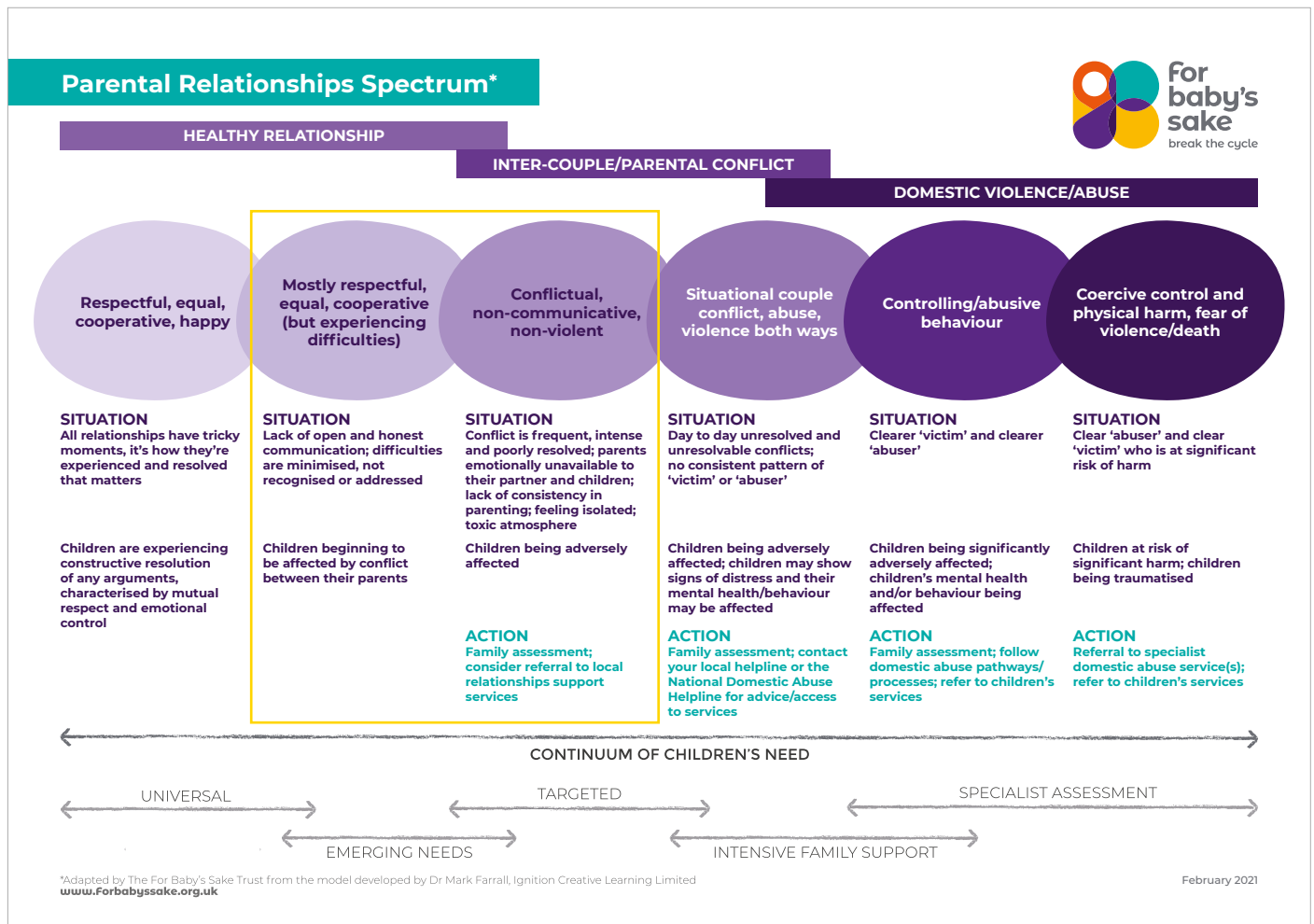
Remember

Long term relationships tend to go through lots of stages and changes, its different for everyone and your journey will be affected by the changes in your life. You may move up and down through the stages. Big changes like loosing a job, or having a baby can cause arguments which may set you back, and you may not always be at the same stage as your partner.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself

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

Tool 4: Intimate relationship continuum



Source: For Babys Sake Trust. To download the pdf go to <https://www.forbabysake.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Parental-Relationships-spectrum-updated-generic-version-21-feb.pdf>

The above tool shows the possible places people could find themselves in. Conflict and abuse are not the same thing. Working with parental conflict you will be focusing on areas (1-3) below and this tool focuses on how to identify if the conflict is constructive or destructive and help identify if conflict is escalating.

Where you are working with parents whose relationship is not healthy, use motivational interviewing and active listening techniques to explore whether they may be experiencing relationships conflict or domestic abuse. Please also make use of the Early Help Assessment to better understand the whole family situation.

Consider asking some or all the questions below to help you establish where on the spectrum the relationship may sit.

- What aspects of your relationship trouble you?
- What would you change if you had the opportunity?
- How understanding is your partner?

- How safe do you feel at home and in your relationship?
- How confident do you feel about making your own decisions?
- How comfortable are you in expressing your own opinions, views and ideas?
- How much choice do you have about your family life?
- Where is the joy in your life?
- What would your children say about life at home?
- What changes, if any, have you noticed about your children's behaviours?
- What prevents you asking for support?

Conflict and Domestic Abuse

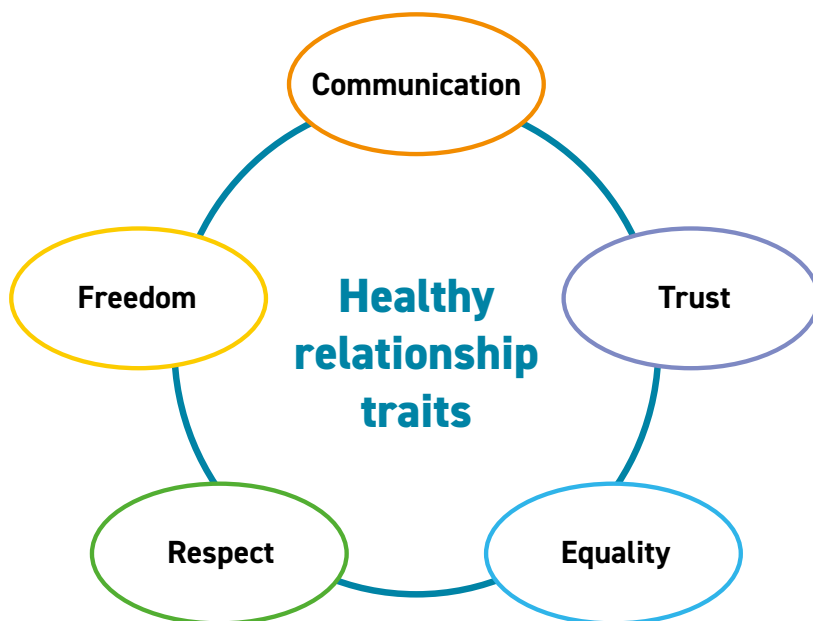
Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It can seriously harm children and young people and witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse. It is important to remember domestic abuse:

- can happen inside and outside the home
- can happen over the phone, on the internet and on social networking sites
- can happen in any relationship and can continue even after the relationship has ended
- that both men and women can be abused or abusers
- involve kicking, hitting, punching, or cutting
- can include rape (including in a relationship)
- can be controlling someone's finances by withholding money or stopping someone earning
- can be controlling behaviour, like telling someone where they can go and what they can wear
- include not letting someone leave the house
- include reading emails, text messages or letters
- include threatening to kill someone or harm them
- include threatening behaviour to another family member or pet.

If a family is experiencing domestic violence/abuse and in immediate danger practitioners should dial 999 and follow your safeguarding procedures. Further support on violence/abuse in Kirklees is available on Pennine Domestic Abuse Partnership 24 hour helpline on 0800 052 7222 or online at <https://pdap.co.uk/>

Healthy relationships

The traits of a healthy relationship are communication, trust, equality, respect and freedom.



The most effective way to recognise whether parents are going through conflict is simply to ask them. Make it part of your initial conversation when you visit or speak to parents/carers.

Tool 5: Index of family functioning

For each question below, would you say this describes your family, either very well, well, partly, not well, or not at all?

- In my family we talk to each other about things which matter to us:
- People often don't tell each other the truth in my family:
- Each of us gets listened to in our family:
- It feels risky to disagree in our family:
- We find it hard to deal with everyday problems:
- We trust each other:
- It feels miserable in our family:
- When people in my family get angry they ignore each other on purpose:
- We seem to go from one crisis to another in my family:
- When one of us is upset they get looked after within the family:
- Things always seem to go wrong for my family:
- People in the family are nasty to each other:
- People in my family interfere too much in each other's lives:
- In my family we blame each other when things go wrong:
- We are good at finding new ways to deal with things that are difficult:

Relationship support tools – Stage 1: Identifying parental conflict

Tools for working with children and young people.

Tool 6: Me and my family quiz

In every family there are times when family members don't get along. Below are some things that children or young people sometimes think or feel when their family members have arguments or disagreements.

We would like you to tell us what you think or feel when your family members argue or disagree. There are no right or wrong answers.

This quiz helps us to support your family, you should just pick the answer which is best for you.

Questions

• My family members hardly ever argue or disagree:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• I often see my family members arguing or disagreeing:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• They may not think I know it, but my family members argue or disagree a lot:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• My family members get really angry when they argue or disagree:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• When my family members argue or disagree, they shout a lot:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• When my family members argue they say mean things to each other:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• Even after my family members stop arguing or disagreeing, they stay angry at each other:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• When my family members argue or disagree, they usually make up right away:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• My family members usually argue or disagree because of things I do:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• My family members often argue or disagree because of my behaviour:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• When family members argue they want me to take their side:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• When my family members argue or disagree, I worry what they'll do next:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• When my family members argue or disagree, I worry about my family's future:	Yes	No	Sometimes
• When my family members argue or disagree, I'm afraid something bad will happen:	Yes	No	Sometimes

- **When my family members argue or disagree, I feel** (please tick all that you feel):
Scared Unsafe I can't stop thinking about their problems
- **When my family members argue or disagree, I** (please tick all that you feel):
Feel sorry for one or both Try to comfort one or both Try to be really quiet
Don't know what to do
- **When my family members argue or disagree, I feel** (please tick all that you feel):
Caught in the middle Like they are upset with me Like it's my fault

Further information

Parenting from a distance

<https://www.centacarecq.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Me-and-My-Kids-Parenting-From-A-Distance.pdf>

Teenage relationship abuse toolkit

Expect respect – a toolkit for addressing teenage relationship abuse in key stages 3,4 And 5 (Digital Education Resource Archive (DERA)): <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/2012/>

Impact of Parental Conflict Tool

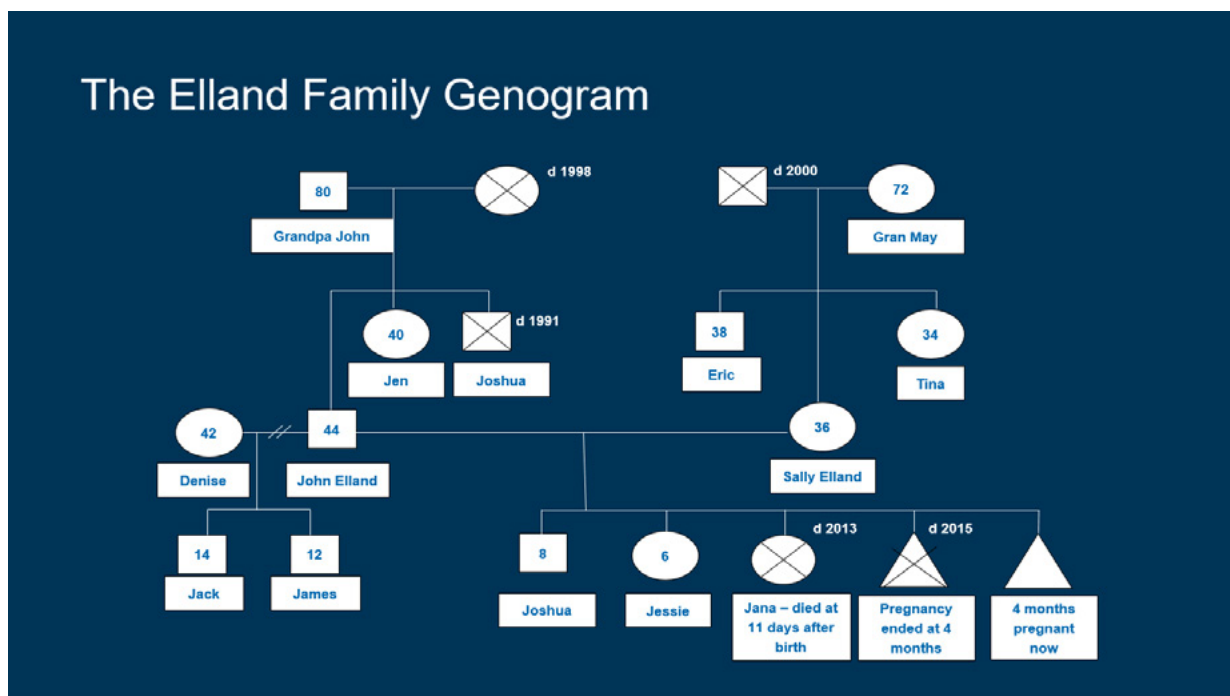
Free Social Work Tools and Resources: <http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/impact-of-parental-conflict-tool/>

Using genograms

Genograms are typically used to understand the connections that a child has to other family members, but a genogram can also be used to understand whether family relationships are a source of strength and support or an area of conflict.

Online resource for using genograms in practice: https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/4962/cf_pt_using-genograms-in-practice_final.pdf

Example genogram



Relationship support tools – Stage 2: Exploring the causes of conflict

Tool 7: The vulnerability stress adaptation model

Enduring vulnerabilities

These are personal traits and past experiences that each person brings to the relationship which are often related to attachment patterns. They are not weaknesses. They are formed by:

- How we were raised. The culture and community we have lived in. Questions we can ask co-parents include the following which make up our 'VSA model questionnaire for parents'. See the online resources at <https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/parentalconflict/10-further-support>
 - » Who raised you?
 - » Were your parents together?
 - » Do you have a faith that directs your values and how you live?
 - » What strengths do you take from your upbringing?
 - » Did your upbringing make you particularly vulnerable or sensitive in any way?
- Our genetic make-up, our personality
 - » Do you see similarities between you and someone else in your family?
 - » Are you generally optimistic or pessimistic?
 - » Do you have a short fuse or lots of patience?
 - » Do you like routine or are you more spontaneous? Relaxed or always busy?
- Our past relationships, romantic and family: the culture of relationships as we see it.
 - » Did your upbringing or past friendships or relationships give you particular strengths or vulnerabilities/sensitivities?
- How we have dealt with stresses in the past.
 - » What have you done in the past?
 - » Who has supported you?
 - » Are there skills you can use now?

Our vulnerabilities are emotional 'lenses' which 'colour' how we see future experiences. They can include negative feelings like:

- Being taken for granted, feeling unappreciated
- Being unheard or disrespected
- Feeling unloved
- Feeling that the other person is not committed to the relationship
- Feeling blamed
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling jealous

And positive feelings (strengths) like:

- Feeling able to cope
- Feeling heard and valued
- Feeling loved
- Seeing the other person's perspective

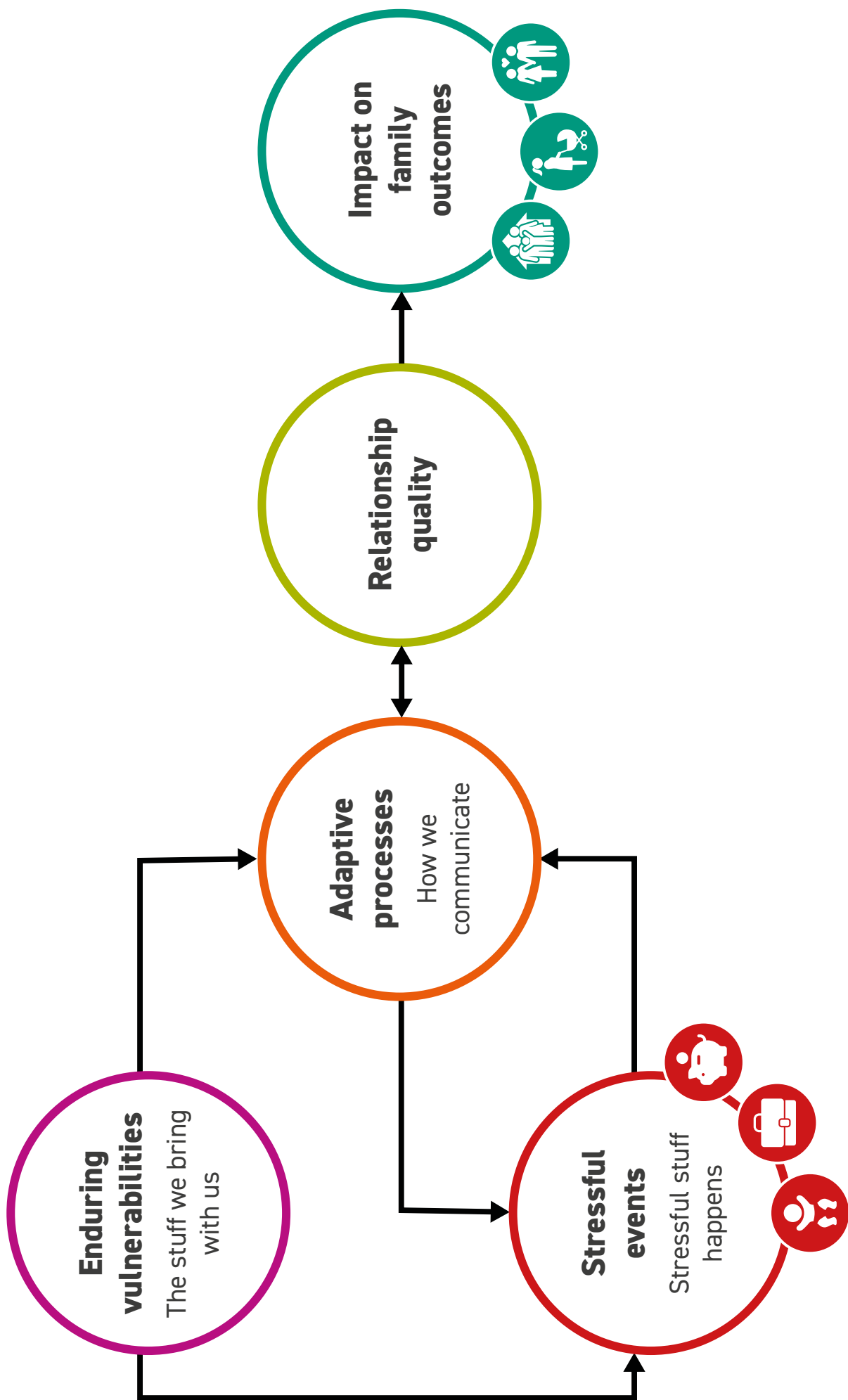
Consider how parents from black and minority ethnic communities may have experienced stereotyping and discrimination intergenerationally and how this might affect their vulnerabilities. Or how parents with alcohol or drug dependency may have felt stigmatised.

- Have they felt unfairly judged or misunderstood?
- Have they been made to feel inferior?
- Have these experiences made them feel more sensitive to language or behaviour from the co-parent which creates the same feelings?
- Or have they developed strengths to protect themselves?

For same- sex couples, have their experiences of coming out to their parents and feeling rejected, made them sensitive to signs of rejection or prejudice? For parents with mental health issues, are they more likely to feel unheard, stigmatised or blamed?

In examining our level of resilience and our enduring vulnerabilities, we can ask parents:

- 'What do you bring with you?'



Stressful events

The life events they encounter, such as having a baby, illness and unemployment, increase co-parents' need for support at the same time as reducing their capacity to provide it.

Consider the stresses associated with becoming first time parents, single parents, parents with a disability or the parents of a child with a disability. Consider how stress might impact parents with mental health issues or the coping mechanisms they have previously used. Have alcohol or drugs featured for parents in stressful situations in the past?

Adaptive processes

How the couple communicate, behave and cope during difficult times. How they resolve conflicts.

Practitioners could use Tool 8 questions when working with parents. This exercise takes time and trust for people to self-reflect. Parents should be reassured that this is not about an overnight 'fix' but a way to begin to understand their own and their co-parent's feelings behind their words and actions and thus improve distressing and harmful conflict.

The vulnerability stress adaptation model

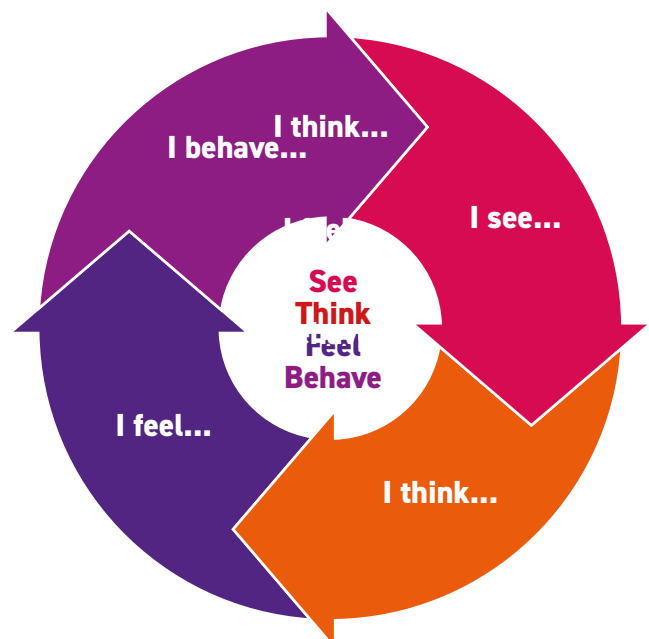


Thoughts, feelings, behaviours

Practitioners can help parents/carers to understand the impact of stressful life events and their history and the methods they use to adapt in these circumstances. Everyone is different and their capability to deal with stressful events can vary considerably and, in some situations, this can affect their relationships and can impact on children and young people. So, ask couples to explain their past and what they bring to the relationship both positive and negative and how to turn the negatives into positives

- **The stuff we bring with us** – these are personal traits and past experiences that each person brings to the relationship (some people may not readily disclose this information or be afraid too)
- **Stressful stuff happens** – these can be things like having a child, becoming unemployed, illness or bereavement, poverty, environment issues, community issues, poor housing, drug and alcohol misuse.
- **How we communicate** – how the parents communicate, behave and cope during stressful events will influence the whole family.
- A co-parenting couple with relatively poor coping and communication skills may remain happy in the relationship if they do not have to cope with many other stressful events.

Thoughts, feelings and behaviour cycle

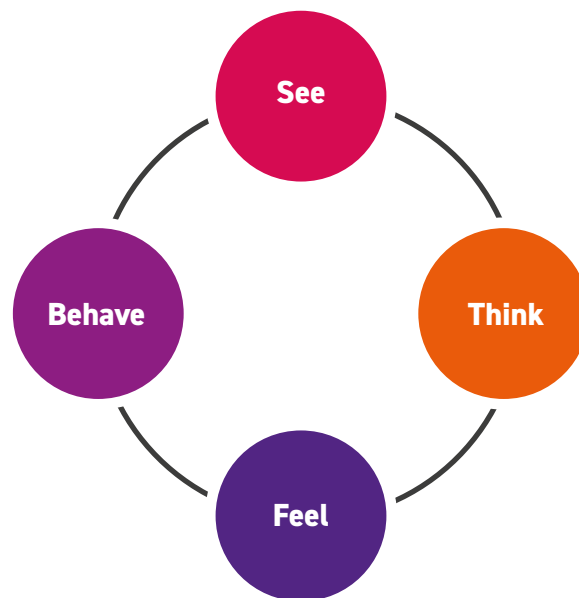


Thoughts, feelings and behaviour exercise

I see:

I behave:

I think:



I feel:

Tool 8: Typical day

Think about your typical day looks like and the triggers to conflict in the morning, afternoon, evening and night.

Our typical day

Time of day	What my day looks like	Triggers to conflict
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		
Night		

Tool 9: How am I treated?

Practitioners can use this to work with members of the family. Below is a list of ways people may treat each other. Write the two most important ways you want to be treated by someone you care about. List additional actions that are important to you or you can use other ideas or words not on the list.

Once the exercise has been completed use the comments to discuss how they can have more respect for each other and what support they need to make this happen.

Ways people might treat each other

- Respected
- Supported
- Ignored
- Trusted
- Fairly
- Afraid
- Impressed
- Amused or made to laugh
- Encouraged
- Listened to
- Treated equally
- Laughed at
- Believed
- Encouraged
- Controlled
- Loved
- Spoiled
- Committed to
- Abused
- Needed
- Care for
- Challenged
- Cheated on
- Treated well
- Treated honestly
- Nasty names called at me
- Cared about

How I want to be treated

The first most important way I want to be treated is:

The second most important way I want to be treated is:

Other actions that are important to me:



Tool 10: Anger iceberg

Visible

- above the water

Anger

Invisible

- below the water

Embarrassed

Regret

Frustration

Scared

Disappointed

Emptiness

Grief

Lonely

Guilt

Shamed

Annoyed

Fear

Overwhelmed

Helpless

Tricked

Trapped

Unsure

Rejected

Nervous

Depressed

Hurt

Unwell

Disgusted

Sad

Helpless

Sorry

Insecure

Inadequacy

About the anger iceberg

Icebergs are large pieces of ice found floating in the open ocean. What you can see from the surface can be misleading as most of the iceberg is hidden below the water. Couples may feel angry and upset and not really communicate about what is really going on in their world. As a practitioner it can be helpful to encourage someone to reflect on what is behind their behaviour. Often couples who do not get on are angry. Anger

may present itself in a basic way but there are often complex feelings that lie behind angry behaviour.

You can use this diagram to start a conversation about what might be lying beneath observed/felt anger. The more you understand about where someone's anger is coming from the more likely you are to be able to access some empathy for their position.

Ask the couple to make a list about what is under their iceberg, how it affects them as a family, and what they want to change.

Words to describe for me what is above the water:

Words to describe for me what is below the water:

How does anger affect you as a family?

What do I/we want to change?

Tool 11: Our relationship

These are some useful questions that are worth trying to remember when you are seeing a family:

- If you felt like your relationship was in a better place, what would be different?
- What would you both need to do differently to get there?
- What might get in the way of you making these changes?
- How could you help each other to overcome these barriers?
- How is your situation affecting the children?
- When you felt OK what was happening then that is not happening now?
- What could you do for each other that might make you feel more connected?
- What support do you need from me?

Once you have identified an area that the couples want to work with it will be useful to write up an action plan with some agreed goals to achieve, timeframes and what support they need to reach their goals.

Tool 12: 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.

- A. Please check either 'yes' or 'no' to indicate whether each issue has been a problem for you and your partner over the last 4 weeks
- B. To what extent has this issue been a problem for you and your partner over the last 4 weeks – the score is on a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 is 'not at all' and 7 is 'very much', choose the number applicable to you from the drop-down menu (or write in the box if completing manually).

• Disagreements about rules for children (e.g., bedtime, play areas):	Yes	No
• Disagreements about type of discipline (e.g., smacking children):	Yes	No
• Disagreements about who should discipline children:	Yes	No
• Fighting in front of children:	Yes	No
• Inconsistency between parents:	Yes	No
• Children preventing parents being alone:	Yes	No
• Disagreements about sharing childcare workloads:	Yes	No
• Cannot resolve arguments about childcare:	Yes	No
• Discussions about childcare turning into arguments:	Yes	No
• Parents undermining each other (not backing each other up):	Yes	No
• Parents favouring one child over another:	Yes	No
• Lack of discussion between parents about childcare:	Yes	No
• Lack of discussions about anything:	Yes	No
• One parent is 'soft', one parent is 'tough' with children:	Yes	No
• Children behave worse with one parent than another:	Yes	No
• Disagreements about what is naughty behaviour:	Yes	No

Tool 13: Healthy relationships 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 upon 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

- My partner makes me feel appreciated: Your score:
Never/almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Frequently (3)
- My partner and I get on each other's nerves: Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)
- When we disagree, we find a solution that satisfied us both: Your score:
Never/almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Frequently (3)
- I can get angry and frustrated with my partner: Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)
- My partner respects my opinions and feelings: Your score:
Never/almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Frequently (3)
- Little arguments can escalate into accusations and criticisms: Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)
- I think about what my life would be like if my partner and I weren't together: Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)
- We laugh and have fun together: Your score:
Never/almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Frequently (3)
- I don't feel my partner listens to me when we argue: Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)
- How often in a typical week do you argue with your partner in your children's presence? Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)

Your relationship with your partner

- My partner makes me feel like I am a good parent: Your score:
Never/almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Frequently (3)
- I feel like my share of the parenting work is more than my partner: Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)
- We are growing and maturing through our experiences as parents: Your score:
Never/almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Frequently (3)
- My partner and I have different ideas about how to raise our child: Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)
- My relationship with my partner is stronger now than before we had a child: Your score:
Never/almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Frequently (3)
- The stress of parenting has caused my partner and I to grow apart: Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)

- We have fun with our children together: Your score:
Never/almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Frequently (3)
- When I am at my wits end as a parent, my partner doesn't give me the extra support I feel I need: Your score:
Never/almost never (3), Once in a while (2), Frequently (1)
- My partner appreciates how hard I work at being a good parent: Your score:
Never/almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Frequently (3)

Add up your total score..... **Your total score:**

If you scored 48-60:

Your relationship with your partner seems to be in good shape and you are working well together to parent your child / children.

If you scored 34-47:

Whilst your relationship with your partner may be good, there could be a few areas you may want to work on.

If you scored 20-33:

You may want to stop and think about where the two of you are headed. Your score indicates the presence of pattern that could harm your relationship.

What next?

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

Consider where your scores are in the 'middle', could small changes in these areas improve things?

Where have you scored 'low'. These are the areas that will be having the biggest impact upon your relationship.

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

To view online, visit <https://www.livewellcampaign.co.uk/app/uploads/2018/10/Healthy-Relationships-Questionnaire.pdf>

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

Relationship support tools – Stage 3: Supporting constructive conflict communication

Tool 14: Always, sometimes, never activity

Practitioners to ask the couple to discuss within their relationship what activities and behaviours they always, sometimes, and never do and list them in the boxes. Encourage the couple to think about their individual behaviour and write/comments about 'what is working well', 'what could you do differently', 'what might need to change to meet each other's needs', 'what needs to happen and when', and 'what support will you need'.

In our relationship we...

Always:

Sometimes:

Never:

Tool 15: Constructive/destructive communication

Ask the couple to consider whether the following statements are constructive or destructive forms of communication.

Electronic version

• Asking each other's point of view:	Constructive	Destructive
• Interrupting to get your point of view across:	Constructive	Destructive
• Recognising that while you may not agree, your partner has a valid point:	Constructive	Destructive
• Listening to the other point of view without interrupting:	Constructive	Destructive
• Withdrawing from the conversation as it's not going your way:	Constructive	Destructive
• Using examples from the past to prove you're right:	Constructive	Destructive
• Considering issues from somebody else's point of view:	Constructive	Destructive
• Pointing out your partner's flaws when they support your argument:	Constructive	Destructive
• Raising your voice to make sure you get your point of view across:	Constructive	Destructive
• Allow each other the opportunity to express your views:	Constructive	Destructive
• Choosing the right time:	Constructive	Destructive
• Explaining how the situation is making you feel:	Constructive	Destructive
• Tell your partner what they should do:	Constructive	Destructive
• Using insults to make your point and share your feelings:	Constructive	Destructive
• Offering possible solutions to problems but be willing to compromise and listen to other suggestions:	Constructive	Destructive
• Having a solution in mind to the problem and don't change your mind:	Constructive	Destructive
• Check out what you agree about:	Constructive	Destructive
• Accepting that your might disagree:	Constructive	Destructive
• Show you understand the other person's point of view:	Constructive	Destructive
• Ending an argument both feeling that you have been heard:	Constructive	Destructive
• Explaining why you feel the way you do:	Constructive	Destructive
• Ending an argument upset and angry:	Constructive	Destructive
• Come up with lots of possible solutions:	Constructive	Destructive

Asking each other's point of view

Interrupting to get your point of view across

Recognising that while you may not agree, your partner has a valid point

Listening to the other point of view without interrupting

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

Using examples from the past to prove you're right

Considering issues from somebody else's point of view

Pointing out your partner's flaws when they support your argument

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

Allow each other the opportunity to express your views

Choosing the right time

Explaining how the situation is making you feel

Tell your partner what they should do

Using insults to make your point and share your feelings

Offering possible solutions to problems but be willing to compromise and listen to other suggestions

Having a solution in mind to the problem and don't change your mind

Check out what you agree about

Accepting that your might disagree

Show you understand the other person's point of view

Ending an argument both feeling that you have been heard

Explaining why you feel the way you do

Ending an argument upset and angry

Come up with lots of possible solutions

Tool 16: Role cards

Review the descriptions on these cards and give examples of situations you and your partner might get into and consider the role you are asking your children to take on.

The Mediator

When your child feels they have to be the mediator between parents, keeping everyone happy and solving problems.

The Judge

When you criticise your partner or ex and expect your child to decide who is right and wrong.

The Confidant

When you share too much information with your child and expect them to fill the gap due to lack of intimate communication with your partner or ex.

The Spy

When you ask your child questions about your partner or ex and rely on them to find out what is going on.

The Messenger

When you ask your child to take information between you and your partner about money, contact, etc..

Tool 17: You and I statements

Print and cut out these card, use them to help parents describe how they are feeling in a constructive way, using 'I' statements, rather than 'you' statements, to prevent conflict.

You statements

You care more about work than your own family	You never pay me any attention, you just don't find me attractive	You're always on the phone texting/ on Facebook. You care more about someone else's opinion than mine	You leave me to do all the tough parenting, so they like you more than me
You don't care about me and ignore me, you never call or text me when you're out	You're always late and you are so unreliable	You contradict all the time when speaking to the kids	You don't help out enough, you just expect me to clean up after you
You're not interested in anything I do anymore	You're more interested in what's going on in Eastenders than our lives		

I statements

Today I enjoyed...	I need help with...	I relax when...	I have support from...
I get irritated by...	I can help when...	I feel anxious when...	I struggle to...
Something I am not sure about is...	I enjoy when...	I would like us to start...	I would like us to stop...
I don't understand why...	I would like us to keep...	Today I struggled with...	It would be great if...
Things go wrong when...			

Tool 18: Aftermath of a fight – am I ready to process?

Explain to parents that after there has been an argument, its important that to support any resolution, both parents need to consider the following points to be ready to work together:

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)?

Conclusion

This toolkit builds on the skills and knowledge you already possess to help you work with families in conflict.

The tools are designed to enhance your assessment and for you to work alongside parents to empower them to make things better for themselves and their children.

Other resources are available, and national organisations also provide information and support.

Resources

Relationship Matters website – partnership between Yorkshire Local Authorities supporting the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme.
<https://relationshipmatters.org.uk/>

See It Differently website
<https://www.seeitdifferently.org/>
developed by One Plus One giving examples of what parental conflict might look like and how to see things differently.

Parental conflict is not the same as domestic abuse
– if you are supporting a parent that is in a domestic abuse situation, seek help by speaking to your manager. You can get further information about domestic abuse from Pennine Domestic Abuse Partnership at <https://pdap.co.uk/>

Useful Telephone Numbers:

- Duty and Advice Children's Social Care
01484 414960
- Emergency Duty Team
01484 414933
- Early Support Service
01484 456823

Kirklees Safeguarding Children Partnership
<https://www.kirkleessafeguardingchildren.co.uk>

The **National Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC)** pages can be accessed through the following link
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/reducing-parental-conflict-programme-and-resources>
there are a range of resources for practitioners, managers and commissioners.

The **Early Intervention Foundation (EIF)** RPC hub
<https://reducingparentalconflict.eif.org.uk/>

Notes

