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How to evaluate training on reducing parental conflict

A practical guide for local areas

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EARLY INTERVENTION FOUNDATION

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Introduction

The provision of reducing parental conflict training for the workforce is a key priority for local areas, as set out by the Department for Work and Pensions,[1] and many local areas have begun integrating the training offer as part of their wider workforce development to ensure practitioners are appropriately trained and qualified. The reducing parental conflict workforce is diverse and includes a range of practitioners and services that engage with families.

The ability to evaluate training is important to gather insight into what is working and what is not. However, we know from our interactions with local areas that evaluation and its methods can often feel daunting. So building on our previous guidance – *Reducing parental conflict: A practical evaluation guide for local areas* – and our continued work with local areas, we have created a brief step-by-step guide to help make the process of conducting an evaluation of reducing parental conflict training feel more manageable and achievable.

FIND OUT MORE

Our Reducing parental conflict (RPC): A practical guide for local areas is available at **https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/reducing-parental-conflict-a-practical-evaluation-guide-for-local-areas**

1 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-parental-conflict-programme-evaluation-report-on-early-implementation

Why is training evaluation important?

An evaluation of local reducing parental conflict training can enable you to:

- **Understand the effectiveness of training and how far activities are providing value for money**, and inform longer-term workforce planning across the partnership.
- **Provide ongoing feedback to funders** and to the partnership board who commissioned the evaluation.
- **Inform how the training could be adapted and improved** using feedback from participants to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your training programme.
- **Identify the ongoing learning needs of your workforce** in order to build and develop a training programme to meet their needs and inform future workforce planning.
- **Support applications for further funding** for reducing parental conflict training.

Navigating through the reducing parental conflict training evaluation guide

In this guide, we provide step-by-step instructions for an approach to evaluating reducing parental conflict training. This builds on our previous guide, which covered evaluation across all aspects of healthy relationships support.

You will need to tailor your approach based on the purpose of your evaluation as well as practical considerations such as resources and budget.

The tasks are split into three phases. Throughout the guide, there are different templates you can use and adapt for your own training evaluation.

Phase	Your training evaluation tasks	Templates
1 Plan your evaluation	Decide the aim of the training evaluation	
	Write your research questions	
	Select the right evaluation method	
2 Collect, analyse, and interpret your evaluation data	Develop data collection tools	Survey template Topic guide template
	Collect data	
	Analyse and interpret the data	
3 Report on your evaluation findings and plan for further evaluation	Report your findings	Evaluation report template
	Take action	
	Next steps for continued and further evaluation	

Keep an eye out for…

FIND OUT MORE

Find out more

There are links throughout to relevant sections of the **RPC evaluation** guide where you can find more detail on how to complete each step.

PRACTICAL TIP

Practical tips

Our practical tips give additional advice and assistance on completing tasks as well as recommendations from our work with local areas.

TEMPLATE

Templates for you to use

The guide provides a set of tried and tested templates for use in your training evaluation.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Practice examples

We include practice examples to illustrate how to approach and conduct evaluation, drawing on our work with local areas across England. The practice examples build on the experiences of ‘Oldtown’, a fictional place introduced in the RPC evaluation guide.

Phase 1: Plan your evaluation

The first phase involves planning your evaluation. Careful planning allows you to visualise your evaluation from start to finish, and helps you keep on track with completing the different tasks as you progress through to phase 2 and 3. The steps described below demonstrate how to **decide the aim of the evaluation**, **write your research questions**, and **select the right evaluation method**.

PRACTICAL TIP

Write an evaluation plan

An evaluation plan can be used to record key decisions you make during the planning phase. You might find it helpful to get sign-off from senior stakeholders to ensure you have the capacity to deliver the evaluation. We recommend including the following sections, but the content of the plan will depend on how much and what type of data you are planning to collect and analyse:

- **Aim** of the evaluation
- **Research questions** to be answered by your training evaluation
- **Methodology** which outlines which methods and participant groups will be used to answer your research questions
- **Analysis approach** you will take to address the research questions
- **Data protection** statement relevant to the project
- **Ethical considerations** to explain how ethical issues will be taken into consideration in the evaluation, and the process for obtaining approval
- **Project management and resourcing** to detail who will be involved in the evaluation and what their roles will be
- **Risks** that may affect the timescales or findings of your evaluation. Include their likelihood of occurring (high, medium or low), the impact on the evaluation if the risk occurs (high, medium or low) and actions to manage or mitigate each risk
- **Timeline** which details completion dates and time ranges for key evaluation tasks, activities and milestones with clarification over who is responsible for completing each task.

Decide the aim of the training evaluation

The first step is to decide the purpose of the evaluation and how the findings will be used. It is important you are clear about who is going to use the results of your evaluation and for what purpose to ensure that you design an evaluation and collect the right kind of data to meet these needs. At this stage, consider how the evaluation aligns with the broader context, for example, whether the evaluation is linked with funding or re-/decommissioning decisions, governance or partnership boards, or steering/advisory groups.

PRACTICAL TIP

Develop theory of change and logic model

In preparation for your training evaluation, we recommend developing a brief theory of change and logic model for your practitioner training, completed as part of the training development and form the basis of an evaluation. A theory of change captures some crucial details about why the training is needed and what it aims to achieve, and a logic model includes more detail on how the resources lead to specific outputs. This will help identify the key learning outcomes and what activities in the training are expected to lead to these outcomes, which provides a good basis for developing research questions.

FIND OUT MORE

See **page 12** of the RPC evaluation guide GO TO ▶

PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Developing a theory of change

Oldtown used a theory of change to create a set of evidence-based outcomes for the various reducing parental conflict interventions they were delivering, including their training programme as well as their parenting interventions. Their theory of change showed how the training was expected to result in practitioners being better able to identify and support families, which would ultimately lead to improved interparental relationships and improved outcomes for children.

More: Download Oldtown's theory of change

Write your research questions

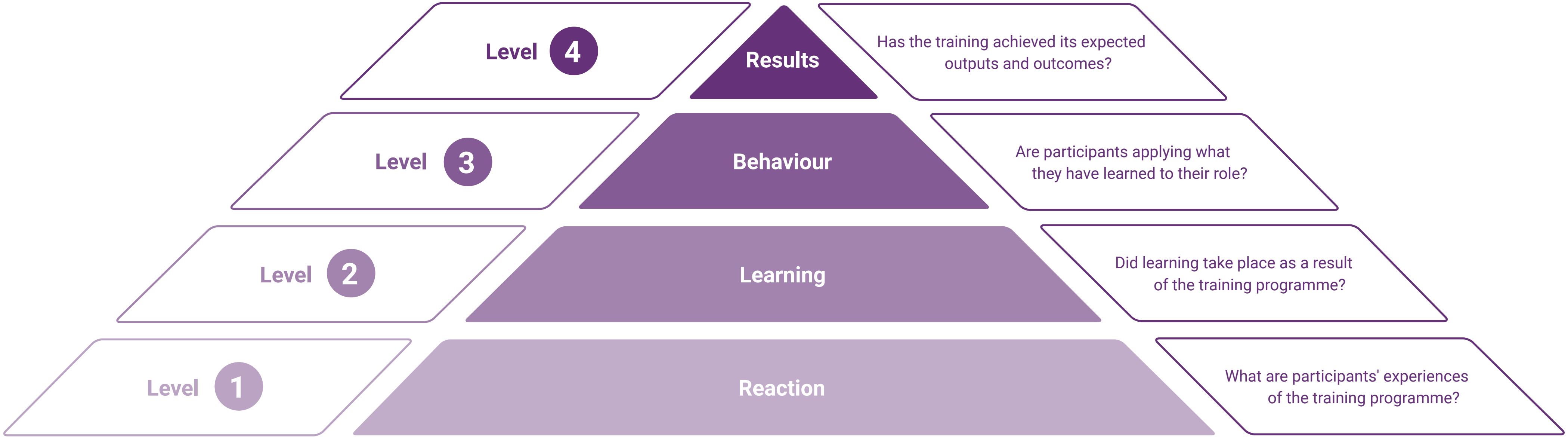
Having clarified the aim of your evaluation, you will need to write specific research questions which set out what your evaluation intends to answer and what you want to find out. They will guide the design of your evaluation, including the methods you select.

You will use your research questions when you later develop your data collection tools. Research questions are not the same as the questions you will ask participants in a survey or qualitative methods.

The Kirkpatrick model, shown in the figure below, may be helpful as a way of determining what aspects of the training you would like to explore in your evaluation and shaping your evaluation questions. The following table provides examples of research questions for each element in the Kirkpatrick model. Select the elements that are relevant to your evaluation.

THE KIRKPATRICK MODEL

The Kirkpatrick model is a four-stage model that is widely used to measure effectiveness of training in an objective way.



Source: Adapted from the original. Kirkpatrick, Donald L. (1994). *Evaluating training programs: the four levels*. San Francisco: Emeryville, CA: Berrett-Koehler; Publishers Group West

ELEMENTS OF THE KIRKPATRICK MODEL AND POSSIBLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Element and definition	Possible research questions
1 **Reaction:** participants' experiences of the training programme	• What are participants' motivations for taking part in the training? • How satisfied are participants with the training? • How engaged are participants with the training? • What do participants think of the training overall? • What do participants think of specific aspects of the training (including mode, structure, content, materials, activities, facilitator)? • How relevant do participants think the training is to their own roles?
2 **Learning:** whether or not learning has taken place as a result of the training programme and met learning objectives	• Did training meet the learning objectives? • Have participants gained the knowledge/skill/confidence the training is focused on?
3 **Behaviour:** whether participants are applying what they have learned to their role and what the facilitators and barriers are	• Are practitioners applying what they have learned in the training to their everyday practice? • What are the facilitators and barriers to practitioners applying what they have learned?
4 **Results:** whether the training programme has achieved its expected outputs and outcomes	• Has training achieved its expected outputs (such as the number of practitioners who completed training)?

Select the right evaluation method

The next step is to choose the right method for collecting data to answer your research questions. The table below shows some common methods that can be used, along with their advantages and disadvantages.

If possible, we recommend you collect both quantitative data (using surveys and/or administrative data) and qualitative data (using interviews, focus groups and/or observations) as each type of method has distinct set of strengths and limitations that can be complementary when combined in a mixed-methods design. While qualitative data can help build a richer picture of the workforce's skills, quantitative data can be used to demonstrate whether and to what extent skills and confidence have improved.

However, the type and number of methods you select will depend on the purpose of your training evaluation, as well as practical considerations such as resources, budget and timeline. Once you have selected which methods you are using, you will need to decide on the specific details, as shown in the figure below on **key methodological factors**.

RESEARCH METHODS AND THEIR ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Research method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Survey A survey is a set of questions that a group of participants respond to, usually online.	✔ Collects information directly from a large number of people in a systematic and standardised way to establish quantities and magnitude (such as 'how many', 'how much', 'to what extent').	✘ Survey data may not capture the complexity of situations, and it may not be possible to fully understand participants' perspectives. For this reason, surveys can be used in combination with interviews or focus groups ✘ It can be challenging to ensure participants complete the survey.
Administrative data This involves using data that is already being collected for administrative purposes, such as attendance data or training costs.	✔ Uses existing data sets which minimises the cost and time required to obtain data.	✘ Data may not contain the range of information required for the evaluation, and there may be limitations on its due to data protection and GDPR issues. Administrative data can be used in combination with other methods.
Interviews An interview can be conducted one-to-one or in pairs, either in person or online.	✔ Can be used to discuss sensitive topics and explore individual experiences in depth ✔ Can be adapted to take account of participants' needs.	✘ Conducting interviews can be time intensive; focus groups may be more efficient ✘ Interview data is not numerical or representative, so interviews can be used in combination with surveys or administrative data.
Focus groups A focus group usually consists of around six to eight participants with a facilitator who moderates the conversation. Focus groups can take place in person or online.	✔ Builds on group dynamics to compare and contrast experiences to explore the range and depth of views ✔ It's an efficient way of gathering views from multiple participants.	✘ Requires an impartial and skilled facilitator ✘ Focus group data is not numerical or representative, so focus groups can be used in combination with surveys or administrative data.
Observation Involves an observer watching and recording the behaviour of participants.	✔ Views the operations of training while it is happening, without relying on participants to self-report later.	✘ It may not be possible to understand how participants are feeling about the training, so observation can be used in combinations with other methods.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Combining quantitative and qualitative methods in sequence

In their evaluation, Oldtown decided to use a mixed-methods approach by using a survey in combination with focus groups. They considered that each method had a distinct set of strengths and limitations which would be complementary if used together. While the survey would provide numerical data that was representative of practitioners who had attended the training, the focus group would provide a rich insight into experiences to explore and elaborate on survey findings.

KEY METHODOLOGICAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Element of study design	Who	How	When
Considerations	• Who will be invited to take part? • What number of participants are you aiming to recruit?	• Who will collect the data? • What mode of data collection will be used (eg online or face-to-face)? • How will it be collected?	• How many times will you collect data? • When will you collect data?

PRACTICAL TIP

Consider data protection and ethics

According to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)[3] there are several legal requirements that must be adhered to when collecting and processing personal data. We advise you to contact your local data protection officer (DPO) or alternative data protection representative, as well as engaging with relevant GDPR guidance.

At this stage you should also think about ethical considerations, such as informed consent and voluntary participation.

FIND OUT MORE

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See **page 40** of the RPC evaluation guide

3 For more information and resources on UK GDPR, see: https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/gdpr-resources/

Phase 2: Collect, analyse, and interpret your evaluation data

Once you have finished planning your evaluation, you will be ready to move on to phase 2 of your evaluation, where you will carry out your evaluation plan. This section provides guidance on how to develop data collection tools, collect data, and analyse and interpret data.

Develop data collection tools

Once a method has been selected, you can proceed to designing your data collection tools. We have produced a set of templates to assist you to run a survey and interviews or focus groups, which are the main ways to evaluate training.

If you are conducting interviews/focus groups, you will need to develop a topic guide, which is an outline of key topics to ensure you cover what you need to during the discussion.

FIND OUT MORE

GO TO ▶

See the RPC evaluation guide on:

Developing a survey: **page 54**
Developing interviews or focus groups: **page 66**
Developing an observation guide: **page 72**

TEMPLATE

Data collection tools templates

Survey template for use in a survey to evaluate reaction, learning behaviour and/or results of practitioners attending training: https://www.eif.org.uk/files/resources/rpc-training-eval-survey-template.docx

Topic guide template for use in interviews/focus groups: https://www.eif.org.uk/files/resources/rpc-training-eval-topic-guide.docx

The final stage of development should involve pre-testing the tool with a group of practitioners to ensure it is fit for purpose. You should gather their feedback on both the questions and the clarity of the instructions you will provide.

Collect data

After you have developed your data collection tool, you will be ready to collect the data using the methods set out in your evaluation plan. Further guidance on how to collect data is available in the evaluation guide.

FIND OUT MORE

GO TO ▶

See the RPC evaluation guide on:

Collecting survey data: **page 54**
Collecting administrative data: **page 62**
Collecting interview/focus group data: **page 66**
Collecting observation data: **page 72**

PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Using online methods for data collection

Oldtown used Microsoft Forms to collect data because it was simple to use and complied with their data security standards. They sent an email link to all practitioners who had taken part in the training and sent two reminder emails to ensure a high response rate.

Oldtown decided to conduct the focus group online because it was easier for practitioners who were geographically dispersed or with busy schedules to attend. They used Microsoft Teams which automatically generated a transcript which could then be used at the analysis stage.

To encourage practitioners to take part in data collection activities, Oldtown emphasised to practitioners that their responses would be used to shape further reducing parental conflict offers and will be shared through the next newsletter update.

Analyse and interpret the data

The next step is to analyse and interpret the data you have collected. This means exploring what story your data is telling.

Try to keep analysis as simple as possible and limited to what is needed to answer your research questions. You might find it helpful to break down analysis for each research question separately.

If your evaluation collected data from multiple methods to answer the same research questions, you should compare the analysis from each – a process known as 'triangulation'. There are different approaches to triangulation, but the simplest is to analyse data from each method separately before combining them to answer your research questions.

If you are completing data collection in sequence, you might find it useful to analyse the data from the first method to inform data collection from additional methods. For example, you might run a short focus group to gather some quick feedback and use it to increase workforce motivation to complete the survey and refine the survey questions. Alternatively, you might collect and analyse survey data and use focus groups or interviews to help interpret the data.

FIND OUT MORE

GO TO ▶

See the RPC evaluation guide on:

Analysing and interpreting survey data: **page 57**
Analysing and interpreting administrative data: **page 62**
Analysing and interpreting interview/focus group data: **page 69**
Analysing and interpreting observation data: **page 72**

PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Analysing quantitative and qualitative data

Oldtown collected and analysed data separately to produce two sets of findings. For their survey data, Microsoft Forms automatically generated results for each of the survey questions showing the number and percentage of respondents who chose each option. The survey data was available to download into Excel for more advanced statistical analysis.

For their focus group data, data from the transcript was first categorised into the different components from the Kirkpatrick model using a colour coding system (i.e., points made about 'reaction' were highlighted in blue, 'learning' in yellow, and so on). Once data had been categorised, Oldtown grouped together text for each of the levels and then summarised the transcript data to identify different key themes.

Oldtown then attempted to combine both sets of findings to answer the research questions. A mixed-methods design helped provide stronger evidence for each of the research questions and provided more confidence in their findings.

Phase 3: Report on your evaluation findings and plan for further evaluation

The final phase is to report your findings collected from phase 2. This section covers advice on how to report your findings, take action, and plan next steps for continued and further evaluation.

FIND OUT MORE

GO TO ▶

See **module 4** of the RPC evaluation guide

Report your findings

Consider who your target audience is and the type of information that will be relevant and useful to them. We recommend writing an evaluation report that captures both the findings and recommendations in one place. The report can then be used as a basis for further outputs such as briefing summaries or presentations.

FIND OUT MORE

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See **page 40** of the RPC evaluation guide

We have produced an evaluation report template that sets out key content and advice to ensure your findings are well structured and easily accessible. This template has been designed to cover different types of reducing parental conflict evaluations, so adapt and amend it to fit your training evaluation.

TEMPLATE

Evaluation report template

Download from: https://www.eif.org.uk/files/resources/rpc-eval-evaluation-report-template.docx

Take action

Within your evaluation report, you should include a list of recommendations based on your findings. Recommendations are actions that need to be taken in order to respond to the evaluation findings. For instance, how the training should be changed, whether the training should be rolled out, and what research questions should be explored next.

Recommendations should draw directly on what you have learned in your evaluation and should be relevant, useful, realistic, specific and prioritised. At this stage, you should begin thinking about how you can put your recommendations into practice.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Using evaluation findings

Findings from the survey indicated that practitioners felt certain aspects of the training were not meeting expectations. The focus group findings revealed there were common recommendations on how these aspects could be improved. As a result, Oldtown have refined the content of the training.

The findings were shared with senior managers to demonstrate that the training is effective and to make the case for future funding. The findings have been referenced in funding applications for additional practitioner training.

The evaluation raised awareness of the training offer and has helped generate interest in practitioner training across the workforce. This has resulted in an increase in the number of practitioners signing up for training, including those from sectors which have previously had low engagement, such as schools and health.

Next steps for continued and further evaluation

This will depend on the evaluation you have conducted as well as its findings. The main focus should be on continued and improved evaluation of your practitioner training. This could be in terms of:

- **Continuing data collection:** for example, administering a follow-up survey to practitioners to explore how learning has been embedded over time. Another example would be to conduct follow-up interviews/focus groups with practitioners, focusing on enablers and barriers to embedding learning in practice, to explore any changes.
- **Collecting additional data:** for example, you might decide to undertake further interviews, focus groups or observations to explore your survey findings in more depth, or conduct a survey to gather representative data.
- **Evaluating additional training:** for example, evaluating training you have not previously evaluated, either due to prioritisation decisions or because there is a new training programme. While the same design and data collection tools might be appropriate (such as the survey and/or topic guide that you have already developed), you may need to adapt them in line with the training you are evaluating.
- **Exploring the influence on family experience and outcomes:** once training has been embedded, you might want to explore outcomes for families who have received support from practitioners who have received the training compared to those who haven't. You may also want to gather their feedback using a survey or qualitive methods. Further information on conducting an evaluation with families is available in the reducing parental conflict evaluation guide.