HM Government

EARLY INTERVENTION FOUNDATION

What Works for Children's Social Care

Coming together as What Works for Early Intervention & Children's Social Care

Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool

A self-assessment planning tool to support local authorities and their partners to deliver a system-wide approach to reducing the negative impact of conflict between parents on their children.

Healthy relationships between parents are an important focus for early intervention and local family services. The quality of the relationship between parents, specifically how they communicate and relate to each other, has a significant influence on effective parenting and child outcomes.

Reducing parental conflict is a complex issue which requires a system-wide response. This self-assessment tool is designed to support local leaders and commissioners to identify local system strengths and areas for development, and to monitor progress over time.

In this document you will find:

- A brief overview of the evidence on parental conflict, and link to further information.
- An introduction to using a systemic approach to reduce the impact of parental conflict on children.
- Descriptors for eight key elements which make up a reducing parental conflict system.
- A list of questions to use to monitor practical changes in your local area.

An overview of the evidence

1. Conflict between parents is a normal part of relationships. However, there is a large body of evidence that shows that parental conflict which is frequent, intense and poorly resolved puts children's mental health and long-term outcomes at risk.
2. Parental conflict can be reflected in a wide range of behaviours, from constructive (helpful) to destructive (harmful) behaviours. Harmful behaviours in a relationship which are frequent, intense and poorly resolved can lead to a lack of respect and a lack of resolution. Behaviours such as shouting, becoming withdrawn or slamming doors can be viewed as destructive.
3. Parental relationship distress is different from domestic abuse. This is because there is not an imbalance of power, neither parent seeks to control the other, and neither parent is fearful of the other.
4. Parental conflict can harm children's outcomes regardless of whether parents are together or separated, are in a same-sex or heterosexual relationship, or are biologically related to the child or not, such as in blended or foster families.

5. Children in workless families are twice as likely to experience damaging parental conflict as those where both parents are working. Financial difficulties impact on parental mental health, which can increase parental conflict. This in turn can impact on parenting and children's outcomes.
6. Interventions which focus solely on supporting the parent–child relationship (such as parenting programmes) in the context of parental conflict are unlikely to improve outcomes for children.
7. Evidence suggests that parental conflict may have more of a negative impact on the father–child relationship than the mother–child relationship. Fathers are more likely to respond to parental conflict by withdrawing from their children or adopting poor parenting practices. In addition, parental separation can lead to reduced and inconsistent contacts between children and non-resident parents, who are typically fathers, further disrupting the father–child relationship. For these reasons, including fathers in family-focused interventions is an important future direction for both practice and research.

To find out more about the evidence relating to parental conflict and to access a range of practical planning resources go to the **Reducing Parental Conflict Hub** at https://reducingparentalconflict.eif.org.uk/

A systemic approach

Tackling parental conflict is complex. It requires effective local arrangements for strategy and planning, leading change, delivering effective single- and multi-agency working, and evaluating progress. These four dimensions (PLAN, LEAD, DELIVER, EVALUATE) form the Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool, which is designed to guide local arrangements to reduce the impact of parental conflict on their children.

Each dimension has two key elements, each described at five different progress levels, to allow a local area to rate their current position, and identify the steps they need to take to improve.

Using the planning tool

The Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool is designed to support practical change through positive challenge within local partnerships. It can also be used to set a baseline and track progress over time.

The tool and the corresponding worksheet are particularly effective as the basis for a structured stakeholder workshop, sharing different views and building consensus about progress and priorities. You may want to take account of the following if using the tool in this way:

- Reducing parental conflict is a complex issue which involves a range of different organisations. Make sure to involve strategic and operational stakeholders from across the spectrum of services and organisations that provide child and family services.
- No one sees the whole picture, so planning workshops are most effective when there is opportunity to hear different perspectives, to hear from families themselves, and to find common ground.
- Stakeholders often need to take time to understand what the evidence says about parental conflict and child impact before being able to actively engage in a local assessment and plan.
- The purpose of the workshop is to move from talk to action, so sufficient time should be allowed for agreeing specific next steps.

DIMENSIONS	KEY ELEMENTS	PROGRESS LEVELS				
		0	1	2	3	4
		ENTRY LEVEL	FIRST STEPS	EARLY PROGRESS	SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	MATURE
		Services yet to prioritise parental conflict but provide strong foundations	Principle of tackling parental conflict is accepted and there is commitment to action	Initial development to tackle parental conflict	Initial results achieved and positive outcomes evident	Embedded good practice and others learning from achievements
PLAN	1. Strategy					
	2. Workforce					
LEAD	3. Partnership					
	4. Community					
DELIVER	5. Services & interventions					
	6. Coordinated working					
EVALUATE	7. Outcomes & experience					
	8. Evaluation					

Common typologies

Most local areas in England started on a journey to reduce the negative impact of parent conflict a few years ago and different local areas have encountered different obstacles along the way. Therefore, local areas are likely to be at different points in their journeys now. However, there are some common typologies for areas using the tool.

0 Type 0: Starting off

- No infrastructure specific to parental conflict yet.
- Early discussions among stakeholders.
- All or most of the Planning Tool key elements are scored as 0 **Entry Level**.

FOCUS ON:

- **Making the case for change to key stakeholders.**
- **Identifying a Senior Responsible Owner who can make things happen.**
- **Improving understanding of the evidence.**
- **Agreeing first steps to build local workforce understanding of parental conflict.**

1 Type 1: Becoming established

- Some key champions and infrastructure specific to parental conflict and this work has a growing local profile.
- Planning Tool key elements usually scored as between 1 **First Steps** and 2 **Early Progress**.
- Building investment in workforce training and evidence based interventions

FOCUS ON:

- **Test and learn: making sure that the local infrastructure for using data and measuring impact is secure.**
- **Enhancing quality and reach within core services.**
- **Embedding approaches within wider network of relevant services.**

2 Type 2: Making good progress

- Well-established and high-profile approach to reducing parental conflict, embedded within wider child and family services.
- Planning Tool key elements usually scored as between 2 **Early Progress** and 3 **Substantial Progress.**
- Starting to share learning with wider audiences.

FOCUS ON:

- **Peer / independent challenge on impact.**
- **Pooling and sharing learning.**
- **Sustaining and expanding effective approaches.**

Measuring your progress

There are practical local changes that can be monitored to track your progress level. When completing an assessment using the tool, you will be asked to answer the following questions. Your answers will allow DWP to target support most helpfully and better understand the local environment.

1. What proportion of the following workforces have received reducing parental conflict (RPC) training?

	0–25%	25–50%	50–75%	75–100%
Local authority Early Help/family workers				
Commissioned Early Help/family services (e.g. voluntary sector)				
Children's social care workers				
Specialist public health or community nurses				
Police				
Education services (e.g. school pastoral leads, designated safeguarding leads,SENCOs, school family support workers and teachers)				
Health visiting				
Youth offending services				
Other (please specify)				

2. Does your local area currently offer or plan to offer any of the following interventions which were tested as part of the four contract package area trials which ended in summer 2022?

	Yes	Plan to	No
Mentalization Based Therapy (MBT)			
Family Transitions Triple P (FT-PPP)			
Enhanced Triple P (E-PPP)			
Parenting when separated (PWS)			
Incredible Years Advanced (IY)			
Within My Reach (WMR)			
Family Check Up (FCU)			

3. Does your local area offer any other RPC interventions? (either externally commissioned or internally developed)

Please record the name of the intervention below and select 'externally commissioned' 'internally developed' or 'other'	Externally commissioned	Internally developed	Other

4. How many RPC trainers do you have in your local area?

Please write in your best estimate	

5. Do you collect the following data on parental conflict?

	Yes	No
Issue data – referral: parental conflict is captured as an issue at referral		
Issue data – assessment/review: parental conflict is captured as an issue at assessment or review stage		
Outcome data: parental conflict is captured as an outcome, whether successful or not		
Qualitative data: parental conflict is captured in action plans or case notes in the case management system.		

6. Is parental conflict included within the following strategic documents? (you may select more than one)

	Yes	No
Early Help strategy		
Children and young people plan		
Community safety strategy		
Stand-alone 'healthy relationships' (or similar) strategy		
Supporting Families Early Help System Guide self-assessment		
Others (please specify)		

7. How aware of the RPC agenda are the senior leaders of your partners?

	Not aware	Somewhat aware	Very aware
Local authority children's services			
Health			
Police			
Education			
Voluntary and community sector			
Other (please specify)			

8. Does your local area provide RPC information and activities online? If yes, please provide links if you are willing to share with others.

	Yes	No
Online service or intervention for parents		
Signposting on children's services web pages		
Leaflets		
Posters		
Social media		
Videos		
Others (please specify)		

Please include any links here	

Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool

PLAN

1. STRATEGY

This element focuses on the local vision, strategic approach and plan for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children. It considers how well community needs are understood, how data is used, and what the shared priorities are for taking action. It also considers how resources are aligned between partner organisations to support delivery of the local strategy. The strategic approach can be set out in an RPC-specific written strategy or integrated within wider early intervention family strategies.

0 ENTRY LEVEL	• Local planning to improve support for vulnerable children and vulnerable adults takes account of the whole family unit.
1 FIRST STEPS	• The research evidence on parental conflict is understood by senior managers and other key stakeholders, including how it differs from domestic abuse, and it is recognised as important to child outcomes.
2 EARLY PROGRESS	• Initial action plans are in place to address the impact of parental conflict on children • Data about vulnerable groups is gathered from partners to identify immediate strategic issues and responses, including gaps in local knowledge. • Resources, including community assets, that are available for reducing parental conflict are understood, and commissioners work with providers to integrate RPC into service specifications and to develop practitioner skills.
3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	• The local vision and multi-agency strategic approach for reducing the impact of parental conflict on children is agreed, communicated and woven into relevant strategic plans. • An action plan delivers the strategic approach, and progress is monitored at a senior level. • Partners share data for a population needs assessment, which gives a clear narrative about the impact of parental conflict on children and young people, and this informs decisions. • Investment in services to reduce parental conflict is a local priority, and partners pool or align funding to support delivery of the strategy, based on mapping and analysis of resources.
4 MATURE	• Progress in delivering the strategic approach is monitored, reviewed and refreshed, taking account of impact to date and local learning about what has worked well and where improvements and investment need to be made. • There is evidence of significant shifts in investment to reduce parental conflict through early intervention. There is evidence of impact as a result of investment. • All decisions about commissioning or redesigning family support services take account of strength of evidence and prioritise reducing parental conflict.

Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool

PLAN

2. WORKFORCE

This element focuses on local arrangements for ensuring that the multi-agency workforce has the right skills and confidence to deliver the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children. This includes analysing workforce needs across the system, and delivering capacity and capability through redesign, recruitment and training.

0 ENTRY LEVEL	• There are established local arrangements for workforce planning , and an understanding of the workforce which supports vulnerable families.
1 FIRST STEPS	• Initial work is underway to identify who in the workforce can impact on parental conflict, and what their learning needs are. • There are a few examples of training on reducing parental conflict. Participants have an understanding of domestic abuse identification and assessment processes and pathways prior to completing RPC training.
2 EARLY PROGRESS	• Multi-agency workforce needs on reducing parental conflict are being mapped, and capacity and skills audits or training reviews are underway. • There are regular opportunities for some key staff to receive training in their role in identifying and responding to parental conflict, including engaging both parents.
3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	• Workforce needs are analysed and understood for those who can impact on parental conflict. • Capacity gaps are addressed through redesign or recruitment so that services can identify and respond to parental conflict. • Practitioners access integrated and specialist training on reducing parental conflict, including on engaging harder-to-reach communities and communicating with both parents.
4 MATURE	• The skills and knowledge required to reduce parental conflict are part of role specifications, recruitment and competency frameworks. • The workforce receives high-quality training and supervision in reducing parental conflict. • Indicators of staff awareness and performance on parental conflict are positive, and staff members champion this issue.

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LEAD

3. PARTNERSHIP

This element focuses on strategic leadership and partnership working to drive forward delivery of the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children. It focuses on core children's services partners as well as adult mental health services, domestic abuse services, homelessness services, alcohol and substance abuse services, and probation and prison services. This element also includes how leadership is distributed across the community and local organisations.

0 ENTRY LEVEL	• There are established partnership arrangements for making decisions about strategic priorities for local family services.
1 FIRST STEPS	• There is low but increasing awareness of the importance of addressing parental conflict, championed by some partners. • A senior leader is accountable for driving the strategic partnership approach to reducing parental conflict.
2 EARLY PROGRESS	• An identified partnership group has lead responsibility for reducing parental conflict and its impact on children. This brings together a growing group of partner agencies and there is willingness to deliver actions, share funding and responsibility, and design solutions. Partners are contributing to the development of the local strategy and action plan. • Partners review the latest evidence on parental relationships and child development, and use this to consider local approaches to reducing the impact of conflict.
3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	• The strategic partnership group is broad, active and having an impact. Partners actively support and challenge each other. • Governance of delivery of the strategy is clear and partners have a shared understanding of goals, performance and their role in taking action. There is an agreed process for addressing areas of underperformance. • Operational and strategic leaders champion the importance of investment in services to reduce parental conflict and the benefits of a more joined-up approach. • Local leaders encourage innovation and collaboration in how services are planned and delivered, alongside a focus on using evidence.
4 MATURE	• An influential and effective partnership group actively owns the strategy and is accountable for the delivery of action plans for reducing parental conflict. Timely delivery of actions is routine, and there is a breadth of impact. • Senior leaders are advocates and champions for the delivery of the local strategy for reducing parental conflict. • Local leaders and decision-makers routinely draw on reliable evidence to inform resource use and service design, and challenge policy with a weak evidence base.

LEAD

4. COMMUNITY

This element focuses on how families and the local community are engaged in the design and delivery of the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children.

0 ENTRY LEVEL

- Children and families are often engaged through formal consultation and engagement mechanisms on family services. Their views are taken into account in strategy and service development.

1 FIRST STEPS

- The lived experiences of some families are starting to influence local thinking and planning.
- Families with lived experiences are starting to inform a shared understanding of domestic abuse and parental conflict.

2 EARLY PROGRESS

- The views of children, young people and families directly inform strategy through consultation focused on reducing parental conflict and the impact on children. Some family champions are involved in the strategy development process.
- There are examples of peer support, community development and involvement in delivery of services to reduce parental conflict. Work is underway to map and develop capacity of communities and voluntary organisations to contribute to this agenda.

3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

- Families co-design strategy for reducing parental conflict and are involved in commissioning processes and governance structures where decisions about strategic priorities are made.
- There is clear evidence of fathers' engagement.
- There are examples where families have successfully challenged local arrangements.
- Parents and community volunteers train alongside professionals and co-facilitate training.
- Peer support, community development and involvement in delivery are part of the local strategy to reduce parental conflict.

4 MATURE

- Arrangements for involving a range of families from different backgrounds in the governance, design and quality assurance of services to reduce conflict are inclusive, routine and embedded.
- Communities are actively providing peer support to reduce parental conflict.

Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool

DELIVER

5. SERVICES & INTERVENTIONS

This element focuses on how, at an operational level, local services deliver support to reduce parental conflict, including evidence-based programmes, and the way that information about parental conflict is made available to families.

0 ENTRY LEVEL	• Services to support vulnerable children and adults take account of the whole family unit.
1 FIRST STEPS	• Front-line working on parental conflict is starting to be seen in some areas. There is variable understanding within local family support services of the role they can play in reducing parental conflict. • Parents are signposted to online self-help resources and interventions.
2 EARLY PROGRESS	• Key services recognise their role in reducing parental conflict. Support to reduce parental conflict is targeted at priority groups. • Some evidence-based interventions or programmes are being implemented, although funding for these may be short-term or insecure. • Some services collaborate on information for families about the impact of parental conflict, including the differences between parental conflict and domestic abuse, and how to access support.
3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	• Data shows that the quality of services to reduce parental conflict is good and improving. • Approaches to working with families prioritise relationships and this influences how services are designed and delivered. • Evidence-based programmes to reduce parental conflict are embedded in key services. These interventions are targeted accurately and evaluated for impact. • There is a clear understanding of the different support for parental conflict and domestic abuse across the local workforce and this is communicated to families. • Information about parental relationships and support services is accessible to and understood by all families. Services work together to reach families that are identified as priority groups with the information that they need.
4 MATURE	• Data shows that the quality of services to reduce parental conflict is good or excellent. • Service and case audits consider the effectiveness of the local system for families that are vulnerable to interparental conflict, and findings are used to inform service redesign. • There is a coherent portfolio of evidence-based interventions which are embedded in the local family offer. Interventions are evaluated and achieving good outcomes for children. • Families across all communities consistently report that they have access to up-to-date and accurate service information in a range of ways, with appropriate support to do so where this is needed.

DELIVER

6. COORDINATED WORKING

This element focuses on how local services collaborate using common systems and processes to identify, assess and support vulnerable families, and on the arrangements for collecting and sharing personal data to support care planning.

0 ENTRY LEVEL	• Common processes are used to identify and support vulnerable families. • Partners are in discussion about how they collect and store personal family data, and how they might share data to improve family services.
1 FIRST STEPS	• There is a commitment to strengthening the processes to identify, assess and meet the needs of families vulnerable to parental conflict. There is also interest in designing a multi-agency pathway for parental conflict and coordinating how families access support. • There is a commitment to recording and sharing personal data on parental conflict, but arrangements are not yet in place.
2 EARLY PROGRESS	• Organisations are developing integrated parental conflict pathways and processes in line with domestic abuse pathways of support. Team Around the Family arrangements consider parental conflict for some families, although not yet consistently. • Some information sharing is happening across the teams which are core to reducing parental conflict. Information sharing agreements are in place but not fully operationalised.
3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	• Information-sharing on parental conflict is routine and timely, and is used to inform delivery of services. • An agreed parental conflict pathway is being integrated into the practice and processes that make up the wider local system for supporting vulnerable families.
4 MATURE	• Parental conflict is an integral part of common processes for identifying, assessing and meeting needs of vulnerable families. • There is routine and timely multi-agency data sharing and matching on parental conflict to identify and assess family risks, needs and strengths.

Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool

EVALUATE

7. OUTCOMES & EXPERIENCE

This element focuses on how progress in reducing the impact parental conflict on children is measured, and what the experience of support is like from the perspective of families. It includes using tools like an outcomes framework which is specific to reducing parental conflict, or integrating measures of conflict and its impact within wider child and family outcome frameworks.

0 ENTRY LEVEL	• There are coordinated arrangements locally for identifying and monitoring key outcomes for children and families.
1 FIRST STEPS	• There is a recognition that performance measures and outcomes relating to the impact of parental conflict on children need to be used locally.
2 EARLY PROGRESS	• Specific outcomes on parental conflict and the impact on children are being defined and agreed. • Data shows that some families experience a smoother journey through services as a result of the focus on reducing parental conflict.
3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	• Process and outcome measures on parental conflict and the impact on children have been agreed and data is routinely collected and reported from local family services. Validated measurement tools are used where appropriate. • Performance against locally defined outcomes is starting to show signs of improvement against baselines. Families vulnerable to parental conflict generally have a smooth journey through support services as a result of the focus on reducing parental conflict. • Evidence on the customer journey experience is collected regularly and informs service and workforce development. • The partnership overseeing the strategy for reducing parental conflict uses family satisfaction feedback and stories as part of its outcomes framework.
4 MATURE	• Partnership-wide outcomes and indicators on parental conflict and the impact on children are embedded in use, and families have a smooth journey through any support that they receive to reduce parental conflict. Validated measurement tools are routinely used. • Partners have a clear view of which parts of the system are working well, and use this to inform strategy, hold service providers to account, and inform service development. • Arrangements for collecting user experience of services relating to parental conflict are routine and embedded, and families are quality-assuring services and leading change. • Outcomes are improving, and where performance is less good analysis is underway to understand why.

EVALUATE

8. EVALUATION

This element focuses on how local partners find and apply external evidence on reducing parental conflict from research and practice, as well as generating robust local evidence where there is a need to innovate.

0 ENTRY LEVEL	• Evaluation is recognised as important, and partners use research and other evidence sources to inform decisions about family services.
1 FIRST STEPS	• Some local stakeholders are starting to review the latest evidence on reducing parental conflict and consider what this means for local services.
2 EARLY PROGRESS	• Plans are being developed for the evaluation of specific services and interventions that address parental conflict.
3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	• A consistent approach to evaluation of service impact on parental conflict is a recognised goal and work on an evaluation framework is underway. • Local evaluation findings are used to inform tactical and operational decisions as well as strategy and planning decisions.
4 MATURE	• A common evaluation framework is applied across services to reduce parental conflict which recognises different standards of evidence. Some local evaluation uses comparison groups. The consistent approach to evaluation supports experimentation and innovation. • The local evidence base is growing and informs future service development. Other places use the learning to support their own policy decisions.

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First published in October 2018, updated January 2023. What Works for Early Intervention & Children's Social care © 2018, 2023

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