

Harmony at Home

Reducing Parental Conflict Practitioner Toolkit



worcestershire.gov.uk/harmony-home

Introduction

What is Harmony at Home?

“Harmony at Home” is Worcestershire’s way of addressing the issue of parents arguing and the impact it has on their children. This approach is part of a broader initiative called the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) project, which is in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and organisations from our multi-agency reference group.

Harmony at Home understands all relationships have challenges, difficulties and breakdown, especially with the pressures of being a parent.

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit has been designed specifically for practitioners to support everyday practice, giving advice, tips and information to families, parents and carers who may be together, separating, divorced or co-parenting. This will support practitioners to complete direct interventions with parents, including assessment tools, questionnaires and templates for discussion.

In this toolkit, we use the word ‘practitioner’ but this applies to anyone working with families, eg. school staff & health visiting teams. Supporting healthy relationships is everyone’s business. All practitioners working across Worcestershire can provide support.

What does it hope to achieve?

- The toolkit aims to help practitioners engage families and address conflicts constructively.
- Support parents to establish safe spaces to share their wishes and feelings to ultimately have improved communication
- Parents are accessing targeted support sessions aimed at reducing conflict and improving the lived experience and safety for all in the family home
- Support to address and reduce parental conflict that sits below a domestic abuse or violence threshold.



This Harmony at Home, Reducing Parental Conflict Toolkit is designed to:

- Support everyday practice and provide timely support
- Initiate conversations with parents about their relationships
- Enable and empower parents to understand their conflict and to learn strategies to resolving issues themselves.
- Offer guidance to professionals on using these tools effectively with families.

How to use this toolkit?

This toolkit offers guidance on 1-5 planned sessions for practitioners to complete with parents who are parenting together or apart. This will not always be used as a structured programme of intervention. The sessions are designed for parents, carers, and families to explore specific themes together, with guidance from the practitioner.

Please adapt this intervention plan depending on family needs (including neurodivergence, age and physical needs). Practitioners should work holistically with families and respond to their needs. Practitioners may choose to complete only one of the session plans with parents to fit in with an existing support plan. Any practitioner or volunteer working with families can start conversations about parental relationships.

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Session 1. Understanding Parental Conflict.

Objective: Build rapport, explore what parental conflict is, and assess its impact on children.

1.1 Build a Rapport

Review your involvement with the family and what led to support being offered and start conversations about conflict in a non-judgmental and supportive way. This can be achieved through open-ended questions, active listening, and acknowledging the challenges parents face when dealing with conflict.

This toolkit aims to help identify and support couples with conflict. That sits below the threshold of domestic abuse and violence. Disagreements in relationships are normal. They are not problematic when both people feel able to handle and resolve them.

Highlight the Importance of Open Communication: Start by explaining that open and honest communication is crucial for navigating conflicts, especially when there are children involved.

Acknowledge the Difficulty: Validate the challenges parents face when dealing with conflict. Mention that it's a common experience and that it's okay to feel overwhelmed or frustrated.

Focus on Collaboration: Frame the discussion as a collaborative effort to improve communication and parenting.

Use Open-Ended Questions: Focus on strengths and shared goals. Instead of directly addressing conflict, start by asking about the parents' strengths as co-parents and their shared goals for their children. Ask questions that prompt parents to reflect on their own communication styles and behaviours.

Examples of Icebreaker Questions:

“ What are the biggest challenges you and your partner, or ex-partner face when it comes to co-parenting? ”

“ What are some things you admire about your co-parent's parenting style? ”

“ What are some things you feel you both do well when it comes to co-parenting? ”

“ What are some things you would like to improve in your communication with your co-parent? ”

“ What strategies have you tried in the past to reduce conflict, and what worked or didn't work? ”



1.2 What is Parental Conflict and how does it impact on children?

Definition from the Department for Work and Pensions:

Parental conflict, which can range from a lack of warmth and emotional distance, right through to swearing and shouting, is known to be a risk factor for poor child outcomes, particularly when conflict is frequent, intense and poorly resolved. There is growing understanding and awareness of the need to address and reduce parental conflict that sits below domestic abuse.

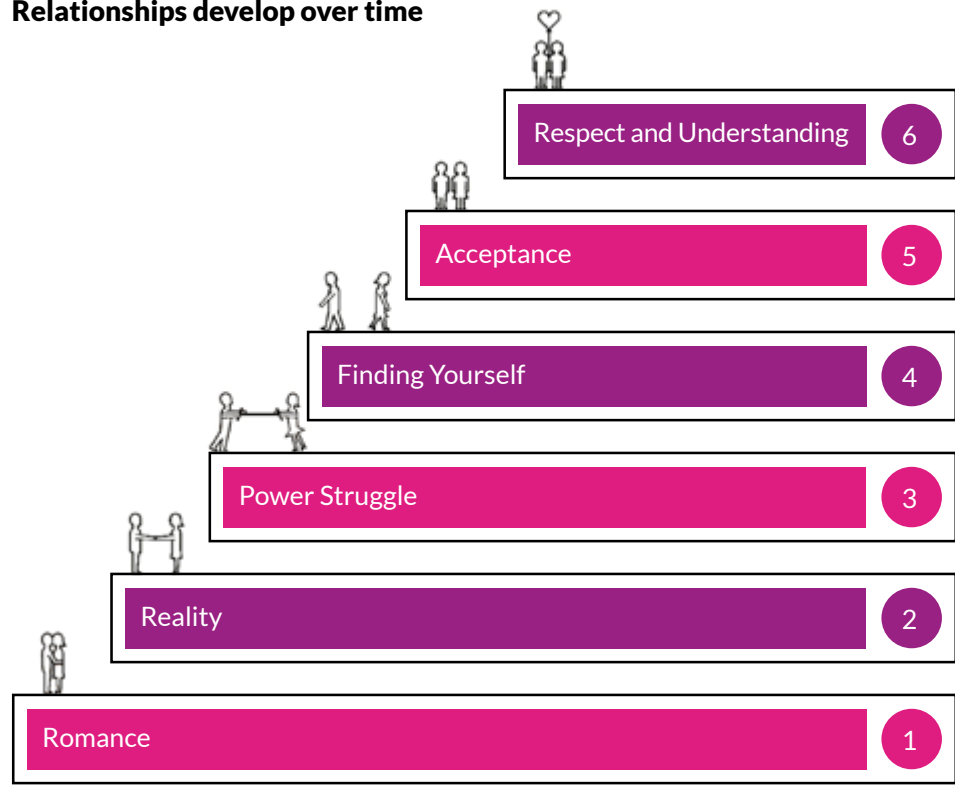
It is important to recognise the different kinds of parenting relationships that exist:

- Parents living together
- Separated or divorced parents
- Step-families

Relationships change over time. What stage are you at? What could this mean for your relationship?

This relationship stage visual below can be used to highlight that relationships develop over time. Consider reviewing with parents and asking the questions below to support open conversation.

Relationships develop over time



Long term relationships tend to go through lots of stages and changes. It's different for everyone and your journey will be affected by the changes in your lives.

1) Romance - Many relationships start here – everything seems perfect and you want to spend every moment together.

2) Reality - You start to see each other's flaws. You may find that you want different things from life.

3) Power struggles - As you figure out how things are going to work between the two of you, you may have to reach a compromise about important issues like children, money, or housework.

4) Finding yourselves - Once you've figured out how your relationship works, you may need to focus on yourselves as individuals – your personal hopes and dreams. This can be a difficult stage for many couples.

5) Acceptance - When you have learned to respect each other's needs, you can start to see your differences as strengths.

6) Mutual love and respect - You learn to love each other completely – warts and all. You've found a way to balance your needs as individuals with your roles in the relationship.

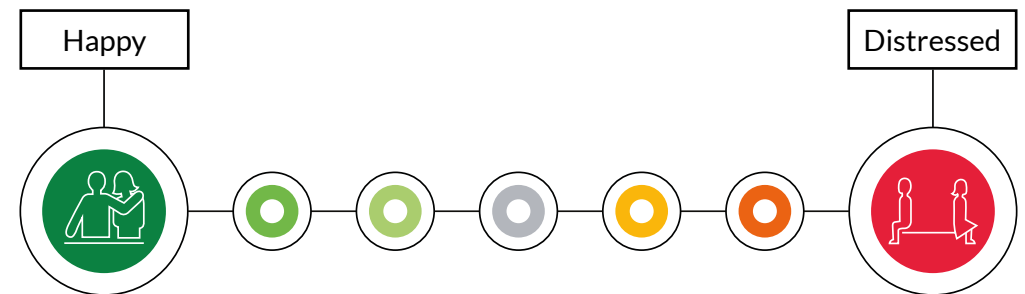
Throughout your life, you may move up and down through the stages.

Here's a few questions to ask yourself now:

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

Relationship Scales

How are we doing?



The scale can be used to encourage parents to have an open discussion, by asking them to rate their situation, highlighting differences in how they are experiencing their relationship and starting to think about changes needed to make their relationship more harmonious and consistent for their children.

There are many factors which can affect parental relationships. Do any of these apply to your relationship?



Financial pressures



Bereavement



Work / employment pressures



Health issues/ illness



Birth of a child/adoption



Moving house



Educational pressures (children starting school, moving school or sitting exams)



Other commitments (family/ caring responsibilities)



Housing insecurity or homelessness



Lifestyle changes

Parental conflict places children at risk of:

- Negative peer relationships within their community and school; with both peers and school staff, affecting academic outcomes
- Earlier involvement with drug or alcohol misuse
- Poor future adult relationships
- Lower future employability prospects which can lead to financial difficulties
- Increased risk of poor mental health in children, and into adulthood
- Negative impact on neurobiological processes, which in turn affects children's emotional development, leading to conduct disorder, poor attachment and risk-taking behaviours
- Children are also at risk of a range of health difficulties including sleep disorders, digestive problems, abdominal pains, fatigue, headaches and reduced physical growth.

Research indicates that when parents put their children in the middle of their conflict it can be harmful. Helping parents to identify the ways they might be doing this is an important first step in encouraging change.



The Mediator

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



The Judge

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



The Confidant

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



The Messenger

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



The Spy

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

Additional information to support session 1

Video Resources:

- [Parental conflict: the impact on children and how local authorities can help - VIMEO](#)
- [Childs voice - YOUTUBE](#)

Helpful links:

- [Tips For Successful Co-Parenting - NATIONAL FAMILY MEDIATION](#)

Session 2. Communication Styles

Objective: Improve awareness of communication styles and better understand each other's style and its effect.

2.1 Understanding communication styles

When parents communicate, cooperate and act as a team, whether or not they are together as a couple, their children do better. When children are exposed to conflict that is frequent, intense and poorly resolved it can impact in how children feel and how they behave. Children of all ages and stages from newborn babies to young adults can be affected by conflict between those adults who matter most to them.

We might think that if we don't argue in front of the children then it won't be harmful. But even if children don't see or hear the arguments, they still know they are happening. They will pick up on tension and atmosphere, they will notice that things feel different, and they may notice the family routine changing.

	What poor communication looks like:	How you can protect against it:
Criticism	Criticism isn't the same as complaining. It's a direct attack on your partner. "You only think about yourself."	Try starting a sentence with "I..." and asking for what you need. "I was worried last night. I'd like it if you could text me when you're going to be late."
Contempt	Contempt is when we are deliberately mean. We might use name-calling, or sarcasm, or roll our eyes to show we're not interested.	Try to focus on what you love about each other. Look for opportunities to pay each other compliments and do things together that you both enjoy.
Defensiveness	Defensiveness is usually a response to criticism. We deflect blame onto the other person. "I've been busy. Why couldn't you do it?"	Try to see things from each other's point of view. Take responsibility and say sorry when you're in the wrong.
Stonewalling	Stonewalling is when we get so overwhelmed that we shut down completely, blanking our partner, or walking out of the room.	Try to be good to yourself. Take some time out to do something relaxing and enjoyable.

2.2 Constructive vs Destructive

Conflict in relationships is a reality...



How we communicate and solve problems

Natural

Damaging

Constructive Conflict

Destructive Conflict

Part of Everyday Life

Negative

Normal

Impacts Child Outcomes

Parents in conflict may be struggling to identify the destructive elements of their behaviour.

The constructive versus destructive cards, provide the opportunity to discuss behaviours with parents and if they are present in a relationship. You may choose to add more cards yourself depending on the parental relationship.

Ask the parents to think about the behaviours and place them in the always, sometimes, never columns as they apply to their relationship. Then ask the couple/individual to identify what they would consider to be constructive and destructive behaviours. Using solution focused questioning, help them identify how they could change their destructive behaviour and increase the positive behaviours.

Ask for each other's point of view.

Withdrawal from the conversation as it's not going your way.

Explain how the situation is making you feel.

End an argument upset and angry.

Recognise that whilst you may not agree, your partner has a valid point.

Offer possible solutions to problems, whilst are willing to compromise and listen to other suggestions.

Raise your voice to make sure you get your point of view across.

Listen to one another's point of view without interrupting.

Accept there may be times where you disagree.

Use examples from the past to prove your right.

Use insults to make your point and share your feelings.

Allow each other to opportunity to express your views.

In our relationship we...

Always

Sometimes

Never

2.3 You vs I statements

An "I" message or "I" statement is a style of communication that focuses on the feelings or beliefs of the speaker rather than blaming the listener.

'You' statements often come across as an accusation and will make the listener feel defensive, by using an 'I' statement it will enable the speakers to be assertive without making any accusations, making the listener feel less defensive.

Activity Prompt List – I statement

To be completed by/with both parties (individual sessions). Worker to support each involved party to complete the prompt list below. The worker can read the sentence and support the party to finish it as if they are aiming it directly to the other person. Worker to write this down ensuring I statements are used.

Example: I feel we are in conflict because... we do not listen to each other and undermine each other in front of the children.

If they do not know what to say on one of them, leave it blank. They can always come back to it. If they feel like they are repeating themselves – this is ok, it highlights it is important to them and is a priority to resolve.

Once you have completed with both parties, bring them together for a joint session. Options:

- Suggest they can read their own out aloud to the other person
- They can read the other persons out aloud
- Worker can read both out aloud

Once the tool has been shared between both parties, worker to ask:

- How did hearing the prompt list make you feel?
- Anything surprised you?
- Anything you agree/disagree with?
- Are there any similarities in each other's list?

This list can then be used to focus on the issues brought up. It opens the communication between parties in conflict in a healthy way.

Prompt List	
I feel upset when.....	I believe....
I feel upset because...	I'm angry because...
I would like to know more about.....	I need...
I understand.....	I don't need...
I don't understand.....	It's important that...
I feel we are in conflict because....	I want to tell you...
I appreciate it when....	I would like to hear...
I am not willing to negotiate on...	I agree that...
I think it's important we discuss...	I want...
I am afraid to...	I don't want...
I am not afraid to....	I am grateful for...
I am sorry that...	I am willing to...
I am not willing to...	I expect...
It would be nice if...	I disagree with...
	I am willing to negotiate on...

Additional information to support session 2

Video Resources:

- [#SeeltDifferently: Maddie's Family - YOUTUBE](#)

Helpful links:

- [Co-parenting from separate households Toolkit - RELATE.ORG.UK](#)
- [Reducing Parental Conflict Toolkit - LIVE WELL CHESHIRE WEST](#)

Session 3. Managing Conflict

Objective: Develop conflict resolution strategies and new approaches.

3.1 Conflict styles

Even the happiest couples or parents co-parenting well have negative moments, which can lead to criticism, undermining or blame. Below are some common things that people do in an argument. When we identify and acknowledge these, we can start to think about healthier ways to respond.



Which of these do you do?

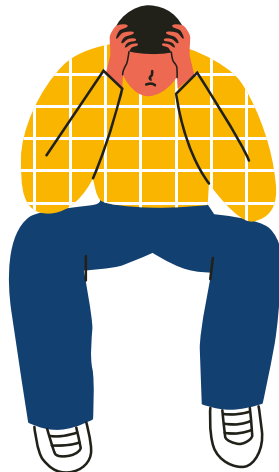
Bottle things up and have a rant?

Get overwhelmed by your feelings?

Sulk or give the silent treatment?

Other examples include?

How did your partner respond?



We all need to have difficult conversations sometimes. The way you start these conversations will affect the way they go.



HARMFUL arguments can be BAD for your relationship

Trying to win
Saying mean things
Name-calling
Blaming
Being negative



HELPFUL arguments can be GOOD for your relationship

Working together
Considering each other's feelings
Being affectionate
Solving problems

There are two ways to start a conversation:

1) A harsh start-up:

A harsh start-up is when you go straight in with a verbal attack:
"You never think about me!"

The other person is likely to be defensive and you won't get the support you need.

2) A soft start-up:

A soft start-up is a way of asking for something you want without blaming the other person:
"I'm worried about how we're going to get everything done."

This makes it easier for the other person to listen, so you can sort things out together.

How to practice a soft start-up

Instead of saying: *"You never help out! I have to do everything by myself!"*

Try saying: *"I'm feeling stressed out. I'd really like some help."*

It's the same thing, but it's more likely to get you the help you need.

So, before you start a difficult conversation, ask yourself if there's a better, softer way to start.

3.2 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 on 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				
Green scores 3, Yellow scores 2, Blue scores 1.	Never/ almost never	Once in a while	Frequently	Your Score
My partner makes me feel appreciated				
My partner and I get on each other's nerves				
When we disagree, we find a solution that satisfies us both				
I can get angry and frustrated with my partner				
My partner respects my opinions and feelings				
Little arguments can escalate into accusations and criticisms				
I think about what my life would be like if my partner and I weren't together				
We laugh and have fun together				
I don't feel my partner listens to me when we argue				

Your relationship with your partner				
Green scores 3, Yellow scores 2, Blue scores 1.	Never/ almost never	Once in a while	Frequently	Your Score
My partner makes me feel appreciated				

Your relationship with your partner				
Green scores 3, Yellow scores 2, Blue scores 1.	Never/ almost never	Once in a while	Frequently	Your Score
My partner makes me feel like I'm a good parent				
I feel like my share of the parenting work is more than my partner's				
We are growing and maturing together through our experiences as parents				
My partner and I have different ideas about how to raise our child				
My relationship with my partner is stronger now than before we had a child				
The stress of parenting has caused my partner and I to grow apart				
We have fun with our children together				
When I'm at my wits end as a parent, my partner doesn't give me the extra support I feel I need				
My partner appreciates how hard I work at being a good parent				

Add up your total score

If you scored in the **48 – 60** range, your relationship with your partner seems to be in good shape and you are working well together in parenting your child / children.

If you scored in the **34 – 47** range, whilst your relationship with your partner may be good, there could be a few areas you may want to work on.

If you scored in the **20 – 33** range you may want to stop and think about where the two of you are headed. Your score indicates the presence of patterns that could harm your relationship.

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

Consider where your scores are in the 'middle', these will be the yellow boxes; could small changes in these areas help to improve things? Where you have scored 'low', these will be the blue boxes; these areas will be having the biggest impact on your relationship.

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



3.3 Strategies to protect children from parental conflict

It's really important to highlight that when parents are under really high levels of stress, it can sometimes have an impact on their ability to parent.

Practitioners need to remind parents that if they realise they have not managed to shield their child from an argument (for instance, if your child has seen or heard you arguing or your child has seen or heard you upset or angry after an argument), it is important to try to repair things, to help the child understand that they are in no way responsible for the argument and to reduce the risk of long-term impact of the conflict.

Later, when things are calm, take the time to have a conversation with your child about what happened and why. For instance, if you argued with your co-parent or carer in front of your child, maybe just apologise that your child had to see that argument and reassure them that the issue was one between the adults and not something they need to worry about.

Ensure that the child understands that it is not because of them, and is in no way their fault, but that the parents are responsible for working things out.

Additional information to support session 3

Video Resources:

- [#SeeltDifferently: Maddie's Family](#)

Helpful links:

- [Co-parenting from separate households Toolkit - RELATE.ORG.UK](#)
- [Reducing Parental Conflict Toolkit - LIVE WELL CHESHIRE WEST](#)



Session 4. Managing Emotions and Triggers

Objective: Explore conflict triggers & support emotional regulations.

4.1 Know your triggers

Think about what triggers a strong reaction and stops you from being able to think rationally. It might be something obvious, for example, an upsetting word or image, or a memory from your past that causes you to have a strong reaction. Or we might not know where they come from, but we can usually identify the things that particularly irritate or annoy us.

Being aware of what they are, means that you can look out for them, and when you recognise them in a conversation or interaction, step away from the situation and take some time to cool down before you step back into the interaction with your co-parent or carer.

Are there any stressors that I can reduce?

Is there any way I can take the pressure off myself?

A Typical day

A simple template to help parents identify what and when may be triggers to conflict in their relationship.

Once identified you can work with the family to find alternative ways to behaviour that may not involve harmful conflict.

	What my day looks like	Triggers to conflict
<u>Morning</u>		
<u>Afternoon</u>		
<u>Evening</u>		
<u>Night</u>		

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. Consider using this against the 'A typical day' activity.

Has this issue been a problem for you and your partner in the past 4 weeks?	YES	NO
1. Disagreements about rules for children (eg. bedtime, play areas)	YES	NO
2. Disagreements about type of discipline (eg. smacking children)	YES	NO
3. Disagreements about who should discipline children	YES	NO
4. Fighting in front of children	YES	NO
5. Inconsistency between parents	YES	NO
6. Children preventing parents being alone	YES	NO
7. Disagreements about sharing childcare workloads	YES	NO
8. Cannot resolve arguments about child care	YES	NO
9. Discussions about child care turning into arguments	YES	NO
10. Parents undermining each other (not backing each other up)	YES	NO
11. Parents favouring one child over another	YES	NO
12. Lack of discussions between parents about childcare	YES	NO
13. Lack of discussions about anything	YES	NO
14. One parent is "soft", one parent is "tough" with children	YES	NO
15. Children behave worse with one parent than another	YES	NO
16. Disagreements about what is naughty behavior	YES	NO

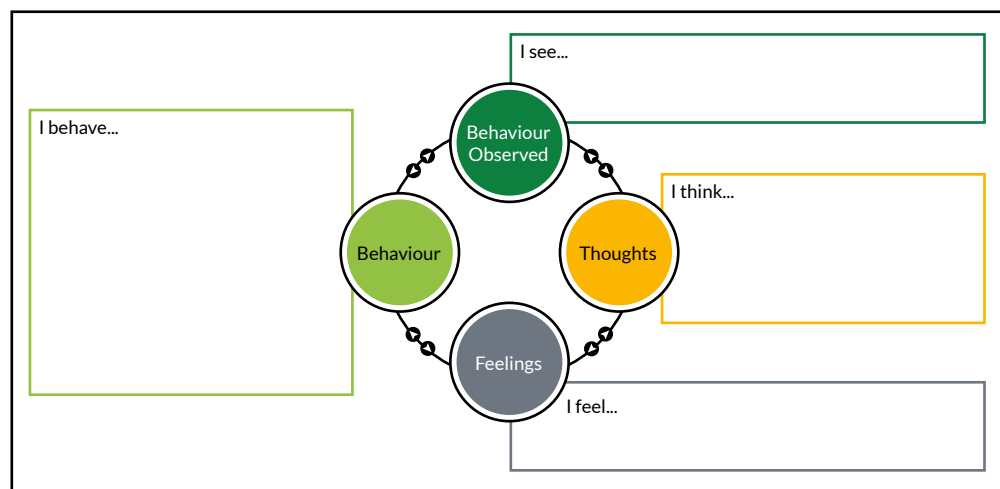
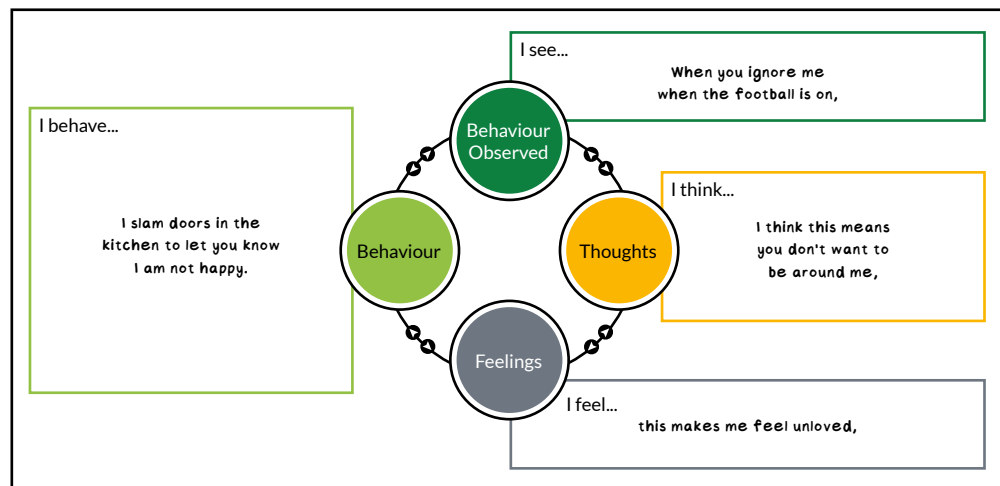
1. Please circle either 'Yes' or 'No' to indicate whether each issue has been a problem for you and your partner over the last 4 weeks.
2. Secondly circle a number identifying the extent to which each issue has been a problem for you and your partner in the last 4 weeks.

[illegible]

4.2 Thoughts feeling and behaviours exercise

This model can be used to support couples to recognise how they internalise behaviour that they observe, which in turn affects how they feel, impacting on their response.

This will help them to better understand each other's behaviour.



Additional information to support session 4

Video Resources:

- [In conflict: Self-awareness and stress reduction](#)

4.3 Coping strategies

How do you manage strong feelings or being upset? Do you have strong coping strategies or are others less helpful? Talk to your network, do they have suggestions? It can be useful to think about coping strategies in two broad categories:

○ Emotion-Focused Coping Skills:

These coping strategies are focused on bringing down emotional spurs, and include activities like exercising, taking a bath, meditating, and giving yourself a pep talk. These are just some suggestions, find what works for you to manage your feelings, talk to a friend or family member about what might help, or list some ideas now (practitioner led).

○ Problem-Focused Coping Skills:

Problem focused coping skills work to address the difficulties, like working on managing your time, establishing boundaries, and asking your network for help, list some ideas now (practitioner led).

Letting go: Think about the conflict between you and your co-parent. Is there conflict that is ongoing and harmful and unresolved, that you are unlikely to be able to resolve. Think about whether you can tolerate that there is more than one feeling or truth. Consider whether you can, even temporarily, let go of that conflict.

Self care: Self-care is an important component of supporting children and young people through parental conflict. If parents don't care for themselves, they are less able to support the children and young people in their care. For more self-care advice please visit

Consider signposting parents to the [Self-care for parents and carers | Anna Freud](#) for further advice and guidance.

Additional information to support session 4

Helpful links:

- [Self-care for parents & carers](#)
- [Self-care top tips for young parents & carers](#)
- [Resources - Parental conflict toolkit](#)

Session 5. Co-Parenting and Shared Goals

Objective: Foster a cooperative co-parenting relationship and agree on shared parenting goals.

5.1 Co-parenting & shared values

Keep Communication Open and Respectful

The quality of relationships, whether parents are together or separated, is increasingly recognised as a primary influence on children's long-term mental health and future life chances. Research by EIF on behalf of DWP found that parents who engage in frequent, intense, and poorly resolved conflict put their children's mental health and long-term life chances at risk.

As we have already covered, good communication is crucial for successful co-parenting. Parents should try to communicate openly and respectfully about their children's needs and concerns and you both need to be willing to compromise and make decisions together.

It's also important to ensure you don't bad mouth your partner or ex in front of your child. Remember they love you both, and it can be painful and confusing to them to hear you saying horrible things about someone they love. It can also impact your child's self-esteem and increase their anxiety levels.

Put Your Children's Needs First

The children should be your priority, and this should be front of mind when you are making decisions that involve them. You should avoid putting your own needs or emotions ahead of your children's.

It's also important to consider your child's wishes for the future. You may want to think about allowing them to have a say, after all it is their life too.

Be Consistent

Consistency is key when it comes to co-parenting. Children thrive on routine and predictability, so it's important to establish consistent rules and expectations in both households.

Be Flexible

While consistency is important, it's also essential to be flexible when unexpected circumstances arise. Being willing to adjust the parenting plan or make changes to accommodate each other's schedules can help reduce conflict and maintain a healthy co-parenting relationship. Remember that important dates (birthdays, celebrations, sports days,) are special to you, your child and the other parent and so flexibility will be required.

Seek Support When Needed

Co-parenting can be challenging, and sometimes help is needed. Seeking support from a family mediator can help co-parents navigate the challenges of co-parenting and help to maintain a healthy relationship for the sake of their children.



5.2 Parenting apart

Co-parenting is when two parents share the responsibility of raising their children and both stay involved in their daily lives.

After a breakup or divorce, co-parenting can be challenging. However, there are resources available to help. These can show you how to make co-parenting work, highlight the benefits for your children, and help improve your relationship with the other parent.

Examples of questions for co-parents who live apart to consider the arrangements for their children now and in the future:

“What would you like the day to day care arrangements for the children to look like? Who will take them to school and pick them up from school? Where will they sleep during the school week?”

“What about your co-parent? Is it safe for the children to spend time with your co-parent? What level of care do you see them having? Think about the practical arrangements like travel, school uniforms, homework, toys, siblings, pets, etc”

“Will this work for your children? Should you ask them what they want? Will all the children have the same view? Will your child's voice be more important as they grow?”

“What will care arrangements look like for special occasions like birthdays, religious holidays, father's/mother's day?”

“What about holidays? Will these be abroad or in the UK?”

“How will you and your co-parent make decisions about education like the choice of school, subjects, parents' evenings etc?”

“How will you make decisions around your child's health with your co-parent? Who will make appointments with the GP and dentist? How will you share information?”

“How will you deal with a child's request for a tattoo or piercing? Will there be a process for you to discuss this with your co-parent?”

“How will you keep your child safe in relation to sex, alcohol and drugs? How will you work with your co-parent in this respect?”

“What else is important to you? Do you want your child to be raised in a certain faith or with certain cultural values? What about a second language or the need to understand ethnic roots by mixing with extended family?”

“How and when will new partners be introduced to the children? What role will they take and what will they be called by the children?”

“How do you want to communicate with your co-parent? Phone, text, email or parenting app?”

“What about money? Does one co-parent need help from the other? Will this be a regular payment or for expenses like school trips?”

Creating a communication plan?

This can be a helpful way to know what to expect in terms of communication and to set boundaries as you move through what could be some difficult transitions. For example, how will you communicate? Via text, email, coparenting apps?



Consider signposting parents to the [Separating better](#) app to support conversation and to safely manage communication.

5.3 Parenting plan development

A next step beyond the communication plan is a Parenting Plan. This written agreement supports a co-parenting approach that covers the practical issues for your child and works even better if you involve your child. It is important to set clear boundaries and establish a parenting plan that outlines each parent's responsibilities and expectations.

A Parenting Plan can help because it shows clearly what arrangements and actions you have agreed to meet the needs of your child ensuring your shared goals are identified and prioritised. Agreeing a plan can avoid you having to go to court to reach such an agreement or have arrangements ordered by the court. Agreeing a plan shows your child that you are putting them first and will always act in their best interests.

Benefits of making a Parenting Plan together include:

- refocusing on the needs of your child;
- giving your child a sense of stability and security;
- helping everyone involved know what is expected of them;
- creating a clear agreement to refer back to; and
- setting out practical decisions about your child, such as living arrangements, education and health care.

Access the downloadable form to complete with parents here [How a Parenting Plan can help](#) | Cafcass, or access this via the [Harmony at Home Website](#).

Additional information to support session 5

Video Resources:

- [Parenting Apart Programme - Claire Field Consultancy](#)

Helpful links:

- [Resources to help you make arrangements that are in your child's best interests - CAFCASS](#)
- [How a Parenting Plan can help - CAFCASS](#)
- [What Is Family Mediation And How Can It Help?](#)

Sign Post: Resources

Useful Links:

- Reducing Parental Conflict: training and tools for practitioners and their managers [gov.uk/guidance/reducing-parentalconflict-training-and-tools-for-practitioners-and-their-managers](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reducing-parentalconflict-training-and-tools-for-practitioners-and-their-managers)
- SOCIAL GRACES: basw.co.uk/articles/social-graces-practical-tool-address-inequality
- What is the PACE approach: ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace
- Advice for parents & carers in conflict: annafreud.org/resources/family-wellbeing/advice-and-guidance-for-parents-andcarers-in-conflict-or-separating
- Working with parents - Foundation Years: foundationyears.org.uk/working-with-parents
- Improving outcomes for children by supporting parental relationships Family relationships - innovationunit.org/projects/family-relationships
- Separated Parents Information Programme: nfm.org.uk/separated-parents-information-programme-an-explainer
- What Is Family Mediation And How Can It Help?: nfm.org.uk/about-family-mediation-services/what-is-family-mediation
- Race Equality Foundation, Why are we arguing Resources: raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/parentalconflict/10-further-support
- Reducing parental conflict - resolution: youtube.com/watch?v=iJmj9-LueWM

Further Reading & References

- **What is harmful conflict? – Parental conflict toolkit**
- **GOV.UK- Reducing Parental Conflict: Training Tools for Practitioners**
- **Recognise Parental Conflict as a Practitioner Reducing Parental Conflict Toolkit - Accessible Version | Live Well Cheshire West**
- **Tips For Successful Co-Parenting | National Family Mediation**
- **Reducing Parental Conflict Toolkit - Accessible Version | Live Well Cheshire West**
- **Self-awareness and stress reduction Parents and carers in conflict or separating | Anna Freud**
- **livewellcampaign.co.uk/app/uploads/2018/10/Healthy-Relationships-Questionnaire.pdf**
- **Resources to help you make arrangements that are in your child's best interests | Cafcass**

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